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(Hansard)**

Wednesday 1 December 2004

Mercredi 1^{er} décembre 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 1 December 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 1^{er} décembre 2004

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I seek unanimous consent, it being December 1 and World AIDS Day, that members have permission to wear the red ribbon in recognition of World AIDS Day today.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent for the wearing of the ribbon? Agreed.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENT ALLIANCE

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I rise today to draw attention to the fact that the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance has been at Queen's Park for the past three days, meeting with MPPs from all three parties and sharing with them the recommendations they are making to the Rae review of post-secondary education.

On Monday, John Tory and I met with several of those representatives and heard first-hand about the issues they want Bob Rae to consider when he makes his recommendations to the government. Several of them are in the gallery today; I would like to welcome Alison Forbes and Adam Spence.

Students bring a valuable perspective to the table, and theirs is a voice that needs to be heard, especially now, when significant changes are being contemplated. These student representatives came here to deliver the message that well-funded, accessible higher education builds a bright future for all Ontarians.

Right now, Ontario ranks 10th in terms of per student funding in Canada. Average tuition in Ontario has increased by 139% since 1993, and the Ontario student assistance program provides too little assistance to too few students and is overly bureaucratic.

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, along with many of the other groups that have been attending the public meetings and making submissions to the Rae review, believe there must be a substantial financial investment in post-secondary education. Students, both now and in the future, will be the most directly affected

by the changes that will be made, and they deserve to have their voices heard.

I would like to thank them once again for coming to Queen's Park and meeting with MPPs.

McKELLAR PARK

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Rarely is attention called to our local residents who volunteer their time, their hard work and their inspiration to improve our communities.

In my riding of Ottawa Centre, such a movement has been firmly rooted by the McKellar Park community build project. Two years ago, parents who live in the west-end Ottawa neighbourhood near McKellar Park faced a deteriorating play structure for their children. Community residents rallied together to devise a plan of action to provide their children with a safe and enjoyable play facility. Together with city of Ottawa staff, local residents undertook a fundraising initiative. Initially, local residents intended to raise enough money to build one new toddler play structure. They have shown us, though, that their dreams have no limit. Today, children greet two new play facilities at McKellar Park, with a price tag of \$95,000. The city honoured this particular group as having raised the most money for a local grass-roots community group. On October 24 of this year, they celebrated their efforts with an official recognition and ribbon-cutting ceremony.

To all the local residents and volunteers, I thank you for reminding us of what a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can do in their community. In particular, I would like to thank and to recognize the following individuals for their vision of the project and success in fundraising: Clare Grosskleg, Laurie Pytura, Patti Church, John Rapp, Karen Blakely, Sandra Wong, Lee-Ellen Carroll, Janice Palmer and Wendy Henry—all women. I salute and applaud these community leaders who were responsible for heralding the grand opening of the new McKellar Park for their children.

ELK AND DEER FARMING

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): On November 1, the Ontario Deer and Elk Farmers' Association held a reception at Queen's Park to draw attention to the problems in their industry and to ask the government for help. These farmers have a specific issue with the Environmental Bill of Rights regulation that considers deer and elk to be wildlife, regardless of the fact that they

are bred for genetic excellence, born in captivity and raised like any other livestock. Because of this wildlife designation and the EBR regulation, farmers will be subjected to restrictions that will take away the only source of income they have right now.

Just as with beef, deer and elk farmers have been unable to move their animals across the border and have found it very difficult to compete with cheap foreign venison. Many have only managed to keep their business by breeding trophy bulls for harvest preserves. With the new regulation, this will no longer be an option. The deer and elk association has asked Minister Peters to move responsibility for farm-raised deer and elk from the Ministry of Natural Resources to that of agriculture and food. Farmers want this government to see that the animals born and raised on farms and ranches should be treated like other farmed animals, not wildlife. They feel that if the government insists on expropriating their industry, it should at least do an economic impact study to consider the negative financial consequences and to consider compensation.

At the reception, Minister Peters indicated to the association that his ministry would potentially play a role in dealing with their issues. That sounds to me like a promise. While this government breaks promises, I ask that Minister Peters keep his personal word. I ask that he take the appropriate steps to assume responsibility for the cervid industry and help these farmers, as he said he would.

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I want to tell you about something significant that happened today. There were a couple of hundred people outside demonstrating on behalf of the film industry and demonstrating against this government that isn't delivering on its promise. We had actors out there, producers, a lot of crew members and many, many who depend on the film industry, coming to plead with you and urge you to keep your promise.

They all understood before the election that you were going to help them. They believed you then. Surely you must have meant to keep your promise, and that promise was that you would increase tax credits from 20% to 35%, and further support for feature films from 20% to 40%. Sorbara, McGuinty—everyone understood that promise.

After the government got elected and we posed a question in this House, the Minister of Finance said we can't involve ourselves in horse-trading; we can't do what other jurisdictions are doing. A lot of provinces, and the US, are giving a whole lot of tax credits to keep their industry there, and my friend Greg Sorbara said, "We can't do it."

Mercifully, I think they're changing their position, but the film industry is saying, "We need your support today—not three years from now before an election, but today."

Deliver on that promise. That's what they expect.

1340

ONTARIO PRINCIPALS' DAY

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise today to recognize Ontario Principals' Day. The strength, dedication and enthusiasm of Ontario's 5,000 elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals have been a vital part of the success of Ontario schools.

