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of Ontario**

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(Hansard)**

Monday 29 November 2004

Lundi 29 novembre 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 29 November 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 29 novembre 2004

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MICHAEL SIYDOCK

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):

Mike Siydock served for many years as a warden with the Ministry of Natural Resources. During that time, his dream was to join his brother Kevin as a member of the Ontario Provincial Police. Seven years ago, his dream was realized. This past Friday evening, while responding to a motor vehicle accident, Mike collapsed at the scene. He was pronounced dead at the Milton general hospital. Mike Siydock was 49.

Mike grew up in Whitney, Ontario. He was an avid sportsman who loved to hunt and fish, and made many return trips to the area with his boys to enjoy this passion.

I first got to know Mike during minor hockey days, and through the years the Siydock boys and the Yakabuski boys clashed on the ice on many occasions. There were competitive confrontations on the ice, but only on the ice. I also worked with Mike in Algonquin Park in the summer of 1976. Mike had more experience than I did and was always willing to help the new kids.

Mike was married to Elizabeth Murray, of Barry's Bay. Liz and I were one year apart in school. Both Mike's and Liz's families have deep roots in the Madawaska valley; they are well-known and respected. Along with Liz, Mike leaves behind their three children, Donald, Stephen and Laura; his father, Andrew; and 10 brothers and sisters. He will be missed by them and by countless others.

WIFE ASSAULT PREVENTION MONTH

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): November is Wife Assault Prevention Month, and as part of the effort to respond to this very serious situation, women's shelters around the province are lobbying the McGuinty government to provide funding to add 60% more beds to the shelter system.

In Sudbury the need for more shelter beds is critical. The executive director of our YWCA reported last week that Geneva House, a 32-bed shelter for women and children, is completely full. There is zero vacancy. In the last month, four mothers and their children were transferred out of the community because no beds were avail-

able for them. Women and children have been placed in shelters in Sturgeon Falls, North Bay and as far away as Orillia and Barrie. Women making the difficult decision to flee from an abusive partner should not have to go to a shelter four hours away from home in order to be safe. It is overwhelming enough to flee, perhaps without money or any means to support your children; imagine the added stress when you have to flee the community too and leave behind any support of friends and family who might be needed to help you and your children survive this trauma.

This is a situation which can't be allowed to continue. We need more shelter beds, not only in Sudbury but throughout the province. We need a substantial increase in social assistance rates to make up for the 34% loss in income that came with the 22% cut and eight-year freeze of rates under the Conservatives. We need more affordable housing so women and children don't have to choose between a violent home and no home at all. And we need these changes now, so women and children traumatized by violence can seek and obtain refuge and have the resources they need to put new lives together again.

NATIONAL OSTEOPOROSIS MONTH

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I rise today to recognize that November has been National Osteoporosis Month. Some 1.4 million Canadians suffer from osteoporosis. One in four women and one in eight men over the age of 50 has osteoporosis, but the disease can strike at any age. Maybe osteoporosis is not the disease we think about the most, but it's one that affects many of us, and together we can reduce both its prevalence and its impact.

As we mark National Osteoporosis Month this year, there is reason for optimism. Significant progress is being made toward the adoption of an osteoporosis strategy. According to Dr Earl Bogoch of St Michael's Hospital, a coordinated and targeted strategy has the potential to reduce fractures related to osteoporosis by 50% to 60%.

The Osteoporosis Society of Canada was formed in 1982 as the first national charitable organization dedicated to helping people living with osteoporosis in the world. With headquarters located in my riding of Don Valley West, the Osteoporosis society works with volunteers, the medical community, health care organizations and government to promote high-quality services, research and education for people affected by osteoporosis.

I want to take this opportunity to invite all members of the Legislature to join me in recognizing the hard work of Karen Ormerod and her team at the Osteoporosis Society of Canada and the difference they make in the lives of people who live with osteoporosis every day.

MICHAEL SIYDOCK

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Along the lines of Mr Yakabuski, I have a statement on the death of a constable on the weekend.

As critic for community safety and correctional services, it is with great sorrow that I rise in the House today to pay tribute to Provincial Constable Michael John Siydock, of the Port Credit detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police.

On the night of Friday, November 26, while on duty investigating a motor vehicle collision near Milton, Constable Siydock collapsed. He was later pronounced deceased due to natural causes at Milton general hospital. Constable Siydock was only 49 years of age. He leaves behind his wife, Elizabeth, and his children, Donald, Stephen and Laura.

While his personal family grieves his loss, so does his OPP family. Members of the OPP are strongly committed to each other, to exemplary service and to making this province a safer place for all. While they may not see or speak to each other every single day, ties develop between officers that bind the entire OPP family together. In fact, I spoke during the weekend to OPP Commissioner Gwen Boniface. Hearing her grief made me realize just how profoundly the constable's death has affected the OPP as an organization. There is a quote on the OPPA Web site that reads as follows:

Remember our fallen members and their memory,
if we forget, who but their family will remember,
after all, we are all family.

On behalf of the PC caucus and our leader, John Tory, I offer condolences to the Siydock family and to the OPP family. May Constable Siydock rest in peace, as he so rightfully deserves, and may his family treasure his many memories.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): On the evening of November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello travelled to Kincardine to speak, and she carried the message that this government is serious about ending the deadly cycle of violence against women.

She praised the Women's House of Bruce County for its work, for offering a shelter to women and children who are escaping from domestic violence. Both the Women's House of Bruce County and the Women's Shelter of Huron have benefited from increased funding from this government.

The Honourable Sandra Pupatello has announced an action plan to fight domestic violence, including additional funding to create second-stage housing, investing in a public education and awareness campaign, improved training for people working in the criminal justice system to better assess risk and abusive situations, and province-wide consultations with experts and front-line workers. November is Wife Assault Prevention Month, and it marks the government's commitment to ending violence.

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DOCTORS

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): The hallmark of Health Minister George Smitherman has been the bully approach. This has certainly been the case with respect to Ontario's public hospitals. But Premier, the bully is back. The bully is now bullying our doctors.

Let's look at what Christina Blizzard said in the Saturday Sun: "I don't know if it's bald-faced arrogance or sheer stupidity that prompted Premier Dalton McGuinty and his Health Minister George Smitherman to declare war on the province's 20,000 doctors yesterday."

She then quotes Dr John Rapin, who later said, after the stunt that the health minister and Premier pulled, that he and Ontario's physicians had been "shanghaied" by the government: "Some of you"—the news media—"got this release before I did."

Let's look at the bottom line, according to the Sun and Christina Blizzard. The bottom line is, "It is outrageous—and very dangerous—for McGuinty to get involved in such a ham-fisted attempt to browbeat the doctors.... Now it's not just his minister who is wearing this foolish move. McGuinty himself has egg all over his face."

What have we heard from Dr John Rapin and the OMA? Just today, in a recently released letter, he says, "It is unacceptable that a government who promised to work with doctors would fail to even return their phone calls about an important issue."

The OMA is asking to get an explanation of this media stunt, of this media press release. They said that the government of Dalton McGuinty has "failed to take the time to consult directly" with Ontario's physicians.

Shame on this minister, and double shame on Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I rise today in recognition of two Halton police services groups that are committed to keeping our communities strong and safe. The Elder Abuse Prevention Committee provides advice, training and information forums for organizations that deal specifically with seniors. The Two District Diversity Team has been doing fine work in promoting training and diversity issues within a variety of organizations.

On November 3, I had the honour of presenting the Elder Abuse Prevention Committee and the Two District

Diversity Team of Halton Regional Police Services with the 2004 Award of Excellence for Fighting Crime.

I would also like to take this time to mention two of my fellow members, without whom these awards would not exist. David Zimmer and Liz Sandals have been doing amazing work as co-chairs of the Ontario Crime Control Commission.

Please join me in applauding the vigilance of the Elder Abuse Prevention Committee and the Two District Diversity Team of Halton Regional Police Services, and all their colleagues, for the work they do in building an Ontario and a Halton region that is safe for all citizens.

RENEWABLE FUELS

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): The McGuinty government is putting forward a plan that will require that all gasoline sold in Ontario contain an average of 5% ethanol by 2007. As many of you know, ethanol is a cleaner-burning fuel, so this means cleaner air for all Ontarians.

As I'm sure you know, Mr Speaker, ethanol is made primarily from corn, meaning this initiative will be a major boost for rural farming communities all across Ontario. Small agricultural communities like mine in Chatham-Kent-Essex or communities in Brant, Guelph or Cornwall—agricultural communities all across Ontario—will benefit from increased demand for their products.

It also means that ethanol producers can now move forward on new investments, investments in capital and jobs, investments that will help make our domestic ethanol industry the springboard for a larger bio-based economy that will bring new opportunities to Ontario.

To that end, the McGuinty government is also working to develop a parallel strategy to boost the domestic production and use of biodiesel, something that will help make Ontario a leader in the emerging bioeconomy. People in farming communities will see real benefits. It's a win for farmers, a win for rural Ontario and a win for the environment. This is not only a boost for Ontario in the rural communities; it is a boost for all Ontarians, who will reap the rewards of cleaner air and improved health.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): I thought I'd share another one of today's headlines with the House: "Ontario to Overtake Michigan as Auto Kingpin."

Ontario's auto industry represents the largest manufacturing sector in the province. The sector directly employs more than 140,000 people and generates another 191,000 jobs in spinoff activities.

This government understands how important the auto industry is to the Ontario economy. That's why we announced the Ontario automotive investment strategy, which over the next five years will invest in leading-edge auto manufacturing projects that are worth more than \$300 million in investment or that create or retain more than 300 jobs. Recently, we invested \$100 million when Ford celebrated its 100th anniversary in Ontario and

announced \$1 billion for a flexible manufacturing facility in Oakville.

Investments in the auto industry mean investments in my community, in my riding of Essex. Instead of turning our backs on the automotive industry like the previous government did, we're celebrating it.

Just listen to what Buzz Hargrove had to say at the Ford announcement this past year: "I first have to compliment Dalton McGuinty, because it was with his election that we got rid of the naysayers that said this industry was a smokestack industry, was dying, that the government shouldn't put money in." He complimented Joe Cordiano, he complimented the ministry and he said he was never so happy in his life to see the tail end of Jim Flaherty. That's the word from Buzz Hargrove.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): In the members' west gallery we have a former member from Halton Centre of the 36th Parliament, Mr Terence Young. Let's welcome him here.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO GENERATION CONTRACT

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Premier. Last week I raised an issue with your energy minister dealing with the very rich contract awarded to AIM PowerGen Corp, a company headed by the Ontario president of the Liberal Party of Canada.

The bid requirements outlined in your RFP forbid anyone who is bidding to have any contact with any provincial official before and during the bid process. Can you assure the House that, in the case of this \$475-million contract awarded to a prominent Liberal, the no-contact requirement was adhered to?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I believe the Minister of Energy had an opportunity to speak to this last week, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to address it as well.

The process for this RFP was open and tendered. The government was not involved in selecting the successful bidders. The minister was not aware of any of the successful proponents until a few days before the announcement itself was made. An independent fairness commissioner was contracted to oversee the entire process and ensure that all proponents and interested parties were treated equally and fairly throughout the process.

Mr Runciman: Once again the Premier clearly avoided the questions dealing with adherence to bid requirements. We're talking about a contract that provided a company headed by a prominent Liberal with a guaranteed 20-year, \$66,000-a-day contract. This is a very lucrative deal, and the hard-working taxpayers of Ontario have a right to know if this contract was awarded appropriately.

Today I received information indicating that Mr Mike Crawley, the president of AIM PowerGen, sent an e-mail in the midst of the bid process to various parties encouraging their attendance at the energy minister's fundraiser at \$5,000 a pop. Premier, I'm sending copies of this material over to you and asking that you have an independent third party review the contract award process to ensure that it was absolutely above-board.

1350

Hon Mr McGuinty: To repeat, the entire process was overseen by an independent fairness commissioner. I'll quote from his report. It stated in part, "We detected no bias either for or against any particular proponent in the application of the" evaluation "criteria. "Those evaluation criteria that were applied were applied objectively based on a criteria published in the RFP." I think the fairness commissioner has addressed this.

Mr Runciman: In fairness to the fairness commissioner, he would be unaware of these political contacts; he would be unaware of Mr Crawley's e-mail. To try to lay this all on the fairness commissioner is totally inappropriate.

Premier, the contract your government signed with Mr Crawley is worth \$24 million a year, or \$66,000 a day, each and every day, guaranteed, for 20 years. A contract of this magnitude must be above-board.

Your own RFP was clear in stating that no bidder may have any contact with decision-makers before or during the RFP process. The RFP was issued on June 24 and it closed on August 25 of this year. Mr Crawley, the winner of this contract, sent an e-mail out on July 27 for an August 23 event. You won't guarantee that the RFP guidelines were followed. Premier, will you halt this contract immediately and refer it to the Integrity Commissioner to ensure that it is completely above-board? Will you do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite knows full well that he has the option, if he wants to—if he thinks there is some legitimacy connected with his concern, then what he can do is refer this to the Integrity Commissioner himself. Rather, he chooses to bring this here and make these kinds of spurious allegations on a rather regular basis.

The fairness commissioner oversaw this matter. Again, he addressed it very specifically. He said, and I quote once more, "We detected no bias either for or against any particular proponent in the application of the" evaluation "criteria. Those evaluation criteria that were applied were applied objectively based on the criteria published in the RFP."

I believe that ends the matter. If the member opposite wants to keep this alive, if he thinks there's some legitimacy, then I encourage him and invite him to speak to the Integrity Commissioner.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Premier. It concerns hospital funding in eastern Ontario. Premier, your own Ministry of Public Infra-

structure and Renewal Web site says that it "manages infrastructure planning to achieve maximum leverage for taxpayer dollars." Taxpayers in Campbellford, Ontario, and indeed throughout Northumberland county were shocked and outraged to see your parliamentary assistant for this ministry trotting around the county saying that the riding of Northumberland had too many hospitals and that the province couldn't afford to run them. Premier, your parliamentary assistant is basically threatening hospital closures.

Residents of Northumberland county want you, their Premier, to personally stand in your place and say that this idea is misguided. Will you stand in your place and defend the Campbellford Memorial Hospital?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the Minister of Health would like to address this.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): In a fashion that seeks not to confirm the honourable member's storyline, because that hasn't always served us well in the past, I can stand in this House and give complete assurance to the people of Northumberland, and in fact the people of Ontario, that we have no plan to close hospitals. In fact, I'm on the record as very clearly saying—from one of the earliest questions I ever had in this House, related to the Four Counties hospital in Newbury—that every hospital in Ontario is cherished and that each one of them has a very special and particular role to play, and that it's our government's complete intention to build on their capacities and enhance the role they play in each and every one of these important communities.

Mr Baird: I want to redirect this question back to the Premier. Premier, it's not rich enough that your second-highest-ranking elected official dealing with public infrastructure in the province is threatening to close hospitals in Northumberland; in fact, this individual is the member of provincial Parliament for Northumberland. That's the riding that Campbellford Memorial Hospital calls home.

Volunteers in the community are angry and frustrated. Your parliamentary assistant's suggestion that the hospital might have to close is hurting patient care today. You see, it's hard to fundraise for the hospital's capital campaign when the local MPP is threatening to close it. It's hard to attract new doctors and nurses when the local MPP is musing publicly about shutting down the hospital.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr Baird: Their local MPP won't stand up for their hospital. Taxpayers, patients and health care workers in Campbellford and throughout Northumberland county want you to stand in your place and say that this idea is not going to happen, that it will not happen as long as you're in the Premier's chair. Will you do that, Premier?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I think the important part of history that people need to be reminded of in the House today is that if there is a party in this Legislature that has a history of closing hospitals in Northumberland, it's that party. That party closed the Port Hope hospital during

their days in office. This is the party that, while in office, took the knife and cut health care services in Northumberland. It's not the plan of our party.

Since coming to office, we have been involved in an unprecedented investment in community care and almost \$1 billion in new operating funds for Ontario's hospitals. Campbellford, like the other 153 distinct hospital corporations in the province of Ontario, is one of the proud foundations of a very good health care system.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): My question is also to the Premier. This past weekend, I was in Peterborough, and I was literally shocked when I picked up the local press that said the Peterborough Regional Health Centre was "in dire straits." Minister, this means less service and more cost to that community.

I went on to read the article in some detail. This was said by the CEO of the hospital: "This is a challenging time, a stressful time." Clearly, in the community of Ontario, Peterborough is just one of many that are hurting from your cuts and brutal action by your Minister of Health. Minister, you've not only imposed a health tax of \$2.4 billion, but people are simply paying more and getting less. It isn't just the Peterborough hospital I'm speaking of. I believe the arguments you have going on in health care are not helpful.

The Speaker: Question.

Mr O'Toole: Minister, it's more tax, less service. What are you going to do to help the rural hospitals in Ontario?

Hon Mr Smitherman: Let's be clear in a fashion that the honourable member couldn't be in his question.

There is a party in this Legislature, and it's the governing party, that's investing this year \$700 million more in Ontario hospitals than they proposed in their Magna budget for the same fiscal year. There is a party in this Legislature, and it is the Liberal Party, that stands in contrast to those two parties, which, during their days in government, cut the budgets of Ontario hospitals—in your case, over two years by \$600 million. It is only the magical math of the honourable member that can turn a \$469.5-million investment in hospitals into a cut. The reality of the circumstances are very clear. The cuts that took place under their regime totalled nearly \$600 million over two fiscal years.

OMA AGREEMENT

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Just a year and a half ago you used to criticize the former Conservative government for creating conflict everywhere, for dividing society and attacking anyone who disagreed with their direction.

On Friday, your health minister tried a cute surprise trick with the doctors, the physicians of Ontario. In response, the president of the Ontario Medical Association, Dr Rapin, said he was upset with the way the revamped offer was foisted upon the doctors. He said, "I feel disappointed and frustrated, and there's some anger

around as well, that we've been somewhat shanghaied rather than dealt with openly by government."

Premier, why is your Minister of Health now employing the same kinds of tactics that you used to criticize under the former Conservative government?

1400

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): Let me take the opportunity once again to commend our Minister of Health, who has been relentless, respectful of Ontario's doctors and resolved to move ahead with the fundamental transformation that ensures Ontario patients have better access to family care and we put our health care system on a more sustainable footing. I want to commend him for taking on that responsibility.

Just so we know how we got here, 14 months into our mandate, this minister devoted nine entire months to negotiating with the Ontario Medical Association. That consisted of over 120 meetings. We set up four side tables, which themselves also involved some 44 meetings. The Ontario Medical Association negotiating team endorsed this agreement unanimously. That gives you an idea of how hard we worked with the Ontario Medical Association, with Ontario's doctors' representatives, to make sure that we got this right. I think that demonstrates tremendous respect for those people who work day in and day out on behalf of Ontario patients—our doctors.

Mr Hampton: Clearly, Premier, somewhere there must be something wrong with your strategy, because Dr Rapin said that he felt "somewhat shanghaied rather than dealt with openly by a government that had committed to work with stakeholders to renew health care."

He also said, and I quote the Toronto Star, that the surprise bargaining tactic "infuriated senior doctors ... who were summoned to what they thought was an 8:00 am informal chat ... aimed at kick-starting a new round of negotiations." Dr Rapin referred to your leaking of torqued and misleading polling information that vilified doctors as "cheap politics."

Premier, why is your Minister of Health engaging in the kind of cheap politics that you were so critical of the former Conservative government for?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me tell you that we are very proud of this plan, and we look forward to moving ahead with it. Let me tell you about some parts of it.