Often, the work of our principals is overlooked or taken for granted. However, a principal can turn a struggling school into a thriving one. As well, every day, principals across this province make a significant difference in the lives of our children. They are not only the disciplinarians whom we were afraid of as students; they are also counsellors, administrators, mentors, education advocates and community builders. Principals are some of the most important leaders in our communities, and constantly demonstrate this leadership to our students and teachers.

Every day, principals face unique issues and challenges. Improving student achievement, balancing the budget, completing administrative duties and spending time with students, staff and parents all fall within their responsibilities. In a sense, principals are the administrators of our future. I would like to thank Ontario's principals for rising to the challenge and working to help students and teachers in our schools succeed.

I'd also like to congratulate the Ontario Principals' Council on winning two awards of distinction from the Canadian Association of Communicators in Education for the second year in a row.

Principals are the front-line administrators who are charged with the duty of restoring confidence in our school system, and they deserve our praise. I would like to congratulate Ontario's principals on the great job that they do every day. We salute you.

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): Today, over 1,000 creative and talented men and women of Ontario's film and related industries rallied at Queen's Park to protest the McGuinty government's abandonment of Ontario's world-respected film industry. This rally comes on the heels of a press conference held this week by the Ontario PC Party leader, John Tory.

Dalton McGuinty ran on a platform that promised to boost the Ontario film and television tax credit from 20% to 33%, to introduce a new feature film component of the Ontario film and television tax credit and to increase this credit from 20% to 40% of eligible expenditures.

Now this government has broken two more promises. Rather, we have the finance minister standing up in the House and saying, "Ontario will not participate in the unhealthy bidding war with upping and upping tax credits."

I would say to this government, the men and women of Ontario's film industry are the best in the world at what they do. They have brought this city and this province jobs, investment and a sense of pride in our country. I urge the government to keep their commitment to the film industry. Do not break another promise; the jobs and livelihood of thousands of people depend on it. Do not abandon Hollywood North.

ST JUDE CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I rise today to congratulate the Lakehead Catholic school board trustees, principal Margaret Hall, and the students and faculty at St Jude Catholic Elementary School in Thunder Bay. A few weeks ago, when the EQAO results were announced, St Jude students had an astounding improvement over previous years' results.

In reading, the number of St Jude grade 3 students at or above the provincial level was 82% this year, compared to last year's level, which was 32%, and the 2002 level at 46%. Students also dramatically improved in the math category: 76% of grade 6 students met or surpassed the provincial level, in contrast to 19% in 2003. The third category, writing, also saw tremendous results for both grade 3 and grade 6: 79% of the grade 3 students were above the provincial level, and 63% of the grade 6 students.

If we look at the percentage of all grade 3 students at or above the provincial standard in 2003-04 in the last three categories, we can see how exceptionally the St Jude students performed. The provincial averages in reading were 54%; in writing, 58%; and in math, 57%. The same can be said for grade 6. The provincial average was 58% for reading, 54% for writing and 57% for math.

The incredible turnaround for St Jude led them to be one of three schools that were profiled in the EQAO case study. The case study noted that improvements in scores demonstrate the importance of systematic leadership, the value of using assessment data and the results a school can achieve when the commitment is shared among school leaders, staff and parents.

I add my congratulations to all those responsible for this incredible turnaround, including our own Ministry of Education.

SPEED RIVER FAMILY HEALTH NETWORK

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I was pleased yesterday to have the Minister of Health visit the Speed River Family Health Network in Guelph. Speed River employs 20 doctors and serves 30,000 patients. They provide the sort of multidisciplinary, 24/7 team approach that we want.

Dr Blair Fraser reported that most of the doctors who work at Speed River supported the OMA deal. "It's an excellent agreement," Fraser said. In fact, Wellington county doctors voted 51% in favour of the deal.

Here is what the Guelph Mercury had to say on this issue yesterday: "There is much to recommend the provincial proposal unveiled last Friday. It will make Ontario family physicians the best paid in Canada, up from fourth spot, and specialists the second-highest paid, up from fifth place."

The Mercury went on to say: "People are fed up with problems in health care.... They want the problems resolved after years of bickering.... This newly tuned deal addresses many of the complaints doctors voiced in rejecting the original text."

I agree with the Mercury editorial, and I applaud the Premier and the Minister of Health for their courage in moving forward and transforming our health care system to give the people of Ontario the health care they want and deserve.

PROJECT GENESIS

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I'm pleased to rise in this Legislature and share with my colleagues that Suncor is investing a total of \$1 billion in Sarnia-Lambton.

Project Genesis is part of a new plan to build a new diesel desulphurization unit and also to modify other equipment to process more crude oil. This plant will reduce the sulphur content in diesel fuel, along with a hydrogen project.

As we move forward into the 21st century, cleaner fuels are one way in which we will achieve a more sustainable development approach in our fuel consumption and, in turn, this will help to keep our environment clean.

This \$1-billion investment will be one of the biggest investments from one company in the Sarnia-Lambton area. It will provide many construction jobs and will be of great benefit to my community.

As well, Suncor donated \$500,000 toward the local hospital capital project. This large investment will be important to the future of Ontario. Sarnia-Lambton is glad to have such a good corporate citizen in our community.

WEARING OF BUTTON

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Mr Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent. I was at the film rally this morning, and I would ask permission from the House to wear this button, "Keep Ontario cameras rolling. Keep your promises." Would that be agreed?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is there unanimous consent? I heard a no.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on social

policy and move its adoption. I'll send it with page Daniel.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 63, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to hours of work and certain other matters / Projet de loi 63, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne les heures de travail et d'autres questions.

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

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

1350

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I beg leave to present a report on Environet from the standing committee on public accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Does the member wish to make a statement?

Mr Sterling: So there will not be confusion, this relates to the auditor's report of November 2003. The public accounts committee met last February to deal with those matters with regard to his 2003 annual report. Following the hearings and the committee's deliberations, unanimous reports were prepared by our committee; that is, all members of all parties agreed to this report.

The auditor's objectives for the Ministry of the Environment's Environet strategy were to assess whether the ministry had adequate policies and procedures in place to ensure the Environet systems adequately addressed existing legislative and regulatory requirements. In other words, were they putting into effect the legislation and regulations, and were the technical systems that were being developed meeting the job?

The auditor concluded in his 2003 report that Environet did not provide ministry staff with the required information to ensure that drinking water meets regulatory standards, that hazardous waste movements were properly controlled and that air emissions were properly monitored or reported. As a result, the committee prepared 14 recommendations to the ministry to remedy this situation.

We look forward to the ministry's response to our recommendations and to hearing from them with regard to some of the questions asked in the report.

With that, I would like to move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on finance and economic affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

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

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

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

WORLD AIDS DAY

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Mr Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes to recognize World AIDS Day.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes on World AIDS Day? Agreed.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I stand before the House to once again bring to the attention of honourable members that this is World AIDS Day, a day of commemoration and awareness-raising that falls on December 1.

This year the World AIDS Campaign has chosen to focus on women, girls and HIV. In Canada, as in the rest of the world, increasingly the face of AIDS is a female one. According to the United Nations, nearly half of all adults living with this disease worldwide are now women. In 2003, 29% of new HIV diagnoses in Ontario were women, up from 23% the year before.

The reasons for this are biological and cultural. In many parts of the world, including here in Canada, women are too often economically and socially dependent on men and have too little control over men's sexual behaviour. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said at the world AIDS conference in Bangkok, "What is needed is real, positive change that will give more power and confidence to women and girls. Change that will transform relations between women and men at all levels of society." He's right. Until the global community does all it can to ensure that all women are treated equally and with dignity and respect, this dire trend will continue.

This is a time in which we reflect on the massive global tragedy that is AIDS. It is a tragedy that has hit this world hard and fast. It's hard to imagine that less than a quarter-century ago, nobody had even heard of AIDS. Yet today AIDS is spreading rapidly around the world, infecting nearly 40 million people and threatening the future of families and nations alike.

In 1981, front-line health providers in New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles began to notice clusters of rare disease outbreaks among men having sex with men. The cause of these outbreaks was a new syndrome that would soon become known as AIDS. Sensing a threat to their continued existence, gay communities around the world, including right here in Ontario, rallied to their defence. Gay people and their friends mobilized to edu-

cate communities, work with health providers, educate governments, and most importantly, help one another.

I was there; I saw it first-hand. I saw how people came together from every diverse corner of the community in response to this crisis. You could say that it was in those dark moments that the gay community itself was born. This community effort spawned a new legion of organizations and agencies led, in large part, by gay men. These organizations are now there in communities all across the province of Ontario, not just in places like Toronto but many other urban centres as well.

They are gifts borne out of sadness but also of hope, a hope that one day they will no longer be needed at all.

With today's drug combinations, fewer people are succumbing to HIV and AIDS. People are living with this disease like people live with many serious chronic illnesses. When we lose people to HIV and AIDS, though, it is no less painful than the first deaths, and it reminds us that there is no cure and that prevention remains a significant challenge. The resurgence of infections in Ontario, especially among women, aboriginals, people from endemic communities and men who have sex with men, compels us to keep talking about HIV and AIDS and to actively resist complacency.

Thanks to trailblazers like June Callwood and Stephen Lewis, I can feel the surge of a new, community-based movement coming. Stephen Lewis is taking the compassionate community spirit that has characterized the HIV/AIDS movement in Ontario to the world stage and is bringing a new consciousness into our living rooms.

In just the past few weeks in the greater Toronto area, an enormous number of events: the other day, Urban AIDS at the Ricoh Coliseum. On Sunday, I went to the People to People organization with the Ethiopian community, a few weeks ago to the Ontario Hospital Association AIDS Africa Gala, and to the launch of the Ontario Hospital Association-Registered Nurses Association of Ontario project in Lesotho. Tomorrow night I have the opportunity to participate in a fundraising event in York region, co-chaired by Marianna Beer, wife of Charles Beer, that will raise \$100,000 for the Stephen Lewis Foundation.

We've lost more than 7,000 Ontarians to AIDS since 1981. Today 24,000 Ontarians live with HIV. They're our lovers and our friends, our sisters and our brothers, our sons and our daughters. We admire their courage and dignity very much.

In the face of the reality of HIV, sometimes it's hard to muster hope. We have much to be proud of in Ontario for what we've done in the fight against HIV and AIDS, but we have more to do.

This past summer I had the opportunity to attend the International AIDS Conference in Thailand. I was struck by the sheer determination of everyone there to combat this global challenge.

Here in the province of Ontario this year, we've increased funding to AIDS service organizations by 7%, and worked actively with OACHA, the Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS, to help make sure we're ordering our priorities properly. We worked to fix a challenge

with the Trillium drug benefit program. We're working to expand the benefits of anonymous testing.

One of our government's most recent initiatives that I'm most proud of is that the agreement we negotiated with the Ontario Medical Association had, as part of it, introducing the alternative funding program for general practitioners dealing with HIV and AIDS.

Between now and 2006, when Toronto hosts the world AIDS conference, the Ontario AIDS community will work to showcase what we have done collectively locally. I believe that as Canadians, we are at our best when our values are applied globally, when we recognize the power we have to change the world. Powerful evidence abounds that Canadians are lining up right now to do just that—helping to change the world.