Our plan improves access to medical services by rewarding—not penalizing, but by rewarding—doctors, by providing them with specific incentives and supports. For example, it provides significant rewards and incentives for doctors working in underserved northern and rural communities. It rewards and supports doctors who work in teams with fellow doctors as well as nurse practitioners and pharmacists, giving patients better access to care around the clock. It pays doctors to spend more time with senior citizens. It provides incentives and supports to reduce wait times for key medical services like hips and knees, cardiac, cancer, MRIs, CTs and the like.

I believe that it is transformative and it is essential. But I'm also pleased that more and more people are

coming forward and saying, “Yes, we want to go ahead with this agreement.”

I thought that the member opposite would want to support Roy Romanow, and I look forward to quoting from him very shortly.

Mr Hampton: Premier, maybe it has gotten past you, but everyone in Canada believes in primary care reform. It’s the new motherhood and apple pie of health policy. Even Mike Harris said that there had to be primary care reform. That’s not the issue. The issue is the conduct of your health minister, who only seems to know one mode of operation: attack, attack and attack.

This is what the physicians said as a result of your manoeuvre on the weekend. Dr Rapin felt that you tricked him, that instead of a discussion, they were, as I say, handed the media reports at the same time that you were handing the press releases and your documents to the media. He said that this kind of heavy-handed tactic could alienate physicians and might hinder plans to change the way family medicine is practised in Ontario.

Premier, isn’t it time to stop a Minister of Health who only seems to know one mode of operation: attack, attack, attack? Isn’t it time to pay more attention to preserving our health care system?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I think it’s time for us to move forward with the transformation of health care in the province of Ontario, and that’s what we’re doing.

It’s hard to figure out, from one day to the next, where the leader of the NDP stands on these issues and where his party stands on these issues. Originally, when this agreement was made public, he said, “Most people would find it hard to swallow an 11% increase, but a 25% increase, a 35% increase?” Apparently, now he’s very much on side with the doctors who want to come back and renegotiate the deal.

I want to quote from Roy Romanow, who I think has a tremendous amount of credibility when it comes to health care in this country. This is his characterization of our approach and the arrangement—our plan—that we want to have with Ontario doctors: “It is a fundamental transformational change, and it is something that all the evidence in my report indicates should be implemented,” he said. “I think the government is on the right track.

“I believe that the government of Ontario has the support of the public. It’s the right thing to do. Hopefully, the doctors will still come round to an agreement. But if not, the Premier, I think, must act.”

They’ve been talking about action for a long time. We’re actually acting.

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to quote another self-described expert in health care who spoke during an election: “It’s time to invest in greater resources ... and stop the ... privatization of health care.

“Gimmicks and name-calling and personal attacks won’t get the job done.”

But what we’ve had is a Minister of Health who, when the physicians disagree with him, tries cheap politics, releasing press releases that vilify doctors. When the hospital association disagrees with him, he threatens them. When the cleaners, the lowest-paid workers in the hospital system, disagree with him, he threatens them.

Premier, don’t you think it’s time to get rid of the personal attacks, the name-calling and the cheap gimmicks that your Minister of Health seems addicted to engaging in?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): It’s interesting to get this question from a guy who, during the course of the campaign, tried to nail Jell-O to a wall. Apparently, he has no affinity for gimmicks whatsoever.

Interjections.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Apparently, I’ve struck a nerve.

The member opposite may not understand this, but moving ahead with change—change that’s very important to the people of Ontario—is not an easy thing to do. That’s why, together, this government invested some nine months of negotiations, 120 meetings, with Ontario’s doctors. It went on at considerable length. I’m proud to say that at the end of the day, we received the unanimous endorsement of the Ontario Medical Association. In fact, I have a copy of the last page of the agreement. It says, “The undersigned representatives of the parties hereby agree to unanimously recommend acceptance of this agreement to their respective principals.”

Everybody thought it was a good deal. Notwithstanding that, obviously we did not receive ratification. Concerns were expressed, and we have specifically addressed those concerns.

Now, on behalf of the people we all represent and work for—and I mean doctors and government alike—it’s time to move forward.

Mr Hampton: Premier, let me quote another self-described expert, who said, “We need caring hands and talented minds to improve medicare. The Harris-Eves government demoralized and mismanaged our health care professionals.”

That was Dalton McGuinty again. But now we have a health minister who, instead of bringing peace and stability, has attacked, intimidated and bullied volunteer hospital boards. He engages in cheap political attacks on physicians. He attacks other front-line health care workers, and even whistle-blowers like Cyndy DeGiusti at Sick Kids.

Premier, Ontario is short 786 doctors. Some 143 Ontario communities are underserved. One in six doctors is ready to retire. Yet your Minister of Health engages in cheap political attacks on doctors.

Isn’t it time to perhaps think about getting rid of your Minister of Health and bringing in someone who is prepared to work co-operatively with all the people who care about health care in Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: It may be the inclination of the NDP to turn tail and run when it comes to overcoming

those hurdles and impediments that stand in the way of change that is absolutely essential. But we're not going to do that. We intend to move forward with the transformation of health care. We intend to bring better access to doctors for Ontario patients. We intend to improve the quality of care we deliver to all Ontarians. We intend to put our health care system on a much more sustainable footing. We intend to do all of those things and we will keep going in that direction.

1410

We have responded to doctors' concerns. They put out a number of concerns—in fact, six were listed by the Ontario Medical Association. We have gone out of our way to address those concerns in a very thoughtful and responsible way. Now what we want to do is work with Ontario doctors to implement the change that Ontarians are counting on all of us to deliver.

Mr Hampton: Premier, before and during the election you told the people of Ontario to choose change. Today, I'm telling you to choose change. The problem isn't with primary health care reform. That is acknowledged everywhere across Canada. It's been acknowledged by virtually everyone in Ontario for the last 15 years. The problem is, you have a health minister who thinks that the only way to solve a problem is to engage in cheap political tricks, to release polling information that is torqued and inaccurate and use it to vilify and attack doctors, to trick doctors, to engage in processes that don't build consensus, that don't build agreement.

The president said that your tactics will hinder primary care reform. I'm asking you the question: Isn't it time to change the Minister of Health and change the cheap tactics that you've been engaging in? Isn't it time to change that, rather than attacking the doctors, the hospital association and everyone else in the health care system?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Once again, we hear from the champion of the status quo in Ontario. We don't embrace that status quo, and we are moving ahead. Again, I want to quote from Roy Romanow, who said—he's talking about our plan—"This is a fundamental transformational change and it is something that all 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."

This is the right thing to do. We look forward to moving ahead with this change. We are not going to stand by and allow ourselves to become immersed and sunk into the status quo. We know that moving ahead is not an easy thing to do. We know that the member opposite would turn tail and run at the first hint of difficulty, at the first hint of a challenge when it comes to bringing about this change. We are moving forward with this change. We're doing it in a manner that demonstrates respect for our doctors, we're doing it in a manner that indicates that we responded to their concerns, and we're doing it in a manner that indicates that we resolve to move ahead on behalf of the people of Ontario.

FABRY DISEASE

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. As the minister is well aware, in the House today we have with us patients who suffer from Fabry disease, their family and their friends. They're here to plead with you, minister, as they have since last fall, one year ago, to provide permanent funding for the life-saving enzyme replacement treatment for disease that was approved by Health Canada, a treatment that has improved their quality of life. For over six months you've failed to respond to their requests. Finally, when Donna Strauss and her late husband, John, came to this Legislature, you did promise that you would provide coverage. You further promised Donna Strauss in a handwritten note that you would provide coverage. However, here we are one year later: still no action. In fact, you even failed to respond to a request from Donna for a meeting.

I ask you today, Minister: Demonstrate compassion and end the anxiety for these patients and their families. Keep your promise and guarantee that you will provide this life-saving treatment that is available in 40 other countries in this world, including wealthy countries like the United States and Australia, and poor countries like Romania. Do the right thing: End the anxiety, please.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The honourable member will know that the very same process to which her party while in government committed the province of Ontario—that's the Common Drug Review—is the process that this drug has been going through. Today's press conference follows on the heels of a Common Drug Review analysis of the products from the standpoint of their efficacy, and the Common Drug Review did not offer a favourable point of view.

This is advice that provinces across the land are taking into consideration. Here in Ontario, we'll have the drug quality therapeutics committee review the work of the Common Drug Review, and I continue to keep a watching brief on the progress with respect to this issue.

I acknowledge that for those individuals it is a very significant concern but, at the same time, processes established by that member's party while in government commit Ontario to participating with other provinces in a national review of products such as this one. It has undergone that and it now will be up to the people at the Drug Quality and Therapeutics Committee to review this product further.

Mrs Witmer: This minister continues to hide behind those two reviews. He knows full well they are not the appropriate committees to review this type of treatment. This is a treatment that applies only to a few people. As you know, it's for catastrophic drug treatment. This isn't like the other drugs that are consumed by thousands and thousands of people throughout this country.

I ask you today to do the right thing, and if you won't listen to me, listen to Julie Strauss, who was here in the media studio today. She said:

"For the last 18 years, I have watched my father struggle every day, and this past summer he died at the age of 50 from Fabry disease.

"I am well aware that there is a treatment for" Fabry's disease "because my father had been receiving it for two years, and thankfully [it] made the last two years ... the best two years....

"Because this disease personally affects me, I really hope that if I ever need this treatment, it will be available for me.

"The only thing I have left to say today is, if my father was given the chance to be on enzyme replacement therapy earlier in life, would he still be with us today?"

I ask the minister, will you today commit to meeting with Julie, who is here in the gallery, her mother, her brother and the other patients, and talk to them about making a commitment and following through and making sure that people like Julie don't have to—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. Minister?

Hon Mr Smitherman: It seems that the honourable member, in her desire to suggest that no one has compassion that measures hers, misses a key point: She was the longest-serving health minister in a previous government and, from time to time, members are forced to be in a situation where processes that are established to work out very complex scientific matters must be utilized and adhered to, and that's what we're in the process of doing.

I've taken the opportunity over the course of my time as Minister of Health to spend a lot of time on this issue, to meet people, including John and Donna Strauss, and to meet others who are involved in this, including the manufacturers of these various products. We're in very close contact with them. That would be acknowledged through a variety of people within my ministry and the minister's office.

I'm happy to commit to a meeting, but what I cannot commit to the honourable member is jumping over processes that have been established for this very purpose. She didn't do it when she was the Minister of Health and I find it interesting that she's now counselling that I do the exact opposite of the way she conducted herself during her days as Minister of Health.

CORONER'S INQUEST

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. In September 2002, 21-year-old Martha Murray died in her home near Hamilton. Martha suffered from a potassium deficiency known as hypokalemia. She had also recently been diagnosed as bipolar and was prescribed lithium to deal with that condition. Unbeknownst to both Martha and her parents, a specialist's report in her file warned that she should not take lithium because of her potassium disorder, as that could cause cardiac arrest. And that's what happened in September 2002.

But in March 2003, the local coroner reported Martha's death as undetermined. Then, in November 2003, the paediatric death review committee of the chief coroner's office reported, "Martha's use of prescribed lithium, especially in the setting of hypokalemia, would put her at risk for a cardiac event." Then in July 2004, the investigation statement signed by the chief coroner's office declared Martha's death a natural one.

Minister, this situation demands a coroner's inquest. Will you order one?

1420

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member for her question. I understand the concern of the Murray family, and I offer my condolences to them.

You should understand that a minister has never, ever directed the coroner to hold an inquest. The reason for that is quite simple: They are an independent, arm's-length body. They can't have political interference. But I appreciate the concerns of the family and the member. You should know, as you might know, that the Office of the Chief Coroner is taking a look at that particular case and will be reporting back in a matter of a couple of weeks.

Ms Martel: Martha's parents, Paul and Maryann Murray, are in the members' gallery today. They've come to Queen's Park to make this difficult personal tragedy a public one because they've been unable to get satisfactory answers to the questions they've raised. They want to ensure that doctors are aware of the risks of lithium if they have patients suffering from a potassium deficiency. They want warnings on the pharmacy drug information sheets about the risk of lithium. Most importantly, they want an inquest into the death of their daughter, because they know her death was not a natural one and they don't want other Ontario families to suffer a similar tragedy.

Minister, under section 22 of the Coroners Act, you have the authority to order an inquest. I am asking you again, on behalf of this family, will you order that done today?

Hon Mr Kwinter: I answered the member. I said that in the history of this province a minister has never ordered an inquest, and the reason, again, is quite simple. The chief coroner's office has to stay above political interference.

Having said that, the chief coroner has agreed to review the case. He will take a look at it. I'm sure that the member knows, as the family knows, it was unfortunate that the regional coroner, while he had agreed to look at it, died in his sleep before he could respond, and that created a bit of a delay. But I can assure you that the Office of the Chief Coroner is looking into—

Ms Martel: The chief coroner said it was a natural death.

Hon Mr Kwinter: Again, I can't second-guess the coroner, but in the meantime the chief coroner has agreed to conduct an investigation and will report back as soon as he's through.

GASOLINE TAX

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge):

My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Good news needs to be shared. Last month we kept yet another promise to our municipal partners. One cent per litre of the gasoline tax was confirmed as available to municipal transit authorities. A further one cent per litre will follow in two stages.

As the mayor of Pickering, I was a member of a small provincial task force in the early 1990s called the Transit Integration Task Force. That task force proposed exactly this strategy. I'm pleased now, as a member of this government, that we're delivering on this vision.

In my riding of Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, the community will benefit by \$1.2 million this year for enhanced public transit. I understand, Minister, that you were in the neighbouring riding of Oshawa this morning. Can you share with this House the good-news story in Oshawa?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First of all, I really want to congratulate all the elected members of the Durham region for having the foresight and vision to integrate public transit in the Durham region.

This morning I was delighted to be part of an event in Durham where people were able to see the difference that the gas-tax money makes. I was delighted to be part of an event where we were able to unveil two-way bus service between Oshawa and Whitby. This new bus service will provide better service to the students going to Durham College and to the new University of Ontario Institute of Technology. This service will also benefit people with disabilities.

Let me quote what the mayor of Whitby said about our gas-tax announcement and today's event. He said, "The gas-tax funding announced by your government was well received by Whitby council, and has assured the successful launch of this important undertaking."

I will look forward to the supplementary.

Mr Arthurs: That's great news for the people of Durham region, and I'm looking forward to the very same type of announcements in my community. Could you be more precise in explaining what this means to the city of Oshawa transit system, Minister, and could you provide some update on the status of other municipalities in receiving their gas tax funding?

Hon Mr Takhar: Let me just quote what the mayor of Oshawa said: "Please extend our thanks.... It was a commitment made, and a commitment kept. This is a very welcome initiative ... and it enables us to make the improvements that we are rolling out today."

As far as the status is concerned, so far 55 municipalities have signed the agreement and will be receiving their first gas tax payment retroactive to October of this year. We are expecting that within the next few weeks we will have all agreements signed and the municipalities can start receiving their payments. For the city of Oshawa, this means that \$1.137 million will start flowing to them

and start creating the kinds of benefits I talked about before.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford):

My question is to the Minister of Health. Your government promised to improve cancer wait times and survival rates and make prevention a priority. The Ontario cancer action plan, released last Thursday, warns that if the plan isn't adopted, wait times will only grow longer and patients will once again be forced to seek treatment in the United States. This action plan states that planning for the construction of two three-machine centres, one in Newmarket and the other in Barrie, was approved and ongoing. The reality is that cancer rates are increasing and there are no cancer centres between Toronto and Sudbury.

Will you commit to prioritizing the Barrie Royal Victoria Hospital and the Newmarket Southlake cancer centres to begin construction for the 2005-06 fiscal year?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I was pleased to have the opportunity to be at a press conference last week with Cancer Care Ontario, which released a three-year plan for cancer that was developed at the request of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Cancer Care Ontario is, of course, our partner and the organization we rely upon for assistance in the coordination of cancer services.

While I would acknowledge what the honourable member said about the importance of building centres to the north of Toronto, I do think it is important to heed the advice of Cancer Care Ontario, and that advice was very clear in saying that capital priorities from them include three other centres before Newmarket and Barrie come into play. Two of them I remember off the top of my head, and by the supplementary I hope to capture the third. One of those was Niagara, and expansion of capacity in Ottawa was also seen as a very significant priority.

The case in point here, though, is very simple. I have noticed that with a lot of encouragement and strong community support, campaigns are really getting rolling quite aggressively in both of these communities. I'm supportive of them, and I would agree with the honourable member that an ongoing expansion of our capital capacities, particularly in this deprived part of our province, is an absolute necessity.

Mr Tascona: My constituents and I have concerns about your failure to commit to beginning construction in the 2005-06 fiscal year, and I want you to know why. On November 3, 2004, you were questioned by my colleague from Simcoe-Grey about two new cancer centres, one in Barrie, at Royal Victoria Hospital, and one in Newmarket, at the Southlake Regional Health Centre. Your response: "... both the [cancer] centres in Newmarket and Barrie continue to be important priorities, and we're making considerable progress."

The Ontario cancer action plan, released last Thursday, in the executive summary, page 17, part B, "Increase

Capacity to Meet Predicted Demand, Action Plans,” states: “Immediate priorities include Peel, Hamilton, Sudbury, Grand River and Durham. Once other planned expansions over the next three years are in place, PCOPs will also be required for Ottawa, Kingston and one centre north of the greater Toronto area.”

We have attempted to find out, to no avail, from Cancer Care Ontario and your ministry which cancer centre that is required north of the greater Toronto area is being referred to in the cancer care action plan. Which one is it, Minister: Barrie RVH or Newmarket Southlake, and how is this “considerable progress” if only one of the centres is going ahead and no construction has even started?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I do think the honourable member is doing a considerable amount of injustice to the issue, because he’s got the time sequencing way off, even from his own government’s announcement.

On the issue of Cancer Care Ontario’s report, I didn’t refer to page 17 directly, but certainly, in the front pages, Cancer Care Ontario’s indication to the government of Ontario has been that both of these centres north of Toronto are a priority, and that is the basis that we’re operating on.

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CHILD CARE

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, last week you promised to reveal the details of your child care plan, and you came up very short. Ontario parents believed they would finally have a comprehensive program of regulated, non-profit care. But this, of course, was not to be. Last Thursday, their raised expectations became dashed hopes. All you offered was a small pilot program in just three communities, along with a thin pledge that some day, somewhere, some child might get regulated care. The Toronto Star, in fact, dismissed it as “another election-style promise.”

Minister, you avoided the glare of scrutiny last week by making your announcement outside of the Legislature. Now tell us point-blank, please: How many provincial dollars will be allocated to not-for-profit regulated child care in this year?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): It is with great pleasure and pride that I say today that our Best Start plan will help children from zero to six years across the province. It’ll provide healthier development, early learning and child care and good parenting programs across that age range.

The demonstration sites that the honourable member mentions are for the full hub, which will be over the next few years. The actual JK and SK wraparound programs will start immediately. The planning is starting now. We’ll see the first spaces in the fall, where the communities who are able to provide the spaces because of capital foundations—those will be provided in the fall. With

others, construction will begin by the fall. By 2007-08, phase one will be completed, where we will have wraparound for a significant number of children across the province.

This is one quote from the president of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation, Emily Noble: “Ontario children and their parents will benefit significantly from the Best Start plan.... Teachers welcome the government’s intention to bring early childhood education into the public school system.”

Ms Horwath: The issue is that the minister’s plan has a timetable that is so slow that a child born today will be old enough to be babysitting the next generation of children by the time the program actually kicks in, in full swing.

Have you actually set the rates, Minister, for parental subsidies? No. Have you allocated any new provincial money? No. Have you committed to a not-for-profit system? No. Did you do what you promised to do? No.

You promised 330,000 regulated child care spaces. How many will actually be available in September 2005, and how many kids are actually going to be left behind?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: Not only are we fulfilling our election promise, we’re surpassing it with the assistance of the federal government. We are making it more affordable for up to 84% of families in this province. We are cancelling the RESP and the RRSP criteria for subsidy, allowing more lower-middle-class parents as well as upper-working-class parents to be able to take advantage of this program.

The other thing that we’ll be doing is connecting early childhood programs with other services. Parents have told us from across the province that they want one-stop shopping, one hub. This will take a few years, we do admit. We’re going to do it right. We’re going to do it across the province. And I’m not going to take any lectures from that member, who does not have the best interests of her community at heart when she attacks what I’m trying to do for her community.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): My question is for the Minister of Finance. As I meet with local businesses in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, the Etobicoke Chamber of Commerce and BIAs in my riding, I encounter consistent concerns with respect to the unfair burden of taxes on small businesses in my community.

In particular, there are three areas of concern that are expressed: first, the disproportionately high levels of property tax rates paid by businesses in Etobicoke compared to the property tax rates paid by similar businesses in other parts of the GTA; second, the migration of businesses to the greater GTA as a result of substantially higher levels of education tax; and third, the lack of a small-business retail tax class which specifically addresses the reality of small businesses.

As Etobicoke-Lakeshore continues to work hard on its revitalization, the inequitable tax situation suffered by small businesses in my community is hindering our

progress. What is our government doing to help address these concerns?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I appreciate the question from my friend from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, particularly because she represents an area of the city and the GTA and the province which has its own unique and marvellous business community. I've visited some of those businesses and I understand her concern about the property tax burden. I should say to you that a number of things are taking place that allow more flexibility and moderation of those tax burdens.

The first is that we have given municipalities flexibility to either speed up or moderate the movement toward current value assessment. I made that announcement several months ago in the Legislature, and the impact of that will be good news in Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

The second and perhaps more important initiative is giving municipalities the ability to put into place a graduated tax rate system for small businesses. That also might be of help to a great area of the province.

Ms Broten: The success of urban centres in Toronto is tantamount to the health and vibrancy of our entire city. As you know, Minister, small businesses are an important sector of our economy and the hearts of each of our communities. While it's hopeful that the CVA will address this disproportionate tax issue, the transformation will take certainly many years, perhaps as long as 20 years. Recognizing that municipalities set their business property tax rates, how are we working with the municipalities to ensure success for the businesses in Etobicoke-Lakeshore?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Obviously it's the municipality, and in this case the city of Toronto, which ultimately sets the tax rates. My friend points out an important element of the system that our government inherited, and that is this slow-moving process toward market value assessment. We have taken some steps to ensure that the process becomes fairer. In particular, we have invited municipalities to speak to us directly about the possibility of having a unique class among the various classes of property which would include small business.

The point here is that the small businesses in Etobicoke-Lakeshore and right across the province are one of the very important engines, and we are concerned about the burden of property tax that they confront.

ONTARIO FILM INDUSTRY

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): My question is for the Minister of Culture. Minister, everyone in Ontario knows we have a crisis in our film industry. The industry has been hard-hit over the last several years, and you have failed to keep your election promise to increase tax credits to 33%. The landscape in the last few months has begun to shift even more dramatically, yet last week the Chair of Management Board said you would only help the film industry sometime in the four years of your mandate.

Minister, Ontario's film industry cannot wait. People are losing their jobs today. Businesses are leaving

Ontario today for the US or other provinces. What is your strategy to preserve our film industry right now for the next six to 12 months?

Hon Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I want to thank the member of the opposite party for her question. As you know, our government understands how important Ontario film and television tax credits are both for the industry and for the province's economy. More than 20,000 direct jobs and 32,000 indirect jobs in the film and television industry have been supported by tax credits during a difficult period for all cultural industry.

Our government continues to develop policy that supports our international competitiveness. This includes changes to the Ontario film and television tax credit that increase its value. The enhanced tax credits will result in seven to eight million new dollars invested in the film and TV sector. One announcement allows producers to claim development and labour costs. They can also claim budgets which include a federal contribution. So we are doing what is necessary, recognizing the importance of tax credits in the film industry.

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Mrs Munro: Minister, I don't think you understand the importance of this issue. There are 20,000 people, but these are 20,000 people who stand to lose their jobs. We're talking about real people facing a crisis. Personally, I know set designers, caterers, hairdressers and stuntmen who earn their living in this industry. Do you have any idea of the amount of talent and expertise that we risk losing in this province?

Just as a simple, straightforward example, Wayne Ford is the owner of Mar-Lyn Lumber in Ajax, a small business that employs 10 people. Mar-Lyn is one of the largest suppliers of construction materials for movie sets in the Toronto area, working with about 85% of all productions. Wayne and his employees do good work, yet Wayne is certain he is likely to go out of business with the current crisis in the film industry. With Christmas a month away, what message should I give to Wayne, his employees and their families, and to the thousands of skilled and talented people in this province about what your government will do to save jobs now in the film industry?

Hon Mrs Meilleur: As I said in my first answer, our government understands the importance of the film industry in Ontario. In the last budget, we improved the tax credit, and we will continue to work with the industry because it is important and we want to make sure the film industry continues to flourish here in Ontario.

PUBLIC TELEVISION TÉLÉVISION PUBLIQUE

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Minister of Culture again.

Minister, when you considered the privatization of TVO a while back, the people of this province fought back and fought hard to keep it in public hands. They

told you they value the high-quality educational programming TVOntario provides. Now we learn that you are ready to cut nearly, I hear, \$2 million from their budget. It is impossible for TVO to continue its fundraising efforts and conduct normal operations when threats of cuts hang over their head. Can you put the minds of the people of Ontario at ease and let them know that you are not making cuts to this valuable public service?

Hon Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Thank you for the question. We know that TVO and TFO are very, very important for the community and they offer quality services. We are working with TVO and TFO to continue their good service in Ontario.

I will ask that the next question would be directed to the minister responsible for TFO/TVO, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Mr Marchese: We understand that the programming that's delivered is important. That wasn't the question. It's a different type of question, and I will ask you again, Madam Minister.

Nous entendons que TFO recevra bientôt des coupures de millions de dollars. La communauté francophone est déjà mal servie par les médias en Ontario. TFO offre de la programmation française qui est reconnue autour du monde. Les francophones en Ontario seraient bouleversés d'apprendre qu'ils pourraient perdre des émissions distinguées comme Panorama. Madame la ministre, pourquoi votre gouvernement est-il prêt à offrir la communauté francophone en sacrifice?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Je suis consciente de l'importance que TFO joue dans la communauté francophone. Ils offrent des services de qualité, et nous travaillons à continuer avec TFO à produire ces programmes de qualité.

Alors, ce que nous cherchons présentement c'est d'autres partenaires, et nous savons qu'il y a d'autres provinces qui sont intéressées à acheter les bons services de TFO et de TVO.

COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): My question is for the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. All of the members in this Legislature understand how important it is for the government of Ontario to promote physical activity amongst its young people. However, for many low-income families, it is difficult for children to access recreation facilities due to cost. Minister, can you tell me what you are doing to break down cost barriers for young kids in my riding?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): The member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan makes an excellent point: It's difficult for young people in our province who come from modest means to access facilities and participate in physical activity programming due to fiscal barriers. That is why my ministry has initiated, along with the Ministry of Education, the community use of schools program to lower the cost to

non-profit organizations and to increase the utilization of the facilities, and the communities in action fund to assist community groups in the formulation of recreational programs for lower-income children.

On Wednesday of last week, I had the privilege of announcing two such grants in Thunder Bay. I visited the Thunder Bay Boys and Girls Club to present a cheque of \$10,488 to increase physical activity and sport participation rates in Thunder Bay. In addition, along with Ian Sutherland of the Lakehead District School Board, I made the announcement of a community use of schools agreement, which will see the Lakehead school board receive \$132,000. With the signing of this agreement, the Lakehead board will eliminate all fees for non-profit organizations and increase the number of hours that schools are open by 3,000 hours.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): That is absolutely wonderful for the young people and the students of Thunder Bay.

I understand as well, Minister, that you made another very significant announcement when you were in Thunder Bay regarding another aspect of your portfolio, that being tourism, which of course is of very great importance to the north. Can you tell the Legislature a little bit about the northern Ontario tourism marketing strategy and some of the projects your ministry is working on and supporting in that regard?

Hon Mr Bradley: As the member from Thunder Bay-Superior North would know, tourism is an extremely important part of the northern economy. The northern Ontario tourism marketing strategy will allow us to work with our government and private sector partners to raise awareness of northern tourism destinations right across Ontario, Canadian and international markets by helping to develop tourism packages and products. The strategy will also aim to increase tourist traffic by some 15%, tourism spending by 20%, and 3,000 more jobs in northern Ontario we hope to be able to create.

Our government, through the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp, is contributing \$585,000 to produce a 2005 Outdoor Adventure Guide, a francophone Outdoor Adventure Guide and training materials for the Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce to assist them in identifying new tourism products.

The northern Ontario tourism marketing strategy is part of this government's \$5-million commitment to tourism in northern Ontario.

PETITIONS

EYE EXAMINATIONS

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas the 2004 provincial budget was not clear on whether adult optometry patients who have or who are at

risk for medical conditions, such as diabetes, glaucoma, macular degeneration and clinically significant cataracts would continue to be covered through the Ontario health insurance plan; and

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

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

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

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

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

This has several thousand signatures, and it has my signature as well.

IMMIGRANTS’ SKILLS

Mr Shafiq Qadri (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”—

Interjection: Sign it.

Mr Qadri: —“facilitate the entry, or re-entry, of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce.”

As per the suggestion of the MPP for Durham, I am pleased to sign it.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Petitions? The member from Oxford.

ABORTION

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): Thank you—

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Do you represent Oxford now?

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in Parliament assembled:

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, draw the attention of the House to the following:

“That Ontarians are being asked to consider alternate forms of health care delivery due to escalating costs; and

“That 65% of Ontarians surveyed in October 2002 objected to the public funding of abortion on demand; and

“That almost all abortions are done for ‘socio-economic’ reasons in Canada; and

“That the Canada Health Act imposes no duty on provinces to fund any services other than those which are medically necessary; and

“That there are no legal impediments preventing provinces from” delisting “abortion.

“Therefore, your petitioners call on the Parliament of Ontario to enact legislation which will de-insure induced abortion.”

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.”

I will sign this petition.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Education has failed to ensure that students are protected from individuals whose past behaviours have directly harmed children; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Education has chosen to ignore the children’s aid society’s recommendation that certain individuals not work with children; and

“Whereas the introduction of a ‘volunteer’ into the school system must not be solely at the discretion of the principal; and

“Whereas the Liberal government promised to make sure schools are safe so students can concentrate on learning; and

“Whereas the Liberal government promised to ensure that school boards provide strong local accountability and decision-making;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to amend the Education Act to place restrictions on the eligibility of persons who act as volunteers in schools, and to include as a formal requirement that volunteers be subject to the approval of the school board and parent council.”

I’ve signed my name.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): This is a petition written 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 my name to this petition and give it to Adam.

CHILDREN’S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I have this 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 multiple special needs (and their families) throughout the province access ongoing rehabilitation services that are critical for their development at children’s treatment centres in their area; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased to sign my name to that.

GO TRANSIT SERVICE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from a group of commuters in Mississauga, and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

“That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, instruct GO Transit to allocate sufficient resources from its 2004-05 capital budget to proceed immediately with the acquisition of

land and construction of a new GO train station, called Lisgar, at Tenth Line and the rail tracks, to alleviate the parking congestion and provide better access to GO train service on the Milton line for residents of western Mississauga.”

I am one of those residents. I'm pleased to sign this petition and to ask Evan to carry it for me.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to present this petition on behalf of the riding of Durham.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario's seniors have worked long and hard to build the outstanding quality of life the citizens of Ontario enjoy today; and

“Whereas seniors' drug benefits enable older persons to lead healthier lives and avoid more complex care in hospitals and nursing homes; and

“Whereas, in addition to their taxes, many seniors already contribute toward their prescription drugs through deductibles and dispensing fees; and

“Whereas the vast majority of seniors face increasing costs on fixed pensions and cannot afford to see their incomes eroded further;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario not eliminate or reduce the provincial drug benefits provided to seniors.”

My constituents are concerned about this; therefore, I sign it and support it.

1500

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

“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,” petition the Ontario government to support the passage “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 sign this and ask Ellen to carry it for me.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition signed by thousands of good Cambrian citizens that reads:

“To: Legislative Assembly of Ontario

“Re: support for chiropractic services in Ontario health insurance plan:

“Whereas,

“Elimination of OHIP coverage will mean that many of the 1.2 million patients who use chiropractic will no longer be able to access the health care they need;

“Those with reduced ability to pay—including seniors, low-income families and the working poor—will be forced to seek care in already overburdened family physician offices and emergency departments;

“Elimination of OHIP coverage is expected to save \$93 million in expenditures on chiropractic treatment at a cost to government of over \$200 million in other health care costs; and

“There was no consultation with the public on the decision to delist chiropractic services;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the decision announced in the May 18, 2004, provincial budget and maintain OHIP coverage for chiropractic services, in the best interests of the public, patients, the health care system, government and the province.”

I'm pleased to sign this petition.

LANDFILL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-

wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario. We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of site 41 and the nearby water sources.”

I am pleased to sign my name to that.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the riding of Oxford is made up of many small communities, which have little or no access to municipal water service and are home to churches, halls and other public buildings that must be on private wells; and

“Whereas these buildings are now required to abide by regulation 170 of the Safe Drinking Water Act, which calls for expensive and unnecessary reports and tests if the buildings are to be used; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario maintains it will institute all recommendations of the O’Connor report, including number 84 that recommends provincial funding when approved systems are not economically viable for the owner; and

“Whereas the Minister of the Environment agrees the regulation is flawed;

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

“That the Minister of the Environment put enforcement of regulation 170 on hold until either a provincial funding program is put in place to assist rural public buildings and the organizations they house meet the regulation, or a change to the regulation is made to make it more reasonable and appropriate.”

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT (FALL), 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (AUTOMNE)

Mr Sorbara moved second reading of the following bill:

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 Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Sorbara?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): It’s a pleasure and an honour for me to be speaking on this bill. I just would inform you now that the time allotted for the opening speeches will be shared with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, who will make all the salient points. I’m really just here to introduce him, and I hope you’ll bear with me.

You will recall that I provided this House with a summary of this act through ministers’ statements when the bill was introduced a few days ago in the Legislature. I am going to just highlight some of the points I made at that time.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Maybe you should try reading it sometime.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Did you hear a cry from the Simcoe area? We’ll just ignore that.

Mr Dunlop: Read the bill.

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend says, “Read the bill.” I’m quite familiar with the contents of the bill, and I hope that one day the members opposite will concentrate on the content. I’m going to try to ignore them now but I know that my friend from, I think, Simcoe-Grey is rather jumpy today, so it will be a test.

Anyway, I’m going to share my time with my colleague, my parliamentary assistant. I hope, when he addresses the House on this bill, you will give him some leeway to talk at least a little bit about the steps he has been taking over the course, really, of the past 13 months on the auto insurance file. We’re very proud of how much progress we’ve made on that file, and we are particularly proud of the work he’s done on that.

The essence of Bill 149 is to complete the work that was really launched when we presented the budget in this Legislature back on May 18. As you recall, at that time the budget really represented a four-year plan to do four important things:

The first was to get us on the road to building a stronger economy. The second was to get us on the road to bringing financial health back to the very business of government. We’ve started that as well. Third, to make significant investments in key public services like health care: We’ve done that with historic new levels of funding for hospitals, with new initiatives to transform our system to improve home care and primary care, and you’ve heard about that from the Minister of Health for many, many months. The fourth initiative, and in a way perhaps the most important in the budget, is the investments we’ve made already in education.

I believe, and I think many commentators on Ontario politics will agree with me, that over the course of the eight and a half years the Conservative Party was in government, it was really education that suffered the brunt of their anger and of their inability to manage the public agenda properly. I want to be careful of my language here, because I know you’re paying careful attention.

Let me put it another way: By the time we came to power, the education system in Ontario—primary and

secondary—was in one heck of a mess. For that reason, among others, we made building new strength in education one of our first priorities, and the budget went a long way to set out the course we would be taking.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): You're going to fix it.

1510

Hon Mr Sorbara: And I tell my friend from Whitby-Ajax, all you have to do, really, is talk to a teacher, talk to a principal, talk to an administrator, and they'll say, "We know that you haven't turned water into wine, but already our schools are in better shape."

What they appreciate most is that we respect the importance, the dignity and the status of those wonderful men and women who are teachers in this province and in whose hands every day of the school year we entrust the care and the development of our children. The worst thing about the Tory legacy was the eight-and-a-half-year war on teachers, which will be the legacy of that government. But I'm not here to talk about that; I'm here to talk about Bill 149, and I'm here to talk about the way in which we are ultimately implementing our budget plan.

Admittedly, and I said this at the time of the introduction of the bill, it's a very long bill. In a sense, it's a very technical bill, and I'm not sure the House today wants to hear about all those technicalities. But I think they would be interested in hearing about some of the major thrusts in the bill that take us on the way to a stronger economy and a healthier province.

I want to start off, if I could—

Mr Flaherty: Taxing is very healthy for the economy.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Well, I hear the member from Whitby-Ajax talking about taxes. In fact, the major tax initiative of this bill is to cut taxes, to cut corporate taxes, to cut capital taxes and, indeed, over the course of 10 years to eliminate capital tax in the province of Ontario.

Hon Mr Sorbara: But let's get on with some of the important initiatives that will strengthen our economy. I really want to talk about two initiatives that are worthy of highlight.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Interjections, yes, but continuous? Three speakers—I'm having trouble listening. Minister.

Hon Mr Sorbara: The two that I would like to highlight are the steps we're taking in the apprenticeship system—I think probably these initiatives, more than anything else, define one of the major elements of our approach to stronger economic growth because they represent investments in young people to help them be trained to be North America's leaders in workplace training.

I remember the steps that I had the honour of taking way back in 1985 to 1987 in workplace training. At that time, I had the honour of being Minister of Skills Development, and I am glad to see that now, almost 13 years later, the government is returning to an emphasis on the importance of workplace training. Thousands and

thousands of young people will enter apprenticeship programs as a result of these initiatives. Thousands and thousands of employers will receive payroll assistance to hire new apprentices as a result of these initiatives. So on the workplace side, this initiative of developing the strength of our workforce deserves special attention.

The other thing that I think is worthy of note here as we begin second reading debate is the investments we're making in the Ontario commercialization investment fund program. Now, for many people that's a very long title, and it is; I think I would have given some more thought to perhaps giving it a more easily articulated title. What's important is what this new fund is going to do. We take advantage of \$36 million of taxpayers' money and invest it, along with the private sector, to leverage \$120 million in new pools of investment capital to invest in leading-edge technology businesses. This kind of investment is targeted directly at those new economies, which I believe will be an important part of the new economy over the next 10 and 20 years in Ontario.

Interjection: You're darned right. The knowledge industry.

Hon Mr Sorbara: So on the one hand, investing in workers and, on the other hand, investing in new and creative ways and in what my friend from Mississauga West appropriately calls knowledge industries.