1400

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the official opposition to mark World AIDS Day. Today we mark World AIDS Day with 15 minutes of speeches in this place. The latest estimates suggest that during those 15 minutes that we speak today, 145 people will become infected with HIV. Look around you. Look around this chamber. Every 15 minutes, an equal number of people to everyone in this room—MPPs, officials, political staff and those in the public galleries—will be infected. That's five million people every year.

"There is something new and ominous in the course of this epidemic," Peter Piot, the head of the United Nations AIDS program, said last week. It is much more than the ominous infection rates, however. It's the stigma, the marginalization, the prejudice, the discrimination and the fear that has come to exist in all parts of the world.

It is much more than the statistics, though. Each person who is infected and later contracts AIDS has a face and needs our unconditional love and support. It no longer is a disease primarily targeting or affecting gay men and intravenous drug users. It affects people around the world, from all walks of life: men, women and children.

The situation in Africa is indeed, and continues to become, a pandemic. In some countries, almost one third of people in the entire country are infected. Those numbers are almost incomprehensible, but the good news is that around the world we are beginning to make headway. Spending on HIV/AIDS has tripled around the world in recent years. Research continues to be promising. But before that day arrives, public education is not just important, but it is absolutely essential.

Canada can be proud of its record in fighting this disease around the world, but for those of us in this place, here in Ontario, we have an important responsibility to provide the health and social supports that are essential to those who are living with HIV/AIDS.

Today I want to pay special tribute to one organization in Ottawa which supports people living with AIDS. Bruce House was founded in 1988 by a group of concerned citizens, on the premise that everyone has the right to live and die with dignity. Their goal is to help each and every one of their residents to live the best quality of life. They are blessed with a caring team of staff, a

dedicated group of volunteers and, most importantly, a supportive community. Our province is a much better place due to their efforts and the efforts of countless volunteers, professionals and organizations around Ontario.

Today, let us recommit ourselves to prevention, to public education, to research, to treatment and to compassion, not just here in Ontario but indeed right around the world.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I rise today on behalf of the NDP caucus, not with any pleasure, but to acknowledge the grim reality that HIV/AIDS has reached epidemic proportions. We need to make sure we are responding effectively, appropriately and in a timely fashion to this virus.

UN AIDS, the United Nations agency that is in charge of combating this spread of AIDS, reports that there are 42 million HIV-positive people worldwide. There will be five million new infections around the world this year, and 800,000 of them will be children. Some 3.1 million people will die.

HIV is one of the biggest social, economic and health challenges facing the world. It is a global emergency, claiming over 8,000 lives every day. In fact, five people die of AIDS every minute.

This is the 17th World AIDS Day. The first international health day was the result of a summit of health leaders who met in London in January 1988. They realized that a united global effort was required to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS. The aim of World AIDS Day is to educate people about the worldwide challenges and consequences of the epidemic in order to push for change. World AIDS Day is now an annual event in most countries. On December 1, efforts to combat AIDS are observed, and support is given to the continuing fight against this virus.

The international theme for this year's World AIDS Day is Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS. The number of women living with HIV/AIDS worldwide has rapidly increased, and women now account for nearly half of all people living with HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa, 65% of people living with HIV are women, and among young people, it is 75%. The World AIDS Campaign 2004 seeks to address the way women's inequality helps fuel the transmission of HIV and increases the impact of AIDS. The campaign's slogan, "Have you heard me today?" calls for immediate action against the inequalities that put not only women and girls at risk but whole communities as well.

Depression, poverty, violence, and injection drug use are contributing factors to HIV infection among women. Women and girls in developing countries in particular are more susceptible to HIV/AIDS due to a lack of knowledge about the disease, a lack of access to prevention services and the inability to negotiate safer sex practices. Barriers to employment and education, and sexual violence also make girls and women more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. In addition, all over the world, women are expected to take the lead in domestic work and provide care to family members. HIV and AIDS have significantly increased the burden of care for many women.

AIDS intensifies the feminization of poverty, particularly in hard-hit countries, and disempowers women. Entire families are also affected, as vulnerability increases when women's time caring for the sick is taken away from other productive tasks in the household.

In Canada, the number of new infections points to disturbing trends. At the end of 2002, Health Canada estimated that 56,000 Canadians were living with HIV infection. Furthermore, the number of women testing positive continues to rise. In 2003, 29% of new HIV diagnoses in Ontario were women, up from 23% the previous year. At the same time, an increasing number of Canadians living with AIDS are women: up from 6.1% before 1994, to 16.5% in 2002. Worldwide, eight million women now have AIDS. It is estimated that in a few years, 13 million women will be infected and four million women will have died from AIDS.

Clearly, HIV and AIDS must concern us all. This is a world in which no society and no group within society can remain immune to AIDS as this epidemic grows. World AIDS Day reminds us that we need to respond appropriately, effectively and aggressively to HIV/AIDS every day.

PIERRE BERTON

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Speaker, I believe that we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to two minutes to pay tribute to a great Canadian, Pierre Berton, who passed away yesterday.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent for the two minutes? Yes.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'm honoured to pay tribute to one of Canada's truly great citizens. Yesterday, Pierre Berton boarded his last train, leaving behind, to his country and to his family, an unparalleled legacy as a journalist, historian and social commentator of profound insight, and he was a beloved husband, father and grandfather.

Pierre Berton was a storyteller; indeed, I think that he was our best-loved chronicler. He brought history to life in this country like no one else has in our history, and he was an unapologetic social critic. I think that he taught an entire generation of us to speak our minds plainly and eloquently. He gave Canadians a sense of pride in our past, and in doing so, he gave us a new voice and a new vocabulary to imagine our future.

His bibliography lists 77 published works. They are as diverse as any in Canada, but that's just part of the story. Many of us remember him as a journalist and columnist with the Toronto Daily Star, as an editor of Maclean's magazine. I remember his daily radio commentaries back in the 1960s with Charles Templeton. And who among us—over 30, at least—does not remember being a regular viewer of that quintessentially Canadian program Front Page Challenge?

1410

Despite his suggestions—and you saw it in the paper this morning, the quote saying, "I'm not a historian; I'm

a journalist”—he was a historian. He was one of our most popular historians, and he was a master at his craft. He wrote his stories in a way that transformed history from the private pursuit of academics to the popular pastime for all of us. I believe his biographers will pay special attention to *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike*. Those were seminal works that described Canada in its infant years.

I believe the biographers will talk about Vimy, where Pierre Berton captured the voices of men at the frontiers of war. In particular, I believe the biographers will talk about Klondike and those other great books about Canada's north. Indeed, Pierre Berton gave us a truly new consciousness of the magnificence and the majesty of Canada's north.

In the end, he was a writer who was a master at his profession and who was also committed to the profession. He helped create the Writers' Union of Canada and the Writers Guild of Canada, and he gave thousands and thousands of hours of counselling, mentoring and cajoling to young writers.

As a person who represented him as a constituent, I can also tell you that he was a simple man, truly devoted to his community. Canadians and people all across the world will miss him, but the works that he has left us will fill us for decades and decades to come.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): In the last few weeks, some Canadians have been avidly watching their televisions, waiting to see who would be voted the greatest Canadian, yet there are some Canadians we know in our hearts are great without any vote needed. Yesterday, we lost such a Canadian.

Pierre Berton was an author, a journalist, a broadcaster and a patriot. Born in the Yukon, he served in the Canadian army in World War II. He worked as a journalist or an editor for the *Vancouver News-Herald*, the *Vancouver Sun*, *Macleans* and the *Toronto Star*. He hosted the *Pierre Berton Show* and was a commentator and panellist on *Front Page Challenge*, among other programs.

The awards he has received are almost too numerous to mention. Among many awards, he has received the Governor General's award for creative non-fiction on several occasions. He received awards for columnist of the year, film of the year and a Grand Prix at Cannes for his film *City of Gold* in 1959.

Pierre Berton was a Companion of the Order of Canada and was awarded numerous honorary degrees. He served as chancellor of Yukon College, chair of the Heritage Canada Foundation, chair of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, editor-in-chief of the *Canadian Centennial Library* and as a member of the board of the book publisher McClelland and Stewart.

Pierre Berton's books are his lasting legacy and it is impossible to imagine what the study of Canadian history would be without them. His love for Canada and its people is written on every page of every book he wrote. More than any other writer in our history, he chose to spend his life telling the stories of Canada to Canadians.

Who can forget reading in *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike* of how a nation of only a few million

bound itself together by building a railway from sea to sea? His book *Vimy* tells of the great battle of World War I, where, at some unknown point during the fighting and carnage, our country moved from being a colony to a nation. *The Invasion of Canada* and *Flames Across the Border* illustrate the battles of the War of 1812. *The Promised Land* tells of the settling of the west, and *Winter*, while not overtly historical, speaks to Berton's theme of telling us what it means to be a Canadian.

Pierre Berton was a great Canadian. As a writer and broadcaster, he showed his love for our country in everything he did. He was really a teacher, teaching Canadians about ourselves, challenging us to learn our history and heritage, and to pass it on to our children. He will be missed by a whole country.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Canada has lost a great Canadian. As has been noted, Pierre Berton was an incredible author, columnist, broadcaster, radio personality, television personality, but perhaps most of all, he was an iconoclast who admitted that he broke most of the rules. For example, when he wrote his first book, entitled *The Royal Family*, he admitted that he wrote it because he had seven kids and he couldn't make enough money as a journalist. So he had to find another way to pay the rent.

His history has actually drawn some criticism from the more academic authors, but anyone who reads his history knows that it brings Canadian history alive. His history, for example, of the battle of Vimy Ridge, I think, really tells what Canadian soldiers were like. He said:

"In the eyes of many Englishmen, the Canadians were a wild, undisciplined lot and therefore ineffective by British Army standards. There was nothing sheep-like about them. At the Valcartier camp, when the same movie was shown once too often, they had gone crazy, torn down the YMCA tent and set it afire. Now, in the old country, they refused to conform to the rigid class lines that divided privates, non-commissioned officers and officers into watertight social compartments—as in the railway coaches and in the pubs, with their segregated bars... The British tommies saluted every officer they saw, even across a broad roadway; the Canadians saluted only when they felt like it."

He was an iconoclast, but most of all, as an iconoclast, he dedicated his writing to telling the world what Canadians were all about. So while we may have lost him, I think his writing will have an enduring value for all Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

OMA AGREEMENT

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Premier. Premier, earlier this afternoon, our leader, John Tory, released a copy of the taxpayer-paid partisan political poll you used to manipulate public opinion against Ontario's doctors. This

poll was done a week before the doctors finished voting on your failed offer, and it's clear affirmation of your government's deceptive and double-dealing approach to negotiations with doctors.

This morning, your Minister of Health said your government wants to work with doctors on a successful deal. You've said much the same as recently as two days ago, and we now know these statements were false. Premier—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Mr Speaker, the language is purely unparliamentary and should be withdrawn. The member should be called to order for doing that.