I want to point out a couple of more things this bill does that I think are worthy of note today, and which personally, when I presented the budget, gave me a great deal of satisfaction. The first is an increase of some 25% on the seniors' property tax credit, which has been around in the province for over a decade. I remember during the election campaign how often I heard from seniors—in Woodbridge, Maple, Aurora and King—that the thing they feared most was not having the ability to manage rising costs and not being able to keep their own home. I'm talking about seniors who have modest means, seniors on fixed incomes, seniors who only have a pension, perhaps from 20 or 30 years' working in the construction industry. Those voices continued to ring in my ear with clarity as we prepared the budget.

This property tax credit had not been adjusted for over a decade. When we presented the budget, I was very proud to announce a 25% increase. That's an additional \$125 per family and will touch some 350,000 seniors in the province. Some 35,000 seniors will receive the tax credit for the first time. This is real help to people of modest means whose only interest is to stay within their own home.

The other initiative that I think needs to be highlighted is the fact that this bill creates the northern Ontario grow bonds program. If you'd been travelling with me through the north in the pre-budget hearings, you would have heard, in community after community in northern Ontario, a plea to become real participants in the growth of this great economy in this great province.

For eight and a half years the north was shut out of Tory economic policy—just shut out. You need to go up

north and talk to people, and they will tell you about the fact that virtually nothing happened over the course of eight and a half years during the Tory administration. I was determined that in our budget we would begin to turn that around.

One of the elements that we're using is the grow bonds program, which will provide new capital, investment capital, for entrepreneurs in the north; capital they do not now have access to, to create the new businesses that will create the new jobs that will bring new economic activity and new vibrancy to the northern economy.

There were a number of other steps that we took in the northern prosperity program that we presented at the time of the budget, but this one, I think, merits particular attention because it really grows out of the north. This grow bonds program is something that the northern Ontario chambers of commerce had been asking government for for quite some time. I remember, when we were still in opposition, that they presented to us a framework for a grow bonds program. In the presentation, they gave each of us a seedling pine tree. I asked for several more because my grandkids love to plant trees. I thought I'd bring them home and have them plant them in the backyard and that would remind me, if we were to win the election, that we really ought to think carefully about putting this program in place.

I'm very hopeful that the northern Ontario grow bonds program, which is already the subject of a pilot project—I'm hoping that when we look back at having passed Bill 149, we'll be able to say that there was a special effort in the bill to ensure that we provide northerners with the same opportunities that those participating in the economy in southern Ontario have the advantage of.

1520

I'm seeing that time is pressing here, and my colleague from Eglinton-Lawrence is preparing to give his views on Bill 149.

I want to sum up by simply pointing out that Bill 149 is really part of a larger story, but it is an important component in our determination to create greater transparency in government. In that sense, it's part of the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, which is before this Legislature. It also has a companion in the Audit Act, which has now passed third reading. The Audit Act increases dramatically the powers of the Auditor General to ensure that we have real value in the money that we spend, whether right here in government or with various transfer payment agencies. It is part of the budget bill that we presented in May. Together, those acts represent the legislative considerations that implement the budget that we presented—my goodness—almost six months ago.

When I introduced this bill and when I gave this House an update on the economy, I made two points, and I want to restate those points as I conclude my remarks. We've been in power now, we've been in government, we've had these responsibilities, for some 13 months, and I can say, with absolute confidence and clarity, that

already in Ontario our economy is stronger, and already in Ontario our financial situation is healthier.

We have a long way to go. Passing this bill will help us down that road.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): It's a pleasure to follow the Minister of Finance. As he was relating this bill to how it affects ordinary people, I would also like to continue in that vein. One of the most understandable parts of a complex bill for ordinary Ontarians is the seniors' property tax credit. As the minister said, the seniors' property tax credit, for the first time in 11 years, has been expanded by 85 million extra dollars; 85 million extra dollars will go in the pockets of seniors—low-income, moderate-income seniors. This is for relief in their property taxes. Whether they live in an apartment as tenants, or in a home, they'll be able to access this tax credit.

Members opposite were sneering at the fact that a senior can get a break of \$625 on their taxes. But the seniors I know in Eglinton-Lawrence think that \$625 off their property tax is a significant amount of money, and they're thankful for every \$625 they can get in their pockets.

Interjection.

Mr Colle: Again, the former government basically sneers at this. The members opposite are sneering at that: 625 hard-earned dollars back to those seniors who have worked all their lives, made sacrifices, sent their kids to school and paid off their mortgages. What we're saying as a government is, "You deserve a little bit of help." We're giving it to them with these 85 million extra dollars in their property taxes.

It's a credit that means that 33,000 extra Ontario families will be eligible for this tax credit that weren't eligible under the previous government. Again, 33,000 ordinary Ontario families, whether they live in Stratford, Scarborough, Willowdale or Mississauga, are going to get a break. As tenants, because they pay their property taxes through their rent, or as homeowners, they're going to get this break. That's one part of this bill that the minister is referring to.

The minister also asked me to make a few references to our reforming of auto insurance. I would like to say, again, that some very valuable things have been done in this province with the leadership of the superintendent of financial services, along with the superintendents of financial services right across Canada, where, for the first time in the history of this province of Ontario—I know the Deputy Speaker was in the insurance business at one time. He'll be glad to know that, for the first time in the history of this province, come January 1, every person buying auto insurance in Ontario will have full disclosure—the broker will have full disclosure. In other words, the broker will tell the client the number of companies the broker represents. Whether it's two, three, five, 10 or 15 companies, that will be revealed for the first time in the history of Ontario.

Also, the commission that each broker receives from all the companies they do business with will be listed in a

disclosure form to each customer. That's the first time full disclosure will be done.

Also, all other fees and commissions and financial arrangements between the broker and companies will be made for the first time to the citizens of the province of Ontario.

Again, Ontario is the leading jurisdiction in disclosure. I know that Jim Hall, the superintendent of insurance for the province of Saskatchewan—an NDP government—has said that Ontario has taken great steps toward this whole new era of disclosure when it comes to financial services.

I know it's being done with the mutual funds area. It's being done in all the financial sectors. Insurance is coming up to the plate with their disclosure and transparency.

Also, I should mention that when we came to office last year, there were 220,000 Ontarians in the Facility Association. The Facility Association is where the worst drivers go. If they've had an unfortunate, serious accident or a drunk driving conviction, they go to the Facility Association. The rates are very high. You could pay up to \$5,000, \$6,000 or \$10,000 a year for insurance. When we came to office last year at this time, there were 220,000 Ontarians in Facility paying very high rates. I can say that the good news is, in the month of November, that 220,000 is now down to 84,000. So it's a dramatic drop-off in the number of people who are paying these extraordinarily high rates in Facility. Now it has been depopulated from 220,000 to 84,000. That is a dramatic improvement in the number of people who are paying extraordinarily high rates.

I should also mention that for the first time in the province of Ontario, people who inadvertently write an NSF cheque to their insurance company will not be denied insurance. That's another change we're making to insurance.

Another thing we're also doing, which will come to fruition very quickly, is that we will end credit scoring in the province of Ontario for auto insurance. Credit scoring means that an insurance company or financial institution can basically deny you insurance because of your lifestyle; in other words, if you're a tenant or if you perhaps had a case of bankruptcy or if something happened years ago, your financial standing could have an impact on you maybe not being insured, or it could cause you to have higher rates. That's called credit scoring. We are now, for the first time in Ontario, making credit scoring not allowed. It's no longer going to be allowed to be used. Credit scoring, lifestyle scoring, will no longer be allowed in Ontario.

So I know, Mr Speaker, that you're very interested in some of those reforms in auto insurance.

I should mention that auto insurance rates had been going up by 43% over the last three years before we came to office. Since we've come to office, the rates on the street are down 12%, on average. So we are seeing things finally going in the right direction: There's a 12% reduction. Remember, there are over eight million Ontar-

ians who rely on auto insurance. That's not to say that every single one of those eight million has a reduction. But overall, of those 8.3 million, after three years of skyrocketing rates, we're starting to see the rates go down.

There's more availability of insurance. As I mentioned many times, there's still a lot more work to do in auto insurance and insurance in general, because for too many years there were many forces at work in the marketplace that weren't taken care of. We're seeing the market competitive again. We're seeing improvements, but, as I said, there's still work to be done.

Getting back to this bill, that also deals with the financial plan for this province—and we do have a plan. I know that the minister, in passing, talked about the new knowledge-based economy. One of the most fascinating connections between Bill 149 and something that is going on right across the street, under our noses—if you want to see where the new economy of Canada, of Ontario and of Toronto is, it is going on on College Street in the city of Toronto. I know the former government was interested in this. We are finishing the—

Interjection.

1530

Mr Colle: Well, you're interested, but we're putting our money where our mouth is. The government talked about things—we're putting money into this program called the MARS program. It is across the street on College Street. This budget allocates monies for that kind of cutting-edge technology, which I know the government opposite, the former government, talked about. We are putting this in the budget with a significant investment in funds for what is called new, knowledge-based economic activity, where you combine the best brains out of universities and the private sector with cutting-edge research—and again, along with the private sector.

As I said to you, the members of the Legislature, if you walk across the street, in front of the Toronto General Hospital, you can see the MARS project being built literally from the ground up. So this budget has an allocation of money for a program that is going to be very helpful to projects like MARS which, again, combines some of the best and brightest people we have in Ontario with initiatives that the government is doing. That program is called the Ontario commercialization investment funds program. These funds, again, leverage new pools of private money so you can have scientists, researchers, work together with the private sector and develop the most cutting-edge technology that is of benefit in the medical sciences sector and other sectors that are of a scientific nature.

As you know, I have mentioned many times before that the economy of Ontario is changing. If you go to Hamilton, the number one employer is the Hamilton Health Sciences centre. There are well-paying jobs that make us competitive with the rest of the world when we invest in things like the MARS project and the Hamilton Health Sciences centre. That's what this budget tries to do with its forward-looking approach.

I should mention that the other thing this government is doing is that we've committed to, and started to,

eliminate the capital tax. As many of you know, the capital tax, in essence, is really a tax that has nothing to do with your earned income or how well a company is doing; it's a tax on assets. It's considered a real job-killer, this tax. So we were encouraged—I know in the public hearings that we had across the province last year, many deputations were given on the need to eliminate the capital tax. We have started to eliminate this capital tax, and we're going to do it in a gradual way. The reason we're going to do it in a gradual way is because we're very cognizant of the financial pressures in Ontario and the demands we have on increased services in our hospital and health sector and our education sector etc. So we are eliminating this capital tax. It will be gone by the year 2012. It is a tax that really served no benefit. It wasn't a really positive message to send to the business community, so we are eliminating the capital tax with this act. Again, it's going to be phased in.

Also, the minister mentioned the northern grow bonds. The northern grow bonds are really part of a strategy this government has to ensure that the forgotten parts of Ontario are not neglected any longer. Certainly, Ontario has seen growth and prosperity over the last 10 or 11 years, but there are parts of this province which have not experienced or shared in that economic prosperity. I know a lot of us who were in Pickle Lake, Attawapiskat and Sioux Lookout saw the fact that this previous government basically neglected northern Ontario. In this budget, we're saying that you can no longer do that if you're going to be a competitive province. You're going to have to share the wealth of this province with all Ontarians—not only northern Ontario, but the fact there are strains and ribbons of Ontarians right across every community who have not prospered from the economic growth in the last number of years. That is the reason why you hear the Premier and the minister talk about what is sometimes referred to as forgotten federalism.

We have to start to appreciate, as Ontarians, that we work very hard, we pay a lot of taxes and we love the rest of this country, but we can no longer be expected to pay \$23 billion more to help other provinces than we get back from the federal government. We're saying that we want to help the other provinces, but if we can't keep some of this money here in Ontario to invest in northern Ontario, to invest in the poorer neighbourhoods of Toronto or of Chatham-Kent, we won't have the prosperity whereby we can build the wealth to share with the rest of this great country.

So one of the messages we're trying to give the rest of Canada and our own citizens is that, as Ontarians, we have to be nurturers of this great province's ability to create and manage wealth. By doing that, we can take care of our sick and our elderly, take care of our urban needs and take care of our housing needs, but we have to be able to keep some of these resources here in Ontario so the north can prosper and not be left behind like it was by the last government, and so our urban centres can prosper.

We have to have some money left here in Ontario so we can put back into our roads and highways, public

transit and child care, but we can't do that by writing these cheques for \$23 billion every year. We want to help the rest of Canada, but we have to also ensure that the engine of Canada is taken care of and nurtured.

This budget attempts to invest direct money into northern Ontario. It helps seniors, it invests in the new economy—I mentioned the MARS project—and it talks about modernizing this government, because the minister has said very unequivocally that the status quo is not an option. I know that Tories want to take us back to the days of Newt Gingrich. That's a failed policy. That didn't work. All it does is increase your deficits, as they left us with that deficit. That's proof that Newt Gingrich economics don't work.

We're looking at being modern in terms of investing in all Ontarians, and not just having tax cuts by themselves. We're saying you have to invest in people, you have to invest in universities, you have to invest in our poor, you have to invest in all Ontarians, no matter where they live. As I said, we can't continue to ignore the youth who are going into university, you can't continue to ignore northern Ontario and you can't continue ignore cities. That's why we put part of the gas tax back into the cities and that's why cities all across this province are saying that this province is finally listening. That's why our schools—and if you go to any high school in Ontario and elementary school, they'll tell you that there's a government paying attention to education for a change and not beating up on educators and students.

So that's what this bill is about. It's about investing in people, their aspirations, their future, and not just business. It's our greatest strength that we're investing in, and that is Ontario's incredible people, who work so hard. They want Ontario to prosper, and we're going to try to help them with this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased to be able to rise now and talk a little bit about Bill 149 and some of the comments that were made by the minister and his parliamentary assistant. I listen to these comments, and it's almost like a comedy hour, some of the things they're taking credit for. If anything good is happening, they take credit for it.

For example, the MARS program; we can talk a lot about that. This guy right in front of me broke the sod on it. Mr Flaherty turned the sod with Allan Rock. Now here we have Mr Colle trying to make it sound as though Dalton McGuinty actually had something to do with it. Nothing. It's just pathetic. It's a comical hour. I'm surprised they sit there and actually try to take credit for something like that. And we can talk a lot more about that after.

There are so many things in this bill. Again, I think he referred to it as—what did the minister say here?—part of a larger story. I wonder where the story is going to end. I wonder what's going to happen in 2007. That'll be part of the larger story, and I think you already know what's going to happen. I can see people going for cover right now. It's the end of the Dalton McGuinty government, because they're a one-term wonder, with the type of nonsense we're seeing in this bill.

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I'm going to be sharing part of the time with Mr Flaherty, in doing his leadoff, and we'll use the full time. We'll use the full hour, because we think that if the bill is so important to the government, they would at least find enough speakers to be able to talk to the leadoff for an hour—if, in fact, it's that important. But because it was part of a larger story that's probably going to see the destruction of this government, I guess that's why they only want to speak for 30 minutes on this bill. I look forward to further debate on it.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I'm going to do something a little rare in this House. I'm going to actually ask some questions of the PA. I hope he's listening, because this is a rather arcane bill. It's filled with all kinds of stuff, and he only talked very briefly about some of its sections. I just want to ask him what some of these things mean to him.

Schedule 9 of the bill is for "an election so that a Canadian subsidiary of a foreign bank can transfer its unused Ontario losses and unused corporate minimum tax credits to a Canadian branch of the foreign bank." Nobody has spoken about that yet. I can't find out any information. Exactly what does that mean, Mr PA?

There are some other beauties here too. Here's one under the Electricity Act: Schedule 11, new subsections 94(7) and 94(7.1), and amendments to the regulation-making authority in subsection 96(1) deal with this cascading effect by providing regulation-making authority for the refund of the transfer tax, where the proceeds of a transfer are reinvested in a manner prescribed in the regulations. What does that mean? What are you trying to change?

This is the stuff you've given to us. The last one is a really good one. I think this is pretty simple, and you won't even have to run somewhere to find out what this is. Under schedule 12, the Employer Health Tax Act, the minister can exclude remuneration for everyone, except this provision does not apply to the parties to the application in *Blue Jays v Ontario*. Why are you exempting *Blue Jays v Ontario* in this bill?

These are three very good questions. I'm going to ask questions instead of making comments. I will be delighted to see what the PA has to respond.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I am pleased to respond to the comments from my colleagues the Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistant, the MPP from Eglinton-Lawrence. As my colleague from Beaches-East York mentioned, tax bills are full of arcane trivia that are for tax lawyers and tax accountants, but what I'd like to talk about are some items that are of more of general interest.

I'd like to address the apprenticeship training tax credit, because we understand that if the Ontario economy is going to prosper, we need to invest in apprenticeship programs. According to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, within the next 15 years, 52% of the skilled tradespeople in Ontario are expected to retire. We know that industries are expecting shortages in the skills trades.

We're addressing that with this budget in two ways. Firstly, we will be providing new funding of \$11.7 million annually to expand the number of apprenticeship placements to 26,000 young people. But as I know from some of my past experiences, it isn't just a matter of expanding the number of apprenticeship placements at community colleges and training colleges. It's also important for those young people to actually get positions with businesses where they can complete their training. In order to do that, we have set up the apprenticeship training tax credit to encourage employers to provide the training that the apprentices need.

The tax credit will pay up to \$5,000 of an eligible apprentice's salary each year for three years. The maximum credit will be \$15,000 over the first 36 months of an apprenticeship. We know that this is critical if we're going to train our young people.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I was fascinated by the comments by the parliamentary assistant, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, in his reference to this modest effort at recognizing the costs and the challenges financially that seniors face. It doesn't square it with a government that, on the one hand, is handing out a couple of pennies to seniors while, on the other, it's grabbing out of their pockets and their bank books and savings hundreds and hundreds, and in some cases thousands, more dollars as a result of the election of the Dalton McGuinty government.

We can start with hydro as the classic example of a broken promise, where seniors are now facing—they had protection as consumers, and in particular as seniors, and that protection has now been taken away by an act of this parliament by the Liberal government, which will result in double-digit increases in hydro bills for seniors, who will be experiencing very cold weather this winter.

The education property tax credit, which they cancelled for the most modest of seniors, would have been a \$460-a-year rebate for seniors to assist them because they are house-rich and income-poor. To understand what seniors are going through in this province, the member opposite should know that another \$125 is not going to keep them in their home longer. In fact, for people in Toronto, his seniors in his riding, the average rebate for a senior paying education taxes is in excess of \$1,000. That is the kind of meaningful support that seniors need and deserve, and which seniors got from the previous government. They're not getting it from this government; they're getting \$125.

Mr Dunlop: Plus, they're paying the health tax.

Mr Jackson: Plus they're paying a health tax. In nursing homes, for the first time in Ontario's history, we've got people who are bedridden now paying the health tax in this province. That's what you have done for seniors.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Eglinton-Lawrence has up to two minutes to reply.

Mr Colle: Just to mention, the briefings are available. It is a substantive bill, so if you want specific questions answered—I know you mentioned the *Blue Jays*; that's a

commitment we made to get rid of that loophole where the Blue Jays were not going to pay the health tax. We are taking care of that loophole, and that's something we've committed to.

The other thing: I know the Conservatives always scoff at \$625 to seniors; they say that's pennies. But I know that seniors in Eglinton-Lawrence feel that \$625 off their property tax is significant, and they are happy to see it. The Tories think that's pennies; we think that's a help. We have a lot more work to do for our seniors, but certainly what we think we're doing with this bill is ensuring there are some progressive ways of helping people.