The Speaker: Order. In regard to the language, I will judge it accordingly. I would ask the member to continue. When there is any such unparliamentary language, I will then call the members to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. As I said again, I will call those orders. Thank you very much. The leader of the official opposition.

Mr Runciman: Premier, what this poll shows is that you had no intention of negotiating in good faith. It shows that, all along, you planned to shove your failed deal down the doctors' throats. How can you justify your manipulative, cynical approach to dealing with doctors?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Something that the honourable member chooses to overlook is that we devoted an entire nine months to negotiations with Ontario doctors, 120 meetings at the main negotiating table. Beyond that, there were four side tables at which 44 separate meetings were also held. We devoted ourselves to a very comprehensive negotiating process, which culminated in an agreement that was unanimously endorsed by all those involved in this process.

The member opposite simply does not have any ground on which to stand when he claims that somehow we have abused the process. We respected the process, and then some. What we're determined to do now, on the basis of that process, is to keep moving.

1420

Mr Runciman: They designed this in terms of failure. They couldn't take another day, another two days, another three days to try and find a resolution with the doctors.

Premier, in the polling industry, your partisan poll is known as a message test. It's meant to drive public opinion in one specific direction, in this case toward support for your failed offer to doctors. The poll was an extensive sample. In fact, this was an election-style poll meant to sway public opinion instead of sampling it.

That's the problem. This is not an election campaign. We're talking about people's lives and their ability to find a doctor when they need one. You're more interested in engaging in a full-on war—your minister is always engaging in wars; a partisan war with doctors now—and this poll is your road map for doing just that.

This is a shameful and tawdry example of politics and cynical in the extreme. How can you possibly justify manipulating public opinion against our doctors? How can you justify that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The people of Ontario waited over eight years for that government to move forward on primary care reform. We then negotiated for nine long months, in good faith, and came up with an agreement which was unanimously endorsed by ourselves and the representatives of the OMA. So we are not going to wait one day longer. There are 12 million people who have charged us with the responsibility to keep moving and to improve the quality of their health care while treating our doctors fairly.

We're proud to say that Ontario's doctors, as a result of this plan, will be the best paid in the country when it comes to family medicine. They'll be the second-best paid in the country when it comes to a specialty.

We are proud of this agreement and we look forward, again, to moving forward on behalf of the people of Ontario.

Mr Runciman: The Premier is not going to deal with his shameful tactics with respect to this poll. This poll is a damning indictment of the Premier and his government.

Page 30 proves the point. After being pushed into thinking this deal might have some merit, respondents then said that they have no trust in you or your government's ability to deliver the deal and manage our health care system; 71% of respondents said that. They don't trust you. They have no confidence in you.

The Dalton McGuinty brand is damaged goods. People can't believe anything you say. We now know that what you say is what the pollsters tell you to say. No conviction, no beliefs; just do what the polls tell you to do.

Premier, you owe the people of Ontario an explanation about why you spent tax dollars on secret polls to manipulate public opinion about your failed offer to doctors.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm not sure I've ever heard more inconsistencies within the confines of a single statement. First, the member opposite says that we are governing according to polls, and he cites a poll which he claims doesn't support the direction we're pursuing. Secondly, he says that this is a secret poll. He's got a copy of the poll because we made it public.

Let me tell you something else. There used to be a practice in this Legislature where governments tabled their public opinion research: Bill Davis did it; David Peterson did it; Bob Rae did it; and then Mike Harris stopped it. We have resumed that practice. We make the results of our polling public. We table it. In fact, when it comes to the results of our polling taken pre-budget, you can actually find those today, on-line.

We are proud of the research we've had done. We've made that available to the public. We are proud of the plan that we put together with Ontario's doctors. But more importantly, we are proud of the progress we are about to make on behalf of Ontario patients.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Premier. Here are the kinds of words physicians across Ontario are using to describe your public relations activities. Some call them cynical, some call them manipulative and others have said it is nothing more than conniving maneuvering. Premier, I want to know from you, how much money did you spend that could have gone to health care on this cynical effort to malign our physicians? Would you stand in your place and tell us how much money?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I can tell you that the Tories, when in government, spent over \$14 million on polling. I will tell you this: We will never achieve that number.

I can tell you something else, and this is what this is really all about. Let's understand the Conservative Party's track record with respect to medicare. That is the party that opposed our provincial legislation, passed last year, to entrench our commitment to medicare, including the banning of two-tiered billing. That is the party that fought tooth and nail against the Liberal government's initiative to ban extra-billing in Ontario. That is the party that formed the government which was the second last in all of Canada to embrace medicare. That will give you some notion of their antecedents and their lack of commitment to medicare.

This is a party which is committed to moving forward and to making progress when it comes to the next step in the evolution of medicare. We're committed to doing that on behalf of Ontarians, on behalf of our patients and in partnership with our doctors. That's where we're going.

Mr Baird: I say to the Premier, you may be interested in knowing that polls of this type typically cost in excess of \$100,000. There are 64 hospitals around this province that are today, as we speak, having to lay off nurses, and there are two nurses who will be laid off to pay for your cynical attempt to manipulate public opinion. At the same time as you are trotting around Ontario telling people that there is no more money for doctors, telling people that there is no more money for hospitals, at the same time as you're delisting chiropractors, physiotherapy and optometry services, why would you spend considerable sums of public money to support your cynical attempt to malign our physicians, and why did you leak this poll before your cheap trick last Friday?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Well, this is all interesting coming from a representative of a former government that paid \$300,000 annually to one of their spin doctors—just to remind them about that, Speaker.

I have bad news for members of the opposition. Support for our plan for health care is building. Today we heard from the Ontario Long Term Care Association. Karen Sullivan, president of the association, "noted that access to physician services for long-term-care residents has been a growing concern for homes throughout the province for the past three-four years, particularly as residents are older, frailer and have more complex medical conditions than ever before.

"We have taken every opportunity," she says, "to raise this issue with government, the OMA and the On-

tario Long Term Care Physicians association and we are encouraged that the proposed agreement with the OMA speaks directly to this."

What we have done is we have taken \$10 million through this plan. We've invested in special on-call after-hours coverage and a monthly management fee to support residents right in their nursing homes. People throughout the province, as they gain a better understanding of what we're trying to do on their behalf, are saying, "We want a part of that. We want to join that. We want to improve the quality of health care in our province."

The Speaker: Before I get to your final supplementary, let me just caution you about some of the bordering unparliamentary language that has been happening. Just be more careful about your language.

Mr Baird: I say to the Premier, you have the largest office of any Premier in the history of Ontario: 54 staff. You would think that one of those 54 could write you an answer when you come into this place to debate the public issues.

The people of Ontario just can't be fooled; 71% of them in your own poll said they don't trust your government enough to run the deal and deliver the benefits the government says it will deliver. Not only do Ontario patients and taxpayers not trust you; Ontario physicians don't trust you either.

Premier, I'd like you to stand in your place and tell us: What is the net cost to taxpayers in Ontario of this agreement that you're so proud of? Will you stand in your place and give that, or are you afraid to?

1430

Hon Mr McGuinty: That information has been public for a long time now. In 2007-08, it will cost us \$1.077 billion. But you'll notice, Speaker—

Mr Baird: But you moved all the money up. If you move it all up under a four-year—

Hon Mr McGuinty: Listen, we are delighted to give you a briefing to explain the agreement.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): He doesn't want a briefing.

Hon Mr McGuinty: You will notice, Speaker, that the members opposite shrink away from the substance of the agreement. We are proud of this agreement. They don't stand up and say—or maybe they do. Maybe they're saying that \$1.077 billion and making our Ontario doctors first in Canada when it comes to compensation is not enough. If they're telling us to put more money in, then they should tell us that, because a few weeks ago they told us it was too much.

You will notice that they do not speak about the substance of the deal. We will continue to speak about the substance of this plan. We will talk about the fact that it's bringing more doctors into underserved communities. It's going to encourage doctors to practise more preventive medicine. It's going to encourage doctors to spend more time with seniors. It's going to encourage doctors to spend more time with home care and nursing home patients. It's going to encourage doctors to stay in

Ontario, to work with us and to improve the quality of care for all Ontarians.

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. This morning, thousands of workers in the film and television production industry came to Queen's Park to protest your failure to increase the television and film production tax credit. You may prefer not to remember this, but 15 months ago you promised to increase the tax credit on domestic film and television production from 20% to 33% for labour costs, and for feature films you promised to increase the tax credit from 20% to 40%. But once again you've failed to fulfill your promises. Premier, will you immediately increase the film and television production tax credit, or is this just a game—another McGuinty broken promise?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'm proud of that commitment. We look forward to honouring that commitment. I'm not going to honour it today, if that's what the member opposite is asking me, but I will remind the Ontario film industry that there is not a single, even passing, reference found to that industry and its importance to our province in the NDP platform—just so we're clear as to who stood up for the industry.

We understand the importance of that industry and we look forward to working with them to create a more competitive environment for them.

Mr Hampton: Premier, these are your promises; remember? You're the one who made the promises. You may not understand the urgency of this situation, but across Ontario 50,000 jobs depend on this industry, and today those 50,000 workers are worried that they may lose their jobs because of your failure to keep your promise. You promised Ontario film and television production workers and the industry that you would implement specific actions to sustain their jobs, but just a few weeks ago your finance minister said, "Ontario will not participate in the unhealthy bidding war with upping and upping tax credits." Premier, when did your promise to the film and television production industry become unhealthy bidding?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The only urgency the leader of the NDP is sensing is an urgency to jump on a perceived bandwagon with respect to this particular issue. We were there from the outset. We were there before it became politically fashionable. We worked with the industry, developed a good understanding of the nature of the challenges that we've got to grapple with, and understood the nature of the competitiveness of this North American market.

One of the first things that we did as the government, and I'm sure the members opposite will be interested in hearing this, was to establish a permanent office in Los Angeles—by the way, in partnership with the film industry—so that we can better market this province, and

this community in particular, as a destination when it comes to film production.

We have a strong and abiding partnership with the film industry. We look forward to working with them, and we look forward to honouring our commitment.

Mr Hampton: Well, Premier, you talk about bandwagons. The only bandwagon around here is the bandwagon of your broken promises. They just go on forever.

These are 50,000 families, families to whom you promised only 15 months ago that you were going to implement tax credits to ensure that this industry was sustained and continued to grow. And now, all of a sudden, you don't want to hear about your promises.

This is what is happening elsewhere: The US Congress has introduced new tax credits for production crews. California has done the same. Manitoba has a film and television tax credit of 35%.

You promised very specifically that you were going to increase these tax credits to ensure that Ontario jobs, Ontario workers, were not disadvantaged. It is about your promise, Premier. Are you going to fulfill your promise, or is this just another McGuinty broken promise?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I regret to inform the member opposite that we will be keeping this promise, and we look forward to doing that.