All the last government did was say, "We can solve everything in this world by giving people a tax cut." Well, you know what that resulted in: a \$5.6-billion hole in the budget, a health care system in ruins, an education system in ruins, our cities turned into beggars and our seniors basically unable to make ends meet. That's the legacy of the tax-cut-solves-all failed economic policy of the previous government.

We're saying we have to modernize government, transform government to start investing in new, cutting-edge industries. Look what happened with our investment in Ford. We are now taking over from Michigan as the auto production centre in central North America. We're surpassing Michigan. The last government said it was foolish to invest in the auto industry. They wouldn't invest in Ford or General Motors. We're saying that investment means good-paying jobs and benefits to people. The former government never believed in investing in a future. All they did was give tax cuts to their corporate friends. That doesn't work.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Applause.

Mr Flaherty: Thank you for that resounding ovation.

I am going to share my time with the member for Simcoe North.

I find it interesting to listen to the parliamentary assistant talk about our now surpassing Michigan in the auto sector. He really should go back and look at his numbers. He's the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, and I think the people of Ontario expect not only the minister but the parliamentary assistant to have some familiarity with the facts in the province of Ontario. In fact, we exceeded Michigan production two or three years ago, if he'd like to go back and actually check the number of vehicles. All the parliamentary assistant needs to know is the facts.

He talks about the Toronto Blue Jays. It was the last Liberal government, as I recall, that spent \$600 million, more or less, of the taxpayers' money in the province of Ontario, to build what? The SkyDome, which they are now selling, which is now being sold, for, I think it was \$25 million for the Blue Jays. Now there is a good use of taxpayers' money. Congratulations, Liberals, for once again squandering taxpayers' money. You know how to spend it and you know how to tax. It's tax and spend, tax and spend; it was from 1985 to 1990, and it is now during

the current government. If there is a problem, increase taxes and increase spending.

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The parliamentary assistant talks about MARS. He may not know what it stands for. It stands for Medical and Related Sciences. It was funded through the government of Ontario under Premier Eves; the discussions took place under Premier Harris; the decision was made long before the current government came into office, and the funding decision made. Not only that, but the co-operative effort was made with the government in Ottawa. I was the minister responsible here at the time, and Allan Rock was the minister responsible in Ottawa. With the approval of both cabinets, we made the announcement, and we also did the groundbreaking across the street. In fact, the parliamentary assistant might want to walk across the street and look at the sign; he'll see that for Ontario, it says SuperBuild. Now, when the Liberal government came along they actually got rid of SuperBuild and called it something else.

So I say to the parliamentary assistant, get some air, go across the street and have a look at the sign. It would help him kind of figure out, "Oh, that wasn't our government, actually. It was the previous government that made that decision." That would help him, as I say, get his facts straight, because it's important when you're at the finance ministry to have some familiarity with the facts, so that the people of Ontario will have confidence in the Minister of Finance and have confidence in the parliamentary assistant. It takes time, it takes a lot of work, it takes a lot of hours every week at finance to stay up on the numbers, but it's important work for the people of Ontario. I hope the parliamentary assistant will avail himself of the people at the ministry who have the facts so that he becomes familiar with them.

I was surprised to hear the parliamentary assistant make an attack on equalization. This is a Liberal government in Ontario that is attacking, through the parliamentary assistant, one of the fundamentals of the Canadian relationship. That is, we have acknowledged for years in this country that there needs to be an equalization formula so that other parts of Canada can enjoy a level of public services comparable with other, wealthier parts of the country. It's appalling, actually, to hear the parliamentary assistant come to this Legislative Assembly and say that he wants to attack this pillar of Canadian democracy. There are only two, just now three, "have" provinces: this province of Ontario, the province of Alberta and, just recently, the province of Saskatchewan.

I think I understand the background to that; I think I understand the thinking by the Minister of Finance and by his parliamentary assistant. Because when I look at the numbers and I look at what's proposed in Bill 149, the picture becomes increasingly clear that this government is incapable, incompetent in terms of management and fiscal planning and left to their own resources, the resources of the people of Ontario, they're not going to be able to balance the budget because they can't control their spending. So their way out is going to be to blame

Ottawa and say to the Martin Liberal government in Ottawa, "You've got to bail us out." The rationale for bailing us out is going to be, "You have a surplus in Ottawa of \$9 billion or so. Don't reduce taxes, please, for the people of Ontario and the rest of Canada. Keep the taxes up high. Give us the money. Give us, the government of the province of Ontario, the money so that we can balance our budget." This is one Liberal cousin saying this to another Liberal cousin, but this Liberal cousin today in this place is attacking equalization.

Good luck when you go to Ottawa and say to Prime Minister Martin and the cabinet in Ottawa and the Liberal members of Parliament from Ontario that you're opposed to equalization. I don't think they'll elect you as a great Canadian at that point. I think they'll wonder about your credentials as a Liberal at that point.

Interjection.

Mr Flaherty: No, no. The minister responsible for business talks about The Greatest Canadian. No, I'm not voting for Pierre Trudeau. I know that will cause consternation opposite. My children and I were watching and discussing it last night. I will also refrain from voting for T. C. Douglas, great Canadian though he was.

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): David Suzuki.

Mr Flaherty: Oh, my goodness, the minister opposite pains me.

My reading of Canadian history, as imperfect as it is, tells me that the greatest Canadian is Sir John A. Macdonald, with the wonderful vision for this country that he had. You know, one of Sir John A. Macdonald's favourite sayings was, "I've had the benefit of looking a little ahead, my friends." I commend that to the Liberal members opposite, including the parliamentary assistant and the Minister of Finance, to look a little ahead in the Ontario economy and look a little bit ahead about what the people of Ontario and small and larger businesses of Ontario can and can't afford.

The parliamentary assistant talks about auto insurance. The promise in the first year was a 10% reduction in auto insurance premiums and 10% the next year. We haven't even got to the first 10%, so there's more broken promises. It isn't something I'd be particularly proud of if I were talking about it as a Liberal member of this place from the Ministry of Finance—more broken promises, particularly in the light of the substantial profits that were quite recently reported in the insurance industry.

As members opposite may know, the insurance industry is largely an investment industry and that when investment times are better, the insurance industry does better, and it is indeed doing better now. I would encourage the member opposite and his government to keep their promise of 10% and 10%, given the current circumstances in the insurance sector.

I also encourage them to address another serious issue in the insurance area, and that is what we're hearing from small businesses across Ontario, particularly businesses that do significant export work with the United States. As

we know, a great deal of our quality of life and standard of living relates to the simple fact that we have about 60 million Americans living within a 24-hour driving distance of where we are now, and that results in us having a very substantial, willing market next door to us with free trade, as a result of a Conservative government in Ottawa, opposed by Liberals in the election in 1988, I guess it was. Free trade has been a boon to the economy of Ontario, certainly southern Ontario, and I encourage the parliamentary assistant and the Minister of Finance to address the issue of insurance costs for small businesses doing transborder work in the province of Ontario, about which, regrettably, we've heard very little.

The Minister of Finance, in his remarks here today, talked about work and a stronger economy and financial health. I say to the minister, with respect, that it doesn't take a lot of imagination and it takes very little work to raise taxes. He has raised taxes at a record-setting pace in Ontario—the largest single tax hike in the history of the province, in respect of which he apparently takes some pride.

Then we come to Bill 149, the bill we're debating today. In this bill we find the cancellation of nine tax credits worth \$85 million. I know the minister likes to say that the cancellation of a tax credit is not a tax increase, just as he and the Premier were fond of saying, for a little while at least, that the new health care tax wasn't a tax. They wanted to call it a premium so that hopefully in people's minds there would be some confusion with the old OHIP premiums that we used to have in the province of Ontario. Of course we are still ruled by law, and when the bill came before the House, the bill to impose the so-called health care premium, it was described as a tax, as it had to be in the bill drafted at the request of the Liberal government of Ontario because it was being deducted at source from income and must be a tax in order to do that.

Pretty soon, I think most of the members opposite, and I think even the Premier and the Minister of Finance, will have given up on this euphemism of calling the new health care tax a premium and now admit, openly, I hope, that it is in fact a tax.

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Similarly, when one cancels a tax credit, the result is that persons affected by the tax credit can no longer claim the credit. Guess what? That means they pay more tax. Now, I know to the Liberals opposite that it might not seem like a tax increase, but a lot of working people in Ontario, when they have to pay more tax one year than the year before, really think it's a tax increase. They know that a higher number means pay more, and that if it's going to the government, it's a tax. I say to the members opposite, to the Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistant, why don't you call it what it is?

The abolition of a tax credit results in a tax increase for the groups affected. Who's affected? We can start with persons with disabilities. The provincial sales tax rebate on vehicles purchased by those with disabilities is being cancelled by this bill. It's going to be replaced,

apparently, with some kind of income-tested situation, where after someone purchases the vehicle, they can make a claim if their income is below a certain level. I can tell you that my own experience tells me that this will be ineffective to a significant extent for many people who have disabilities. It's a great challenge for many with disabilities to get the money together, quite frankly, to purchase a vehicle in the first place, and the rebate on sales tax was a tremendous benefit for persons needing that kind of vehicle, vehicles which are modified right here in the province of Ontario.

So I say to the government in all sincerity, this is a mistake. If you need more revenue, and you do, then what you ought to be doing is encouraging growth in the economy in the province of Ontario, not increasing taxes, not taking tax credits away from persons with disabilities, which is mean-spirited, quite frankly. But that's one of the tax increases we find in this bill.

The Minister of Finance talks about education and talking to teachers and principals. Interestingly, and in a fascinating way, he speaks not of parents and students, as if education is about teachers and principals and school boards and school buildings. Of course it's not. Parents are responsible for the education of their children. Our four school systems, publicly funded, are supposed to be about students and their parents.

Where did our school system come from? It came from agricultural, rural Ontario, where farmers got together in a certain concession, pooled their resources and built the one-room schoolhouses that we still see in the countryside in Ontario. They hired a teacher using their own resources. The parents of the students were the first school boards.

That's what education is about: parents and students. It's not about big union leaders, big unions, big school boards and the big buildings they build for themselves to have their big offices and their big meetings in. That isn't what it's about.

I encourage the minister, when he thinks about education—the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance—to think more about parents and talk to parents about how their children are doing in our schools and how competitive their educational experience is. After all, we're competing—and there's nothing wrong with that word “competition.” It's the reality of life in Western democracies, at least, and it's a good thing because it encourages effort. We're competing not only with the United States and other Canadian provinces but, increasingly, we're competing with the emerging large countries of Brazil, China and India, with China and India both having in excess of a billion people.

These are serious challenges that we face. We shouldn't be reducing standards. Our government was at pains to increase standards and impose testing, entirely intentionally, because we needed to know how our students were doing in the school system. The government needs to know and parents need to know how their children are doing so that changes can be made to improve performance. Why? So that the children, when

they're older, will be able to compete not only within Canada but internationally, as we move increasingly into a more global economy.

The biggest mistake and the greatest misleading factor is for a young person to graduate or purport to graduate—to be given a paper saying they graduated from a high school—and then have literacy or numeracy problems when they go to seek a job or start their first job. We hear about that time and time again from employers. That's not doing a favour for the young person. Dumbing down our education system, dumbing down our testing system does no favours for young people in the province of Ontario, because they'll find out the reality quickly enough when they get out in the job market. So I say to the Minister of Finance, when he talks about talking to teachers and principals, that he ought to talk somewhat to parents.

The new economy is important. The Ontario research and development challenge fund is important. The government is saying it's abolished or whatever, but it's continuing under another name, the commercialization fund or whatever. The concept there is actually the medical and related sciences, or MARS, concept. At the time, in 2002, when we hosted BIO 2002, I believe we had about 13,000 people from around the globe here. They liked Toronto, they liked the investment and they liked the concept of MARS, medical and related sciences, that we had. Where we are now is part of that process. The whole concept is that with the University of Toronto, our largest research university, right next door to us here; the teaching hospitals of the University of Toronto on University Avenue; the Legislature, the seat of government being right here; and Bay Street, the financial centre not only of Ontario but of Canada, just down the street, the initiators, the innovators will have access, facilitated by government, to resources so that inventions and discoveries can be commercialized here, creating jobs here and creating wealth here, and not elsewhere.

The steps taken by this government, including the steps taken in Bill 149, actually go in the other direction. Taking away tax credits, increasing taxes, increasing the burden on businesses, both small and large, and on individuals in the province of Ontario is exactly the opposite of that MARS initiative. Tax policy is important, and tax policy is the major factor in terms of decision-making with respect to investment—there's lots of authority for that. I say to the members that this government is going in the wrong direction when it thinks it enhances investment in the province and encourages innovation and commercialization of inventions by imposing more taxes on the people.

The minister or the parliamentary assistant talked about eliminating the corporate capital tax by 2012. They speak of this as if it is an accomplishment, a step forward. The beginning of elimination of the capital tax was in the budget in May 2001. I know that because I did that budget in Ontario. That was the beginning of the elimination of the capital tax. In fact, if this government did nothing—but it insists on this Bill 149—the capital tax

would be eliminated in Ontario by 2008, four years earlier than it will be under Bill 149.

I say to the members opposite, like the Hippocratic oath, first, do no harm. If you just do nothing about the capital tax, we'll get rid of it four years earlier in the province. It's a payroll tax, a capital tax, a job-killing tax. It applies whether or not there is profit, which makes no sense in Ontario. We would be better off if they just did nothing about it and we'll get rid of it four years earlier.

During the briefing provided by the ministry last Friday, my staff asked, "What will be the net impact on the province's books as a result of Bill 149?" There's a question you might want to ask the finance minister. They do this big bill and the minister brings it to this House and introduces it: this big bill here, with all this tax legislation in it. You would think, if you asked the Ministry of Finance the question, "What will be the net impact on the province's books as a result of Bill 149?" which we did, you might get a number back. You might even get a range back, because sometimes tax incentives have unforeseen effects in the economy, because we do have an economy out there; this isn't just tax and spend, although the Liberals act like that. Things happen in the economy, depending on tax policy.

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The answer we got from Finance is, "We have no idea." That is to the question: What will be the net impact on the province's books as a result of Bill 149? "We have no idea." That is shocking when you think of fiscal planning, the prudent management of fiscal planning for the province of Ontario.

The government purports now, in Bill 149, not only to cancel the PST rebate on vehicles purchased by those with disabilities, but also to cancel the Ontario home ownership savings plan. Now, there's peculiar action if one wants to grow the economy in the province of Ontario.

There's no doubt we have had a strong new-housing sector in this province. Some would say—some economists did say—that the strong new-housing sector kept the province from sliding into recession a few years ago, when we did have some softness in other important sectors of the Ontario economy. We know now that housing starts are starting to dip. We know that the Royal Bank anticipates about a 2.5% reduction in housing starts this year, and we're now entering the 12th month of the year. We know anecdotally from persons in the housing business that there has been some slowdown in the new-housing business. We know that it's predicted by the Royal Bank that housing starts will be down more than 12% next year.

So let's think about this. If you're the government and you see a slowdown in housing starts, and you know housing starts are a really important segment of the Ontario economy, and your advisers are telling you that were it not for those substantial new-housing starts in the province a few years ago, our economy might well have slid into recession, and if you're interested—as I'm sure the Minister of Finance is—in economic growth, then

why on earth would you take away the biggest incentive there is to new-home buyers to buy a new home?

This has been a remarkably successful program, the Ontario home ownership savings plan. Maybe the minister can't remember a time and maybe never had the experience of buying a first house, where \$1,000 or \$2,000 makes all the difference in the ability to purchase the house or not purchase the house or the condominium in today's market. Maybe he has forgotten that lots of people have to start off somewhere, and that \$1,000 or \$2,000 is a lot of money when you're buying that first property and may even affect your mortgage eligibility and how large a mortgage you can get.

This is foolhardy. This is bad economic policy for the province of Ontario. Bill 149, to abolish the Ontario home ownership savings plan, which has worked so well for so many young people buying their first property, their first residential home or condominium—but there it is. It's a tax increase, in effect, for young people buying their first property in the province.

Bill 149 also cancels the workplace child care tax incentive, the workplace accessibility tax incentive and the 10-year property tax exemption for new electricity generating facilities. The tax incentive for new alternative or renewable electricity supply is also repealed, and that's being done retroactively to November 25, 2002. All of these tax increases are via Bill 149.

We have the treatment of seniors in the bill. It introduces a seniors tax credit that will provide an average of \$125 in benefits to 685,000 seniors. Now, this takes nerve. I heard the minister speaking about it moments ago here, talking about, "We're doing something for seniors." Well, when the Liberal government took office, one of their early actions was to repeal the provision that we had for a seniors tax credit. Now, that provision would have provided an average of \$475 for more than 945,000 senior households. All right, so we have that figure there—\$475 for more than 945,000 senior households—abolished. And now the minister comes to this place and says, "I have progress." He introduces a seniors' tax credit in Bill 149 that will provide an average of \$125 in benefits. So \$125 compared to \$475, for 685,000 seniors compared to 945,000 senior households. Once again, a little challenge with the arithmetic on the part of the Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistant, if he thinks that's progress for seniors in the province of Ontario. So we have these tax increases—that's not all.

This Bill 149 also makes dramatic changes to the Assessment Act, and this is going to require some further explanation from the minister. The bill alters the manner in which electricity-generating facilities are assessed. Under the act, the minister will have the power to fix assessment rates for these facilities regardless of the current provisions dictated by MPAC, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. This is a power now given to the minister without explanation, and apparently without regulatory guidelines. Now, these structures, these electricity-generating facilities, are currently not subject to

assessment for the purpose of property taxes. The concept of adding a tax burden to clean and renewable energy sources makes no sense whatsoever, when the government is trying to attract new investment in these areas. That is water intake structures, for example, at nuclear or hydroelectric generating facilities. So something's up here; I'm not quite sure what it is. I have some suspicions, but I don't know. What we do know is that some substantial assessment changes are proposed in Bill 149 relating to hydroelectric facilities and other electricity-generating facilities, and that will require more examination as this bill is debated in the House.

The bill also increases the employer health tax by increasing the net amount of employee remuneration that is subject to the tax. Under the bill, employee benefits, profit sharing, stock options and salary deferral plans are now all subject to the employer health tax. So way to go once again. The Liberals have demonstrated their insatiable appetite for tax increases—income tax increases—in the province of Ontario. We already have more than 42% of the GDP of this country being taken up by governments, and now we have more steps forward to take even more from the hard-working people of the province of Ontario.

We have the broken promises, certainly. The biggest one, of course, was the pledge not to increase taxes without a referendum, made to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation; and then the current Premier talking in advertising about not raising taxes and not lowering them either—all of that's gone out the window; a huge spending spree by the government of Ontario, more than a \$7-billion spending spree, so that even a casual observer can look at the books of the province of Ontario today and say, "My goodness, the spending this year is going to approach \$80 billion—\$79 to \$80 billion—once the fiscal year is completed." If you look at only three years ago, the spending was about \$65 billion. There is \$15 billion in additional spending over the course of only three years. People would say, "If I get more for it, great." Well, where are the infrastructure projects? What we're seeing is we're not going ahead with Highway 404, we're not going ahead with the 407 east. We're going so slowly, it will be years and years and years before the highway gets built through Durham region to Highways 35 and 115. Where is the new courthouse in Durham region? All they had to do, the minister of infrastructure and the Premier, was to choose one of three qualified proposals. It had been through an RFQ, it had been through an RFP, it had private sector involvement, P3s, no big capital demands on the province of Ontario. Nothing happens. They've been the government now for almost 14 months, and nothing happens. Where are these infrastructure projects? What are people getting in the province of Ontario for paying all these additional taxes?

1620

Well, they are getting—well, no, they are not. I thought they were getting a new deal with physicians. That didn't happen. No, they thought that was going to happen, or at least the Minister of Health and the Premier

thought that was going to happen before the Premier undermined the Minister of Health, but that hasn't happened.

And what are we going to see in this collective bargaining now? Community college professors got an increase of 3.5% or so, I think it was.

Mr Jackson: Four.

Mr Flaherty: Four, was it? Yes, around 4%, the member for Burlington reminds me. And the Minister of Education said in the estimates committee the other day, "We're telling the teachers now that you get 2%, 2.5%, 3%," something like that, going forward. So the Minister of Finance thinks that the teachers, because he says that he has a good attitude, will take something less at the elementary and secondary school level than they took at the community college level. Well, perhaps so, over the course of several years. Perhaps he thought also the physicians were going to take an agreement that they had rejected resoundingly when asked to vote on it. The nurses are going to arbitration in February. So we have challenges on the spending side in the government of Ontario, and we don't see any spending control happening.

You know, Speaker, as anyone who looks at the books in Ontario knows, that on the operating side of government, 80% of the spending is in the nature of transfer payments to spending partners: universities, colleges, long-term-care facilities, school boards, hospitals and so on. And then in that 80%, 70% to 80%, depending on the area, ends up being spent on salaries, benefits, and so on—wages. So it doesn't take a great deal of analysis, and I hope the minister is doing some of this, to say, "OK. If I'm going to control spending in the province of Ontario for the benefit of the people of Ontario, get some control over these spending increases so that I can stop raising taxes every time I bring a bill to this House and so that people have more money in their own pockets so we'll actually grow the economy instead of having less retail sales tax than was anticipated in the budget being paid, a sure sign of taking money out of people's pockets—if we're going to do that, then we have to make sure that we have some spending controls."

How are you going to do that if the wage demands are going to be at 3%, 4%, 5% and 6% in Ontario? Where is the plan? The Minister of Finance comes here in his budget earlier this year and says, "I have a plan"; in his economic statement in the fall of last year, "I have a plan"; in the economic statement in October this year in this place, "I have a plan." What plan? What's your plan to control spending?

He says here today his plan had two or three points: a stronger economy and financial health. That's not a plan; those are goals. It's motherhood. It's platitudes. The plan has to be, "We're going to get some control over spending in Ontario and we're going to stop increasing taxes for the people and businesses of the province of Ontario." But you have to figure out a way to do that. One of the ways you must consider is making sure the spending side is under some measure of control. Other-

wise, we will continue to have this spiralling spending by government, going from \$65 billion to \$80 billion in a matter of a few years. Where will we be three years from now, in 2007, when hopefully there will be an election, if not sooner? We've got to get some control over spending for the sake of economic growth, our standard of living and our quality of life in Ontario, and we don't do it by \$85 million in tax increases, which is what we see in Bill 149.

I do want to share my time with the member for Simcoe North, and I will wind up pretty soon here. But I want to speak a bit, if I may, about productivity. The minister and his parliamentary assistant talk about economic growth, a knowledge economy, research and development. The way you encourage economic growth in those areas is by minimizing the tax burden. One of the major determinants of economic activity is tax policy. This has been said by many. If the government would just read the advice it gets from the committee on the Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress, if the government would look at the recommendations, it would see not what it's doing, it would see the need to moderate the tax burden; it would see the need to invest in post-secondary education—not in a hard cap for grade school, not in higher salaries for people who work in the system, subject to the rate of inflation or whatever, but on post-secondary education—because we're falling behind our competition, not only in the United States but elsewhere. There are 12 universities being constructed in China as we sit here today in this place. This is urgent.

If we want the standard of living and quality of life for the next generation in Ontario, as Sir John A. Macdonald was fond of saying, "Look a little ahead." You don't do it by \$85 million in tax increases. You don't do it by taking more money out of every paycheque for everybody who works in the province of Ontario, more than six million people, every time they get paid. That's not the way you do it.

So I say, the goal is good, but where's the plan? The plan should be to build infrastructure. The plan should be to invest more in post-secondary education. The plan should be to moderate the tax burden. Then we can encourage aspirations in Ontario and not lose so many people and so much commercialization and investment and reinvestment elsewhere, because we know that tax policy makes a difference in terms of those variables in Ontario.

So I encourage the government to have a look at the informed advice it gets from its own task force; to reflect not just on this year or next year, but to say, "Where are we going to be in the next five, 10 or 15 years in Ontario?" because the decisions that are being made now are vitally important.

Bob Rae, the former Premier, is going to report to the government in late January, I understand, with respect to post-secondary education. I say to the government now, you must plan for his recommendations. Post-secondary education is vitally important, so there must be some

shepherding of resources. Don't come back with more tax increases. Be prudent with spending in other areas of government. Get some control over spending in education, health care and social services, because those are the three areas where most of the money is. Do it now, because next year we're going to need those resources. I don't have a crystal ball, but I expect that at least one of the recommendations is going to be for greater investment in post-secondary education. I encourage the government to prepare for the recommendations that are going to come from Bob Rae's review committee on post-secondary education, which we should see fairly early in the new year, and which can be dealt with in the spring budget by the Minister of Finance. That's important for the young people of Ontario. That's important for our economic future, for our quality of life and for our standard of living as we go forward in Ontario.

So I encourage the minister to anticipate that report and to look at it not just as a report about universities and colleges but as a report that is fundamental to the economic growth of Ontario.

Some 150 or 200 years ago, the centres of economic development were the seaports of the world. That went on for hundreds and hundreds of years—of course, thousands, really. With the advent of the airplane, we saw the importance of airports. Look at the growth in the city of Mississauga and the growth west of the city of Toronto with Pearson airport. Now, the universities and the colleges are the centres of knowledge, the centres of innovation. They are the information ports, the thinking ports, presently and for the future.

So I say that it's incumbent on the government that talks about a knowledge economy, an information society and economic growth to be ready to invest and put some money in that area when the report comes from Mr Rae in the new year. To do that, control has to be exercised in health care, education and social services with respect to the major spending that goes on in those areas, because you can't be all things to all people. When you try to do that, you get this spiralling spending and spiralling taxation which, at the end of the day, is self-defeating, as the Peterson government found out between 1985 and 1990. I encourage the Minister of Finance to reflect on that in anticipation of preparing his budget for the spring of 2005.

1630

Mr Dunlop: I'm very pleased to follow a former finance minister. The member Mr Flaherty actually reduced the provincial debt by, I believe, \$3 billion in the one year he spent as finance minister. He is a very tough act to follow.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: Already I can hear the Minister of Agriculture heckling. If he wants to heckle, I'm going to bring up some points about agriculture a little later on. He won't be very happy when he hears my comments.

This schedule is the Northern Ontario Grow Bonds Corporation Act, 2004. There are 38 different amendments in the bill, I believe. For some reason, they call the

very last one the Northern Ontario Grow Bonds Corporation Act when, in fact, there are many, many tax increases as a result of the introduction of this bill. As the minister said, it's part of the larger story following the budget we saw in the provincial Legislature in the spring, probably the most disastrous budget any government has introduced in the history of this province.

One of the things I find very odd about this government is how they try to take credit for things the previous government has done. They mentioned earlier the MARS project, which Minister Flaherty at the time had worked with through the SuperBuild program. In fact, I believe the SuperBuild signs are still on the building. Many of the construction sites you see in downtown Toronto and across the province still hold the SuperBuild signs. They never got around to changing them to the Ministry of Democratic—what is it?—Infrastructure Renewal. Democratic renewal is the pit bull boy's bill. I can tell you, Speaker, that even in this budget they try to take some credit—

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): On a point of order, Speaker: I take offence at what the member just said in reference to the Attorney General of this province, by using a derogatory term to refer to that member in that way. I ask that he apologize to the Attorney General.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I'll just ask members to use parliamentary language, and we'll all listen for that.

Mr Dunlop: Certainly I would never apologize for whatever comment I made about the Attorney General. I happen to believe that the pit bull legislation is the biggest joke—

Hon Mr Peters: On a point of order, Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker: Let's just get on with the debate, and we'll listen very carefully from here on.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you very much. Again, I would not apologize for that comment.

Hon Mr Peters: On a point of order, Speaker: The member clearly used derogatory language directed at the Attorney General of this province. The reference he made is language that's not appropriate in this House. He should apologize.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll ask the member, if he feels he should withdraw, to do so. I have heard, though, over the past number of weeks the term "pit bull" used pretty loosely all around this Legislature. Again, I would just ask the member to use parliamentary language.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you very much.

I just want to talk a little bit about some of the cuts we've actually seen as the result of this government. I want to talk a little bit about my riding. Project Turn-around, 30 jobs, the most successful program for young offenders in the history of the province: gone. No consultation—gone. The Frost Centre, one of the most important educational facilities for people in rural Ontario in the history of our province: cut without any consultation. Of course, Minister Ramsay did it, as usual, when the House wasn't sitting so he wouldn't have to be

accountable for it. That has been a very, very controversial issue, as you know, but it was the way it was done.

Taking Muskoka out of the north, part of this bill: That's an insult to all the taxpayers in the district of Muskoka. It was what I consider to be one of the most mean-spirited attacks on Ernie Eves, because it's something that Ernie Eves put in a budget that was very important to the folks at the Frost Centre.

Again, there's the way this government has treated the deer and elk farmers in the province of Ontario, more recently announcing a regulation that will likely be rubber-stamped by the government. We've seen where the Minister of Agriculture has not come to the support of a very important agricultural commodity in this province.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: The deer and elk farmers have invested millions of dollars in their farming organizations and in their hunt parks. What we have asked for, and what they are asking for, is compensation. The minister has refused it. The Minister of Agriculture, who sits over there heckling today, has come to the side of the Minister of Natural Resources. He will not support—in fact, last week at the OFA breakfast meeting, he ducked questions. You've ducked questions in the House.

Hon Mr Peters: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member should be clear on what he's making comments about. When he's not even at a meeting—the Minister of Agriculture did take questions at the Ontario Federation of Agriculture meeting. Perhaps he should have gone and listened to the farmers first-hand, instead of hiding from the farmers.

Mr Dunlop: At the OFA meeting last Wednesday morning, Mr Todd Grignon, the owner of Universal Game Farm, was the first person to stand at the microphone. He stood 20 minutes before the Minister of Agriculture began to take questions. He completely ignored Mr Grignon, because he will lose hundreds of thousands of dollars as a result of his decisions.

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to be able to follow the debate and know that it's about something that someone attended and so forth, but I'm waiting to get on with the stimulating debate.

Mr Dunlop: Mr Speaker, thank you very much. What I refer to is the way this government has treated people who are investing in our province, people who were encouraged to invest in the province. Now we have the Minister of Agriculture, who is with an agricultural group that has been supported by previous governments, including the federal government, and has turned his back on them and won't even answer questions at a meeting that he is intended to answer questions at. That's the point I wanted to get across today. Of course, the big problem with the deer and elk farmers and the hunt parks is that there is absolutely no compensation coming from the government. They'll be out. All of the money that's been invested is now gone. In fact, some of them have taken their money, taken their farms and relocated in other provinces, at millions of dollars of expense.

Mr Speaker, there are other things they have done. They promised to put 1,000 new police officers on the street. That's a \$200-million cost if you put it over the term of the government, over the next three years. What have they done? Mr McGuinty has offered \$30 million toward it. At the same time he has offered \$30 million, he has now taken money away from the police services with the removal of option 4—again, no compensation for the police services or for the municipalities. So again we see how they're treating the public and how they're treating the police services.

What is their game plan? They are coming up with something called a centre for safer communities. I know the PA over there is working on this file, and I have asked the minister what it's about. Where is it going to be located? We already have detachments all over the province; we have fire departments. Why do we need a centre for safer communities when we need money in the police services? Anyhow, we haven't seen any movement in that area.

1640

I want to mention something about the seniors' property tax credit. Today, Mr Colle tried to take credit for this wonderful piece of legislation and how it'll help seniors. This is the same government that removed the seniors' property tax credit that was passed last year. I believe, already, it has taken about \$500 million out of the pockets of seniors in the province of Ontario. That's \$500 million they could have spent on TVs or cars or travelling or just for the improvement of their homes. It's gone, right out of the system.

Of course, the way this current government is handling rural Ontario—Mr Speaker, I don't know how you're finding it in your part of the province, but in my part of the province, in my riding, people are extremely disappointed in the government. People are saying, "Can there be a recall? How do we get rid of McGuinty? When is the next election?" We're hearing that over and over again. Although a lot of people are trying to take credit over there and they think that things are all rosy, I can tell you that that's not the case in rural Ontario.

I want to talk a little bit about the health care system. We all know that the most controversial thing the government has done to date is when they introduced the health tax. Originally called a health premium, now we know it's a health tax. That's costing our seniors and all of our working families up to another \$900 a year. That's certainly not very popular, but the biggest concern is the fact that with the health care tax we're paying more and we seem to be getting a lot less. I was at a couple of functions yesterday, and that was part of the conversation; it came up. Over and over again, people are saying to me, "We seem to be getting a lot less."

Now we're seeing, like last Friday up at Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital and Penetanguishene General Hospital, the staff picketing over comments made by the Minister of Health downplaying their role in the health care system, saying that they'd be better off privatized or that we'd get rid of these so-called high-

salaried people that are working in cleaning and in food preparation. Of course, now they're very disappointed. They're just one more group of health care stakeholders who are turning their backs on this government as well.

I refer again to the government taking credit for programs introduced by the previous government. I go back to a comment on page five of the budget speech. It says, "As well, in 2004-05, we'll open an additional 3,760 long-term care beds." That's something that I found very controversial. It's actually hilarious, because I can remember, when today's government was in opposition, that they never gave credit to the government for the 20,000 new long-term-care beds that had been established in the province. Of course, this is the tail end of the 20,000 new long-term-care beds being opened, and now they're taking credit for the 3,760 new beds.

I was happy today to hear my colleague Joe Tascona bring up the cancer care unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie. We really do need to know, with all the additional money that has been included in the health care premium and the additional money the government has received from the federal government, when we will get an announcement in Simcoe county on the cancer care unit for Royal Victoria Hospital. The community is excited about it. They want this building to proceed. It has been on the books for some time. We need an announcement.

I know there's a controversy around Newmarket, at Southlake, and Royal Victoria Hospital, but the bottom line is that this area is growing. It's growing at a dramatic rate. The planning has been accomplished. Last year, the same day I made the announcement at Soldiers' Memorial Hospital to proceed with the construction, Tony Clement came up and gave additional planning dollars at that time for RVH to go to the next stage. We're at that stage, and we have to know what in fact is happening.

I want to get back, for a minute, to some of the other programs that I wanted to bring up here. I wanted to give the government credit for something, and I know we don't often do that. I've said this before and I'll say it again: You followed through on something that we had promised as well, and that was the apprenticeship tax credit. I do give the government credit for putting it forward, because I would have thought they would not do that. So I just wanted to put that on the record. I think, coming from a construction background, that this is a very important direction for the government to go in, and I hope that's something that we can get support from all three parties on as this program goes ahead, along with the federal government as well, because I think they should be part of the package here.

One of the things that has had a large impact on my community was the decision made on September 9 by the Minister of Community and Social Services, and that's the closing down of the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia. I see Mr Hoy over there today. I know his community is impacted, the same as the impact that we may see from Mr Sterling's riding. There are about 1,000 residents of these three remaining facilities. The government

has made a decision to put some kind of plan together to house them in different locations. I just want to say again that these people are very, very severely challenged. I have recently made, I think, three separate tours of the facility up at Orillia, the Huronia Regional Centre, and I look at the facility as being very successful. I don't know how, with the type of housing they have now, we can improve upon that by spending millions of dollars in other areas. I think there is a demand for this type of facility. There are only 1,000 clients left, or 1,000 residents left, in the province of Ontario, but I think when you see the services they have at a centre like the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia, we have to accept the fact that it will take—the government doesn't really have a plan. They just have a planned date for closure.

I really want to put on the record that I think it's a big mistake. I'm working with Huronia Helpers, the parents' organization, and family organizations that support the residents of the Huronia Regional Centre staying in the facility and living out their lives with respect and dignity. We don't know what plan the government really has right now, only that by 2009 the doors will be locked. I find that very difficult to accept at this point, especially after having the opportunity to tour. I would encourage the minister—I know she's been asked by numerous organizations to go up and tour the facility. I would invite her, and put it on the record, to come to Orillia, tour the facility and see the conditions at the Huronia Regional Centre. I think she may have her mind changed by having that invitation.

I'm coming to the end of my time, and I know there are people from the New Democratic Party wanting to speak. But I just want to say that we will not be supporting the bill; that's for sure. I think I have 22 other members who would like to speak to this bill. We consider it a step backwards for the province of Ontario. Again, I do appreciate the opportunity just to share some time today with the member from Whitby-Ajax. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I just wanted to follow up on a comment that was made by the first speaker with respect to essentially the cancellation of the rebate for the tax paid on the purchase of a motor vehicle. As people will know, as a result of that, those people who before were purchasing a vehicle and could get some significant help back will now have to go to the home and vehicle modification program and hope that they might get some assistance. The fact of the matter is, under that particular program, essentially you have to have such a low level of income in order to qualify that many people who would have benefited by the rebate program will now not benefit at all.

1650

I just want to raise the case of a constituent of mine who has been very concerned about this. His name is John Martin. He lives in my hometown of Capreol. He lost his right leg above the knee in December 2002, when he tried to stop a drunk driver from driving away from an

accident scene and, as a result, found himself pinned between two cars and lost up to above the knee of his right leg. He was commenting on the cancellation of this rebate because, although he has a vehicle now that is equipped with a left-foot gas pedal, he made it very clear that because of his disability it would be much easier to get into a van than to try and get into a truck or down into a car. He and his wife are looking at purchasing a minivan with the expectation of getting some of their costs covered.

His problem is now going to be that while he is on a disability pension, there may be some issues around his wife and whether or not she was working and what income they have, which essentially may disqualify them from participating in the program that the government has now transferred these funds to.

I just say to the government, there are a lot of people who rely on this particular program who have some income but certainly could use the support, and this will affect them a great deal. I think many of them who previously would have qualified will now be absolutely out of luck in terms of getting any support for purchases of vehicles or other modifications.

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I'm pleased to make a comment in this round. The member opposite made a comment about the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, as did the Minister of Agriculture himself. I just want to say to members in the House that when the Minister of Agriculture was in Essex and then later in Chatham-Kent Essex, two ridings in the deep south of Ontario, very rich in agricultural production, he sat around in a very informal setting—around a grain bin in one instance; in a machinery shed in another instance—and fielded questions from agriculturalists, from farmers of the community, in a very free-flowing discussion of any topic at all.

We were very pleased, and I know the farm community was pleased, to have a minister just sit down, chat by a grain bin, chat in a machinery shed about the issues of the day—and there was ample time. Sometimes when one attends conventions of all kinds, of all manner, the agenda is not necessarily in the hands of the speaker, whether it be an agriculturalist or someone from the scientific field. Sometimes those agendas just aren't your own and you have to do the best you can. But we certainly appreciated what the Minister of Agriculture stated in our collective ridings in the south.

I think it's important to note in this bill that the apprenticeship training tax is available. I know in our area persons have been talking since 1995 about the need for apprenticeship training, the need for young people and those of any age to move into apprenticeship training. Some 3.3 million Ontarians are baby boomers and are going to be retiring soon. There is a demand for apprenticeship; there has been, for some 10 years. We're addressing that in this bill. I'm so very pleased that movement is coming, because we're going to need those good workers for quality jobs.

Mr Jackson: I'm very pleased to stand in support of the words of my colleagues both from Whitby-Ajax and

Simcoe North, in particular as they relate to the shifting economic fortunes of our province under this new Liberal government.

Clearly, former Finance Minister Jim Flaherty was responsible for reducing the deficit rather significantly in this province, something that a Liberal government has never done in this province's history.

Interjection.

Mr Jackson: It has never done this in the province's history, and you can check it. The one year that you thought you did it, I recall very vividly. It was one of Bob Nixon's greatest sleight-of-hand tricks of the century. He delayed the transfer of half a billion dollars to the Ontario teachers' fund by exactly two seconds and threw it into the next fiscal year. That allowed him, on paper, to balance his books, until the auditor got hold of it after the election. Now, the election didn't work very well for the Liberals at that time, but the auditor certainly set the record straight and left Floyd Laughren with an excellent political opportunity that was handed to him once he took over as the first NDP finance minister.

The members opposite will have many Hansard records of them bragging about balancing the books, but they paid \$70 million in bonus money to the teachers' pension fund, and I think the interest worked out to \$3 million or \$4 million for delaying it by 24 hours, but the money got into their account the very next day. It was a brilliant sleight of hand on the part of Bob Nixon and the Liberals. So I stand by my statement that they have not, in the few times the citizens of Ontario have elected a Liberal Premier, had one who actually knew how to balance the books without employing the sleight of hand tricks that Bob Nixon did.

Mr Prue: It is my privilege to comment on the two speakers, the first from Whitby-Ajax and the second from Simcoe North. There was a very wide-ranging discussion. I think I heard about more bills than one could possibly imagine and more problems than one could envisage in this province. You know, they talked about all things economic, the full range. We heard about the Huronia Regional Centre, we heard about elk farming, we heard about disability vehicles, we heard about everything. But I really want to comment about the two speakers, because they come from very different planes and talked about very different things. The first speaker, from Whitby-Ajax, talked about the need to cut programs, the need to be fiscally responsible, the need to save even more money, the need not to raise taxes. He was right on point for most of his 40 minutes. On the other hand, I think the second speaker came from the other tradition of Progressive Conservatives, if you still call yourselves that, because he was far more progressive. He talked about the need to compensate farmers, the need to compensate elk farmers, the need to spend money in the Huronia—

Mr Dunlop: Regional Centre

Mr Prue:—Regional Centre because that centre is of such primary importance to the families and people who live there.

The first member talked about cutting back in schools and in hospitals; the second member talked about the needs of the Huronia centre, about apprenticeships and all manner of things. Really, I think this is a problem that must be addressed by the government. I would imagine that same kind of feeling exists on that side of the House, where you are torn between whether you should cost cut—and you are cutting some 15 ministries by an average of 12%—or whether you must raise taxes to do those things you promised in the election. It is something I'm hoping for you to be much more clear on as we debate this bill, because at this point it is still unclear to me where you are going, there are so many cost cuts in here and so very few increases for ordinary people.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has two minutes to respond.

Mr Dunlop: I want to thank the members from Beaches-East York, Burlington, Nickel Belt and Chatham-Kent Essex for their comments on our leadoff hour by myself and Mr Flaherty. To the member from Beaches-East York, yes, we probably have different outlooks on a lot of different areas, but what I have to say about my colleague from Whitby-Ajax is that I have so much respect for his abilities in finance and his expertise and background as a lawyer that I like to work with him and I like to hear what he has to say on many of these different topics. I'm excited by the fact that he is able to talk for so long with so many great points each time.

The member from Burlington mentioned a little bit about some of the tax cuts as well. Mr Jackson has been in the House for a long time and has a lot of respect here, and we're happy to see that something he had a start on, the ODA, has gone ahead as well. I think that's a bill that most of us in this House are supporting.

The member from Chatham-Kent Essex—he's not here; oh yes, he is—mentioned something in his talk about the Minister of Agriculture going down to some round tables or sitting beside a grain bin in his farming community. I've invited the minister up to the Universal Game Farm, the very farm that will probably be put out of business because of a regulation that the Ministry of Natural Resources is putting through. I've been denied that request: Neither the Minister of Natural Resources nor the Minister of Agriculture will go up to talk to the person they are actually going to put out of business, and that's a sad day in this province. This young guy has invested literally millions of dollars in this operation, and it is just disgusting to see the way he's been treated by this government.

1700

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Prue: It is indeed my privilege and honour to give the leadoff for the New Democratic Party.

This is a complex bill. It is a thick bill. It was given to us barely a week ago now to take a look at for the first time. The actual date was November 22, today being one week later.

We have a bill here which is an omnibus bill. I have to tell people who are watching on television that you have

no idea of the size of this bill and the scope of what this bill is purporting to do until you actually have a chance to delve into it. It changes 40 government acts and regulations.

I'd just like to go through some of them to show the people who may be watching this—if they don't fall asleep—what this is changing. This is changing the Administration of Justice Act, the Agricultural and Horticultural Organizations Act, the Assessment Act, the Business Corporations Act, the Capital Investment Plan Act, the Commodity Futures Act, the Community Small Business Investment Funds Act, the Co-operative Corporations Act and the Corporations Tax Act. It is changing the Education Act. It is changing the Electricity Act, the Employer Health Tax Act, the Financial Administration Act, the Financial Services Commission of Ontario Act, the Fuel Tax Act, the Gasoline Tax Act, the GO Transit Act, the Highway Traffic Act, the Income Tax Act, the Insurance Act, the Land Transfer Tax Act, the Limitations Act, the Loan and Trust Corporations Act, the Ministry of Revenue Act, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act, the Municipal Act, 2001, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Act, the Northern Services Boards Act, the Ontario Home Ownership Savings Plan Act, the Ontario Municipal Economic Infrastructure Financing Authority Act, the Pension Benefits Act, the Province of Ontario Savings Office Privatization Act, 2002, and the Retail Sales Tax Act. It is changing the Securities Act. It is changing the Tax Terminology Harmonization Act, 2004, the Tobacco Tax Act, the Treasury Board Act, the Northern Ontario Grow Bonds Corporation Act, 2004, and perhaps some more that I have missed.

We have had this document for only a week. When I commented on it a week ago, when the opposition members were given five minutes, I stated at that time that it was important to delve into this to see what other little horrors might be found. Well, I think that we have found a few, and I would like to bring those up today.

Before I do that, I'd just like to put this all in context. The act itself is called An Act to implement 2004 Budget measures, enact the Northern Ontario Grow Bonds Corporation Act, 2004 and amend various Acts. So before we can go into what Bill 149 purports to do, I think it's more important to review what has happened in this province since the advent of this new government.

Last spring, there was lots of hope and promise and lots of people thinking that we had turned a corner, that there might be changes after eight years of what can only be described as some very regressive legislation and financing by many people in this province. People were looking for change. In fact, I'm disappointed to say at this time that not much really has changed.

In that budget, we started off with an unfair health tax, that tax which takes money from people who can ill afford it to pay for their health needs. No one would deny, even for a second—certainly not me—that money needs to be spent on health. No one would deny—especially not me—that we need \$2 billion, \$3 billion or

\$4 billion to set right-side-up the health system which had started to deteriorate in this province. But what this government chose to do at that time was to tax those who could least afford to pay for it. Instead of taking the money from those who were well off or from corporations, they chose to take it from ordinary people, often those who lived in poverty; take money that they could ill afford from themselves, from their families, from their children. That unfair health tax kicks in for people making about \$22,000 a year. If one uses the low-income cut-off figures for the province of Ontario for large cities like Ottawa, Hamilton or Toronto, one will know that for a single parent with one or two children, their health tax kicks in when they earn above \$22,000. For them to be above the poverty limit, a single parent with one child needs to earn \$25,000 a year. So although they are living in poverty, this government has chosen to tax them.

We also have the case of families who are living in poverty. A single wage-earner—and let's make it the mother; we have stay-at-home dads these days. A single mother out there working and earning \$30,000 a year, a stay-at-home father, a couple of kids—that family of four requires \$35,000 to live above the poverty line. Yet if the single wage-earner is earning \$30,000, they are already into the secondary bracket; they're already having to pay \$600 against the health tax. They are living in poverty. This government is choosing to take those people in poverty and tax them, which they can ill afford. It is probably the single most regressive feature of this government in its very short mandate of just over a year.

That is not the only one, though. We have also seen what else they have done in terms of the budget for which this bill is going to dovetail. My comments, if you will allow me, will dovetail in short order.

They also introduced the hydro shuffle, which took \$3.9 billion off the books in order that they were seen to have only a \$2.2-billion deficit. That works for one year, but will not work next year.

They chose to reduce by some 12% the monies that were given to 15 ministries. The average of 12% reduction is going to be seen in agricultural programs, in environmental programs and in many ministries across the full breadth of Ontario. They have chosen to make that reduction.

They have chosen to increase licence fees, everything from my fishing licence—which you'll be pleased to know, Mr Speaker, I renewed today, because it's due and I really need a chance to go back out there and hope to catch some fish next year, for a change—but they increased the licensing fees for drivers' licences and every other type of licence in the province, something that consumers will soon see when those licences are being renewed.

They chose to delist services, everything from chiropractors to optometrists to physiotherapists, that people have come to rely on. In fact, it was the greatest privatization of health care services in this province since those services were made public back in the 1960s.

They have chosen, and wilfully chosen, to not honour their election commitment to end the clawback of the child care subsidies that are given by the federal government. In fact, they continue the clawback, which is probably the single greatest cause of children living in poverty in this country. If you want to eliminate child poverty, which I think is every party's goal—or at least they say so—the easiest, the most effective way that can be done is to end the clawback. This was promised by them during the last election but was not delivered. All that has happened is they have limited the clawback that will not be taken from some of the very poor and destitute families of this province by limiting it to an \$89 return on what they might get, as opposed to the \$2,800 they had promised during the last election.

They promised to institute a whole program of child care reforms—some \$300 million. I'm pleased to see that the minister is here in the House, because I have yet to hear of a single expenditure, a single amount of money that is actually going to be spent, other than pilot projects, other than waiting for two or three or 15 years, and we haven't heard the numbers for it to come together. That promise did not see the light of day in the budget.

We have seen a whole bunch of education benchmarks.

We have seen the problem with housing, the problem that this government ran on a platform of increasing housing, and yet only some \$18 million will be spent in this fiscal year. We have promises of things and shovels in the ground for other housing, but it's pretty small potatoes. It is looking like it's going to be far, far less than what was promised, at 20,000 housing units over the four years of this government's mandate.

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There was a big announcement about shelter allowances, prior to the election, of some \$100 million for low-income families, but none of that was contained in the budget. We did see last week a pilot project, I believe at the enormous cost of \$1.6 million, for the city of Toronto. That's a pilot project to see how it works and, I suppose, to absolve the government of its commitment for \$100 million. It is going to benefit only some 400 families in the immediate Toronto area. It is hardly going to make a dent in those families who are 70,000-plus on a waiting list for assisted housing in Toronto.

We also have the famed sewer tax, because that's where some of the money went from all of those monies for health.

That's what we ran into last spring. We were looking for a lot of great things, but what we ran into was a budget which, in my view, was kind of disastrous to the people of Ontario who were actually seeking change, who did not like the spiralling down of their lifestyle in the eight previous years of the Conservative government. Now, not everyone spiralled down in those eight years. Lots of corporations made lots more money. Lots of very wealthy people didn't have to pay the surtax that kicked in at \$100,000, or the double surtax that kicked in at

\$150,000. But ordinary and lower- and modest-income people certainly saw their lifestyle deteriorate and were hoping for some pretty good things to happen in last spring's budget.

They did not see that. They saw instead that their quality of life has not been enhanced. In fact, in many regards, because they're having to pay for health tax, because they're having to pay more for licences, because they're having to pay more for hydro, where the caps have been taken off, because they're having to pay now for delisted services, because they're not getting money that they expected from the clawback on what the federal government gives them for having children, because there's no housing being built, because they're not getting shelter allowances, they are finding that the quality of their life is being eroded.

This brings me to what we have here before us. We have here a bill which is changing some 40 different government acts, which is thick, which is ponderous, which is difficult to understand. I must admit, even though I had a one-hour briefing, I was not much more enlightened after the one hour than when I went into it, because there are so many bills and so many changes being contemplated, some of which are minuscule, some of which are meaningless to the average person, some of which I think even a tax lawyer would have difficulty in understanding.

I asked, a bit in jest, the PA to the Minister of Finance earlier today if he could explain the change to the Electricity Act in schedule 11, changing the Electricity Act, because this is what it says: New subsections 94(7) and (7.1) and amendments to the regulation-making authority in subsection 96(1) deal with this cascading effect by providing regulation-making authority for the refund of the transfer tax where the proceeds of a transfer are reinvested in a manner prescribed in the regulations.

It's pretty poor English, and it's pretty good gobbledegook, because that is meaningless to anyone. No matter what question one might ask—"What does that mean?"—I don't believe there is possibly an answer. We delved through this and spent about an hour asking what I thought were some probing questions, trying to determine where this government is heading with Bill 149, how it's going to dovetail with the budget announcements that have been made to date. I can tell you, there are six areas that I believe are wrong-headed. There are six things contained in this budget bill, Bill 149, that I think government members, if you are not aware—and I would surmise that some of you may not be, unless you've also had at least one hour sitting down there with senior bureaucrats.

The first one that causes me some great concern is the elimination of the capital tax. I heard the member for Whitby-Ajax say that this was a heinous thing that the Liberals are doing, because he would do it earlier. He would do it by 2008, and you're going to take all the way to 2012 to accomplish the same goal. I would suggest to you that you're just Conservatives who are a little slow. They used to say that New Democrats were Liberals in a hurry. Well, I'm going to say that you are now Con-

servatives who are a little slow, because your plan is exactly the same as their plan.

Interjection.

Mr Prue: Physically only.

Your plan is exactly the same. If you look back to what you said in the last election, it is 180 degrees diametrically opposed to the plan that you ran on. You said you were not going to eliminate the capital tax. But instead, today, you are choosing to do exactly that. You are choosing to eliminate a tax which could potentially bring in a great deal of money. You are going to reward corporations that, I would suggest to you, are already making enough money. This tax is levied on paid-up capital of large corporations. It brings in approximately \$1 billion in revenue per year to the province. It is far from a job-buster, as has been suggested by the official opposition. It is, in fact, an amount of money which large corporations count on, large corporations know they have to pay and large corporations can afford to pay.

Who is the main beneficiary? Some people over there might think it's General Motors; some people over there might think it's farm corporations; some people might think it's a myriad of manufacturing companies that we have in this country—maybe even Stelco from Hamilton. But you would all be quite mistaken. Who pays the lion's share of this capital tax? Two groups: number one, the banks; number two, the insurance companies. Between them, they pay almost half the capital tax. When you eliminate the capital tax, you are eliminating the taxes that come from banks and insurance companies.

How was their year last year? Pretty good, I think. How has their year been? How much profit have they made? One only has to go to the quarterly profits of what is called the six sisters—the six largest banks in this country—to see that every year their profits increase, and increase by large amounts. They are running into the billions of dollars in profit each and every year in this country. They have worldwide investments; the markets are good; they are making money hand over fist. They are making money in so many ways.

If you are an ordinary person going into the bank, they will charge you for literally everything. They charge you for having a bank book now. I hope people watching this realize that you're charged for having a bank book unless you have a minimum of a \$1,000 deposit in there. You are charged for every transaction you make, you are charged if you go to one of the automated tellers, you are charged if you have an overdraft, you are charged, you are charged, you are charged, and their profits are enormous. This is who this government wants to reward.

By reducing the capital tax on banks, you are going to give them a further windfall of approximately a quarter of a billion dollars. I ask you, do you think in your own mind that they need the money, or do poor children need the money? Do they need the money, or do daycares need the money? Do they need the money, or does the education system or hospitals need the money? Quite frankly, I think they make enough. Quite frankly, I think they're well off. Quite frankly, I think we would not be

doing them any harm whatsoever if we were to require that they continue paying those taxes.

The second large group, which earns almost as much as the banks, or pays almost as much as the banks, off capital tax, is the insurance companies. This past week we saw insurance company profits and how much they have gone up in this past year.

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When this Parliament was first called, a lot of the debate was around automobile insurance. The insurance companies were all crying about how much money they didn't have, how they were losing, how they couldn't afford to stay in the insurance game: "Oh, woe is me." But the reality is that, even then, everything was on the upswing. Even then, they were recording profits. Even then, they were making a lot of money.

Today, we can see that that industry is making about \$1 billion in profit—just in Ontario, I believe. These are the same people about whom you now want to say, with all the profits they're making, with all that they're doing, "Let's give them a tax windfall. Let's give away a quarter of a billion dollars, which we need for hospitals and schools, to them."

I'm telling you, I think this is a huge mistake, but that's what you're doing in Bill 149. You are embarking on a program of revenue loss that will escalate over the years, between now and 2012. This year is pretty small. This year is only \$1 million, because you're planning to do it now and it only kicks in in December. So you're going to lose about \$1 million for the fiscal year 2004-05. That ups to \$40 million in 2005-06 and \$110 million in the year 2006-07. This is about the time that we expect an election to be called. Up to that point, we're looking at a loss of about \$150 million until March 2007, with incremental amounts each year until it escalates to the full \$1 billion by 2012.

I would suggest to the government that if you are serious about your other stated goals, if you feel ill at ease because you have not been able to end the child clawback or put the money that you promised into the hospitals or the schools, if you feel ill at ease that people on ODSP are getting a 3% raise or that you can only have the minimum wage increased to \$8 over a number of years, then you should also feel ill at ease that you are giving away money that large corporations quite clearly can afford.

The second item that we find in this legislation is ending the PST on handicapped drivers and their families. That is found in schedule 33, if I could just read it, because I think they say it as succinctly as I ever could:

"Clause 48(3)(k) of the act currently permits the Minister of Finance to make regulations providing for a rebate or partial rebate of tax paid on the purchase of a motor vehicle to transport a physically disabled person. The re-enactment of the clause provides that this rebate is available if the motor vehicle is purchased or ordered on or before May 18, 2004 and delivered before August 1, 2004."

As announced in the Ontario budget of May 18, 2004, as a more effective way of delivering assistance to persons with physical disabilities, increased funding is provided to the home and vehicle modification program funded through Ministry of Community and Social Services. This once and for all ends a rebate which was started in last spring's budget statement. Regular watchers of question period might have remarked or seen that this question was raised by me four times in question period, first to the Minister of Finance and then three times to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

The case at hand in all of those was a young family from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell who had written first of all to their MPP and latterly to me as the critic for community and social services, trying to find out why a rebate that they were in the process of applying for had been cancelled. Quite clearly, that rebate program continued to be on the Web site of the government of Ontario. It was on the Web site right until approximately the end of September or the beginning of October of this year, even though the budget measures had in fact cancelled it. I believe that may have been the case, in part, because this Bill 149 is finally doing the closure, the final deed, that allowed the government's actions to be legal.

In fact, the Chenier family, when they applied for the rebate, did so in order to accommodate the needs of their disabled child. That child needs help with accommodation inside a vehicle, to get to the many medical and other programs that are available in the Glengarry-Prescott-Russell area.

The Minister of Community and Social Services questioned my motive many times for asking that, and I have to tell you I was taken aback at the claims that it was my staff not providing sufficient information; that I was somehow to blame for trying to advocate on behalf of this family and other families like them. The reality is, none of that was correct.

I am pleased to say, and state on the record, that the Chenier family has now been found to be eligible by the same minister who was denying it up until that stage, and is being processed. He has written to my office, and I believe to the minister's office, to thank everyone for accommodating the special needs, and the fact that the government of Ontario had not done what was appropriate in order to cut that program off. Whatever was left out there I assure you is now being taken care of by schedule 33.

The monies being made available to the March of Dimes, of course, is a good thing. I am confident that that wonderful organization, which has its headquarters for Ontario in East York, will spend the money wisely and will ensure that those persons who get the monies are deserving of it.

However, it is means tested. That means only the poorest of the poor are going to be able to get the rebate. I don't know how many of those people will be able to outfit their homes or their cars with the special devices that are needed, because many of those people who will fall into that category quite simply do not own homes and

do not have cars. In any event, who is being left out is a whole swath of ordinary Ontarians: people with disabilities, people who through no fault of their own have found themselves disabled at some point in their lives.

I got a very sad letter the other day. I was carbon-copied on a letter that had been sent to the member for Peterborough from one of his constituents, quite irate at the cancellation of this program and at the details found in Bill 149 to do away with it once and for all. You see, he suffers from multiple sclerosis. It is a debilitating disease that, over years, has sapped his strength, his ability to work, his ability to get around. He writes quite clearly that he is not a poor man, nor is he a rich one; he simply requires some assistance in order to continue functioning at some level in his daily life. He is very disappointed at the government actions in this bill and what it is going to do.

You heard my colleague the member from Nickel Belt talk about a gentleman in her riding and how this same program is being taken away from him.

This portion of the bill, this schedule 33, is going to hurt many, many people; perhaps not the poorest of the poor, but it is going to hurt modest- and middle-income families who rely upon government assistance.

This is the same government that has brought forward an Ontarians with disabilities bill, ostensibly to help those with disabilities fit better and contribute more to Ontario. While putting in that bill, at the same time you are taking away, through finance, the ability of many of those people to function, to get around, to live in their own homes, to drive, to get to medical attention.

I would suggest that this is a wrong provision of this bill. I would suggest that it needs to be removed. I would suggest that if you are serious about helping families and people with disabilities, this provision shouldn't be left in.

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A third problem I have with this bill—and I'm trying to be mindful of the time—is the PST rebate for energy efficiency. We all pride ourselves on being energy-conscious these days, an energy consciousness that comes with the blackout we had, with brownouts that were threatened, with the understanding that energy costs are starting to escalate and that those at the bottom levels are starting to have some very real problems financing the simple turning on of television sets or refrigerators or machines that are required to keep them healthy and alive, everything from kidney dialysis machines to oxygen tents. Everything in this modern world requires electricity.

This bill does one good thing. I'm going to comment on what I think it does well—it does—and congratulate you for that provision. It allows wind and solar and micro-hydroelectric and geothermal units being built to be PST-exempt. Good idea—I'm not going to say for a minute that it's not a good idea. But with the same hand, it takes away the provincial sales tax that was granted to ordinary people for buying energy-efficient appliances. That died in July 2004. That was not renewed, and it is

not renewed specifically under this bill. It is being allowed to die.

People who had energy-inefficient appliances—old clunker refrigerators, old stoves that don't contain the heat, old machinery—used to be able to get a PST rebate if they went in and bought modern machinery that would allow the consumption of electricity to go down dramatically within their own homes, machinery that would allow them to have lower hydro bills, and machinery, most importantly, that would allow the government to stop its reliance on these megaprojects, spending billions at Pickering. If you can take down consumption, you can solve some of the hydro dilemma.

This ordinary process has been taken away under Bill 149. It has been taken away, I think, to the detriment of an energy efficiency that we in this province need to have, an energy efficiency that I hear members on all sides of the House talk about day in and day out, an energy efficiency we need to have if we are to remain strong and competitive and are not going to have to rely on foreign or outside sources of electrical power. This specific bill takes away the PST rebate for energy-efficient appliances retroactive to last July.

The fourth item, again, is an interesting one. There are some changes to the Securities Act. One change that is made is a good one, and again, I commend the good one. But the finance committee, which sat for many, many days over the course of several months listening to deputants from across Ontario, made 14 recommendations to the minister of the treasury board. The 14 recommendations were wide-ranging.

The one that is contained in this bill is an important one. It is the extension of civil liability in the case of misrepresentations in secondary trades under the Securities Act. That's a whole mouthful, but what that means in a nutshell is that people who are ripping off consumers, trading in shady deals on the secondary market, which is about 85% or 90% of the total market, now have an extension of civil liability so they can be sued, so that people can try to recoup some of the monies that may have been purloined. But I would suggest that that's the only thing that's contained.

Everything else that was recommended by the committee and everything else that the minister of the treasury board said he was going to follow up with is not contained in this bill. I don't know whether it's coming later. He hasn't spoken, so I don't know. And if it's coming later, then when, because it's vitally important. Or if this is the only aspect of the bill that's going to be made into law, quite simply, it is not enough.

The things that are silent include separating the adjudicative function from the policy and investigation function of the OSC. I think it is absolutely important to the well-functioning of our stock exchange and the Ontario Securities Commission to have a process whereby people who feel they have been wronged or swindled in the stock market have someone to whom they can go, who they believe is a separate adjudicator, who is not going to be bound by either the policy decisions of the

securities commission or of the investigations branch of that same commission. It was certainly the key recommendation of former Justice Coulter Osborne, which he put before the committee and before the minister of the treasury board, and it is not contained here. I believe, absolutely, if change had taken place, that was the change that should have taken place first. Although I do not deny the other one is important, that one is glaring in that it is not there.

The second problem we see is the direct order for restitution. The committee unanimously recommended that the OSC be given authority to direct order for restitution for people who, in many cases, would be cheated out of most, if not all, of their life savings. We heard story after story from ordinary individuals about how they had been cheated out of their life savings. In fact, the OSC's own figures show that there are approximately 260 infractions investigated and carried out per year, investigations leading to hearings and/or charges and/or criminal charges every year. That would be about one a day while the stock exchange is open. That would be every day someone is cheated out of some money that they actually can catch.

I want you to put that into perspective. I don't think that the Bay store at Queen and Yonge in Toronto catches one shoplifter a day, but at least one person is swindling people out of hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not more, every day on the stock exchange, and there is no direct order for restitution contained in this bill.

There is also nothing in this bill concerning the conflicts of interest that exist in some of the parties doing business within the OSC and the stock exchange, the self-regulating agencies such as the IDA or the Mutual Fund Dealers Association. Both of these groups do advocacy work and discipline work. I would think they do far more advocacy work on saying how good they are than on discipline against the members who breach the line or the etiquette, or whatever one wants to call the daily transactions in funds.

The Securities Act is an important piece of legislation that needs a very large overhaul. There were 14 recommendations made to the minister, and all we see in this bill is one recommendation. Although we welcome that—and I see the Chairman of the finance committee is here now, and I hope I can speak for you as well—we hope that all of our 14 recommendations make it into law. I am disappointed to see that only one is contained within this bill that we have here today.

The fifth problem I have is with schedule 9, which is the phase-out of programs which have perhaps not served Ontario as well as they could have. Schedule 9 sets out those items that are being phased out, and they're being phased out under the Corporations Tax Act again. This, I would suggest, is a mistake. They do not cost the government a lot of money. In fact, in his opening statement, the Minister of Finance said that it's only in the millions of dollars—a couple of million, \$2 million, \$3 million, \$5 million; I forget the figure he used—that were actually being spent from government coffers to corporations, to

businesses that wanted to make use of these particular acts.

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Look at what's being phased out. I ask the members opposite, is this the kind of government you want to be? You are phasing out—in the Corporations Tax Act, subsections 5(6) and (7), the workplace child care tax incentive and workplace accessibility tax incentive apply to expenditures made before January 1, 2005. So if they haven't made the expenditures by the end of this year, which is now only a matter of some four and a half weeks away, they will no longer be eligible for that.

What does the child care tax incentive do? What does the accessibility tax incentive do? These are two relatively small programs that corporations, companies, have come to rely on if they are progressive. If they, as a company, want to have a child care facility on-site and want to set it up, much as the city of Toronto has at Metro Hall or at city hall, or any number of large corporations may have, so that the parents can bring their children to work with them, put them in a secure environment and take them home at the end of the workday—if a corporation is that progressive and wants to do that for the benefit of their employees and for the benefit of the children of those employees, they used to be able to get a tax credit. But Bill 149 is going to ensure that they no longer get that tax credit.

If you believe that there are corporations out there that are progressive, there are companies out there that are progressive, that they want to have on-site child care facilities available, and if you believe those are good things, not bad things, then why would you vote for this particular section of this bill? This is only going to save the government, by the minister's own recollection, a couple of million dollars a year. But it's going to ensure that corporations no longer see that incentive and no longer want to build the very child care centres we need. We need thousands, tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of additional child care facilities across this province. This, in a small way, is going to do away with some of them.

At the same time, those same provisions—subsections 5(6) and (7)—are going to phase out the workplace accessibility tax incentive. This is an incentive, again, for progressive employers who want to have a workplace incentive for people who are disabled. We have the Ontarians with Disabilities Act before this Legislature, which supposedly is going to help people who are disabled. We, as a province, I hope, want to do everything we can to redress the wrongs that have been done to people who, through no fault of their own, are infirm, people who are disabled, whether that disability be mobility disabled or blindness or deafness or whatever it is. We want to do the best we can to assist these people, and some corporations do as well. Some corporations have been able to make wonderful accommodations for people who are disabled.

For many years, when I worked in the immigration department, we had a court reporter, just as we have a

court reporter here in Hansard, who typed into a remarkable machine and then later used a mask. She was totally, completely blind, and had been so since birth. She was able to accommodate that because there were people who were compassionate enough, people who were willing to give her the extra time it took to transcribe the materials, to type them up. She had readers, because occasionally, even with her brilliant 100-words-a-minute typing, she would make mistakes—people who were able to correct those mistakes. She was a tremendous court reporter. There was a program in place by the federal government that allowed that remarkable woman to come to work every day. She was the sole support of her family. I worked with her for many years.

There have to be people like this in the private sector. There have to be people who could go to work if only there were an elevator to get them upstairs, if they were in a wheelchair; people who could go to work and do court reporting services, if only there were a Braille machine; people who could go to work if there were some kind of infrared so they could hear better, if they are hearing-impaired; people who could go to work and who could contribute. There are companies, I am sure, that would want to hire them. But what this bill does, quite frankly, I think, is wrong. It is totally misplaced. It says that the workplace accessibility tax incentive is phased out on January 1, 2005. Is this the legacy this government wants to leave? I would hope not, and I would hope each and every member of the government will make sure that this is not part of this bill when it comes back for third reading.

We have another phase-out: subsection 5(8), phase-out of the educational technology tax incentive as of January 1, 2005. This is educational technology, and it is supposedly being replaced by something else. This is an opportunity for companies to invest in people who have new technological experience, who would go to work for them and who would help them to develop technology so that they can keep abreast of huge changes that are happening in software and every other type of technology. This is being taken out. This is only a cost of \$1 million or \$2 million to the taxpayer per year. I don't want to sound like Bud Drury, like, "What's a million?" but I do want to tell you that for \$1 million, you're going to reap many more benefits if progressive companies can make use of those people, can spend the money wisely, find technological innovation, and help people get the education to do it. This particular bill will phase out that technology incentive on January 1, 2005.

From that same bill, subsection 7(2) of the Corporations Tax Act, is the repeal of the tax incentive for new electricity supply as of November 26, 2002. That's going back two years. I have no idea why this is being done. Perhaps somebody on the opposite side can inform me or tell me why this is a good idea, to phase out retroactively, two years ago, a tax incentive for new electricity supply. Is it because you're going somewhere else? Is it because you're privatizing? I have no idea what this is for, quite frankly, nor were the bureaucrats able to elucidate much on this provision at all.

Then we go, of course, down to sections 30 to 34, which is the elimination of the capital tax. I've already talked about that a little earlier, but just to read what that's going to do, the elimination of the capital tax starting in 2005, deduction from taxable capital is increased by \$2.5 million each year until it reaches a maximum of \$15 million in 2008. Starting in 2009, capital tax rates are reduced each year until capital tax is eliminated in 2012.

This is money you need. This is your bill. These are people you are trying to help. I would suggest to all of you that the corporations to which you are attempting to give the largesse—it's much better to give them the money, if you're going to give them some money, to assist the disabled, to assist the poor, to assist women and men who have children in daycare than it is to simply give them an outright tax break in companies primarily—as I said before, banks and insurance companies—that probably don't need it.

I have about 10 minutes left. I'm going to speak about this because we're getting into the insurance companies again. Primarily because the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance spent most of his time talking about auto insurance, I felt compelled to at least rebut a little bit of what was being said.

This has been one of those very sad cases where people expected so much and are receiving so little. They were promised, during the heat of the campaign, that there would be a 10% reduction in their auto insurance premiums. I have to tell you, Mr Speaker, I do not believe for a moment that this has happened. In this House, the Minister of Finance has stood up and said "10%" at one point, and then lowered that to around 7.5% when most of the companies were in. I would suggest that most of that is quite illusory. We started out by looking at those companies, the 55% or so, which could probably lower the rates fastest, but then when the rest of them came in, we had the whole problem.

1750

People in Ontario are paying very high rates. All of us in this room are probably paying pretty high rates for driving. Even with spotless records, you're going to find that insurance costs continue to escalate. In the year 2002, there was a 20% increase in the cost to average Ontario drivers. In the year 2003, there was a further 25% increase to average Ontario drivers, and in the first quarter of 2004—that's just the first quarter—there was an additional 8% to Ontario drivers.

We were told to wait for the decreases that would come toward the end of the year. We were told that the insurance companies, which are now making scads of money, close to a billion dollars in profit this year, would start to lower the rates.

I looked in eager anticipation at my insurance bill, which I got two weeks ago from an insurance company I have been with for many years. When I got the bill, I opened it up, expecting to see the 7%, 8%, 10%, 12% reduction, which I had been promised so many times in this House.

I should preface my remarks: I have no speeding tickets; I have just an ordinary car; I have a seven-star rating; and I drive less than 18,000 kilometres a year. I opened it up, and what did it say? It said that I got a 5% increase. Hmm. I was a little curious and more than a little miffed, so I phoned the 1-800 number and talked to very nice man, who explained clearly to me that no, whoever said that there was a 10% was—and I can't use the word, because it's unparliamentary. He said that wasn't the case at all. In fact, the company I had been with for many years and which used to give me a fairly good rate, I must say, said that they had been given authorization for increases up to 31% this year. I was lucky; because I had what he considered to be a near-perfect driving record, mine was only going to be a 5% increase.

Mr Jackson: Did you thank him?

Mr Prue: No, I did not thank him. I told him I was sorry but, after all these years, I was going to shop around. I did, and I found somebody who actually will give me a very slight reduction.

There are many people who do not have that luxury. There are many people who have had a ticket in the last year or two. There are many people who've had a fender-bender. There are many people who simply do not know how to do that. They've been with one company year after year.

The reality is that what you promised to give them is not being delivered. Unless they know a broker, which I knew, and phone them up, unless you know all of that stuff and how to go about it, you're going to find out that the reality of the insurance game is that you're going to get an increase.

Ms Martel: What about the government promise?

Mr Prue: The promise that was made to me in this House—and, I'm sure, to 12 million Ontarians out of this House—was that they were going to see a decrease. That promise did not come through. The only decrease I got was from my own initiative. Initiatives are good, and I tell everybody who's out there who might be watching this: If you get an increase, which, by all means, you're probably going to get, at least from this company and probably from many others, don't pay it. Do whatever you can, and if you're lucky enough not to have had an accident or a ticket, you might be able to get away with that. If you're not, I guess you can expect to pay some more.

This whole insurance thing is kind of disquieting because the package that we are starting to see—and I read the package over quite carefully, as well, that the insurance company sent me back and that the new one sent me back. There are a whole bunch of disclaimers that I never saw on previous policies. There are a whole bunch of things they used to pay for that they will no longer pay for. This is all part of the negotiated deal which supposedly allowed prices to drop, but I would suggest it didn't allow prices to drop. For sure what it did was allow profits to go up hugely in the insurance industry this year: things like, if your car is stolen, you

have to pay the deductible unless you have included that in your policy and paid some extra money; or if you used to get certain amounts of money for loss of wages or extra hospitalization, it was all contained there in the form. All of those things now come at a premium. They are no longer included in the policy. In fact, what I have seen from this government is a bare-bones package that is remarkably similar to that which was introduced by the Conservatives in this last House.

We have the whole problem in the insurance industry of hidden commissions. My colleague from Niagara Centre has stood up in this House and asked about hidden commissions. No one has denied there are hidden commissions. The Insurance Bureau of Canada estimates that these cost the insured public about \$359 million a year. We know you pay a commission to the broker of 12.5% on auto. We know you pay 20% on home insurance and other types of insurance. But there are also additional monies that you don't know about that are costing the insured public some \$359 million. If this government is serious about insurance, then I would suggest there is much more that needs to be done.

Certainly if you are dealing with the insurance industry, you have to tell them that you are aware of their record profits, that you will not listen to them crying poor, that you know they are making lots of money and you know that the Insurance Bureau of Canada, their own organization, is saying that some \$359 million is being skimmed off the top by the brokers in money that ordinary insured people are not aware of.

Mr Speaker, my time is almost up. I'm mindful of the time. I have two minutes and 23 seconds to conclude. I would just like to reiterate, go back and hammer home what I was trying to say. This government was elected on

a platform of change. You promised to make things better for ordinary people. The way that is to be accomplished is multi-fold. There are many things that can be done.

What I am suggesting to you is that almost all of the changes you want to make involve expenditures of money. I am asking you not to listen to those who would scream, "Cut additional programs." You are cutting too many programs. You are cutting from ministries, like environment and agriculture, that cannot afford to have cuts. You are talking about cutting in places like hospitals, although I have not, to tell you the truth, seen the actual cuts, but we know they're being rumoured around.

You are going down the same road that took them to electoral disaster. Do not attempt to do it yourself, because I can guarantee you the people out there are expecting so much more. They are expecting that you will raise the necessary funds in a buoyant economy from people who can afford to pay those funds.

I would suggest to you that instead of taking funds from people who live under the low-income cut-off figures, who live in poverty, you should be looking at other sources of revenue. You should be looking to continue socially progressive plans, such as daycare centres and businesses, such as help for those who are disabled to get to work. All of that should be part of what makes your budget and your budget tick.

Bill 149 is huge. There are some problems with it. Fix it when it goes to committee. Fix it before it is enacted in law. Please do what is right for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until Tuesday, November 30, at 1:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1800.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Alvin Curling

Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
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Ancaster-Dundas- Flamborough-Aldershot	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Hon / L'hon Marie (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
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Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Dhillon, Vic (L)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, Hon / L'hon John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
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Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
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Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)
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Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Stormont-Dundas- Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon / L'hon Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon / L'hon Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
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Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
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Perth-Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
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Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Hon / L'hon Gerry (L) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement	York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin (L) Speaker / Président		
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Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
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St Paul's	Bryant, Hon / L'hon Michael (L) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique		

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

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