I know the member is not interested in any good news, but there is some good news. The Ontario Media Development Corp, which opened this new marketing office in Los Angeles, reports that, after we took office, it has already attracted 15 major productions worth almost \$105 million to Ontario.

Let me say that our government understands the nature of the challenges facing our film industry, and we understood that quite some time ago. That's why we incorporated it in our platform. That's why we intend to continue to work with the industry to ensure that we have a competitive environment here, to ensure that we have an enhanced tax credit system, to ensure that we'll have a thriving film industry long into the future. We look forward to working with the industry.

AIR QUALITY

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier, I guess all of those people out there, according to the Premier, are just misinformed.

I want to ask you about another promise you made, another statement you made. You said, "Our most vulnerable citizens—seniors and children—should be able to go outside in the summer without consulting a smog index." We found out yesterday that it's no good to them anyway. The Provincial Auditor tells us that under your government, the air quality index doesn't even work. The tool that is supposed to tell us when we're having a smog day is so outdated and inaccurate that no one in Ontario really knows the truth any more about our air quality.

Some 92% of pollution-related deaths and hospitalizations occur on days when you say the air quality is good or very good. Premier, is this what you meant when

you said that people shouldn't be consulting the smog index?

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

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I find it very interesting that the leader of the third party is giving us a lecture on our plan for air quality, when he has very clearly indicated to the people of Ontario that keeping coal-fired generation in the province is part of his plan. I say, shame on you. That has a very negative impact on air quality in the province of Ontario.

I'm happy to say that our government is working with the federal government to improve air quality standards and to consider the health effects and identify those contaminants that have a negative impact on the health of the people of the province. Our government believes that we need to work with the federal government to build that body of evidence and move forward with our plan for cleaner air, which, by the way, is consistent with our plan to replace coal-fired generation in Ontario.

1440

Mr Hampton: For the record, you should just admit you're not going to keep the promise, and you should admit it now rather than trying to fool people once again. The coal-fired plants aren't closed now, and they're not going to close any time soon.

But I want to ask you again about the original question. The Ontario Medical Association says the annual cost of air pollution in Ontario is \$10 billion, but your own budget says you're going to cut a further 12% from the Ministry of the Environment's budget. One of the programs on the chopping block is the smog patrol, which monitors pollution on highways and roads throughout the province. The McGuinty government says that you're going to do a wonderful job on preventing smog, but then we read the fine print—you're going to eliminate the smog patrol.

The Provincial Auditor slammed your record. He said the smog patrol should improve inspection targets and follow up on violations. I guess improving it means the McGuinty government's going to cut it. Is that what it means, Minister?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: The member opposite is in denial: Denial number one, that coal-fired generation has a very negative impact on air quality; and two, that our government has the strength and fortitude to press forward and replace that coal generation with clean, renewable, safe energy for the people of Ontario.

I want to tell the honourable member what we are doing. Last spring, we announced a five-point plan for cleaner air. We are going to cap NO_x and SO_x emissions. We are going to add 29 contaminants to the list of contaminants that we check for when air quality is monitored. We are going to improve the air dispersion modelling that's in place right now. Right now, that technology is 30 years old, and we're going to bring that up to date. We are also going to take a science-based approach to

ensuring that our focus, our energy and our resources are going to ensure that the testing—smog patrol, for example—will test heavy-duty vehicles, not light-duty, where the majority of nasty emissions come from.

Mr Hampton: This is about cutting the budget of the Ministry of the Environment by a further 12%. This is about cutting the very people who work on smog patrol the day after the Provincial Auditor says that you're doing a lousy job. You try to cover it up by calling it "realignment," but when you read the notes, it's very clear. This isn't a realignment; you're cutting 12 of the people who are out there doing smog patrol.

I say this to the minister and the Premier: Since when did reducing smog, since when did improving air quality, mean you lay off the very people who are out there doing the smog patrol?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: As usual, the honourable member is only presenting part of the information. He's not telling the members of this House that our smog patrol initiative is going to focus on the heavy-duty polluting vehicles like big rigs, dump trucks, buses, commercial vehicles, taxi fleets and used cars. Those are going to be the vehicles that we focus our resources on.

I also want to remind the House that our government has committed to directing two cents of our gas tax to support those municipalities that will invest in transit. That's going to get more vehicles off the road. Last week, we announced an ethanol initiative. Our ethanol initiative in the year 2007 will be the equivalent of removing 200,000 vehicles off the roads in Ontario. That's our commitment to clean air in the province, and I'm proud of the record we have.

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Premier. The Ontario film and television tax credit was introduced in the 1996 budget by the Progressive Conservative government at the time and enhanced from time to time after that in subsequent budgets. It was based on the realization, because of the work of Richard Florida, Roger Martin and others, that Toronto and Ontario had a marvellous opportunity to support an industry which could grow amazingly here, which it has. That path continued through the late 1990s and at the beginning of this century and recently, last year and this year, has suffered substantial decline.

You promised on page 13 of the Liberal election platform, "We will boost the Ontario film and television tax credit from 20% to 33%." As you know, the decline is happening. The competition is there, not only in other parts of Canada but in Louisiana and other places in the United States. Will you now take the necessary steps to bring the tax credit up to date, as you promised you would do?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to inform the members of this House and the public at large that there is not a

single passing reference to the need to enhance the Ontario film tax credit in the Tory platform. This whole notion of finding religion is apparently contagious. We were there from the outset. We understand the nature of the industry, its complexities and the challenges it is facing at present. That's exactly why we incorporated that commitment in our platform and that's exactly why we will deliver on that.

Mr Flaherty: It's interesting that the Premier wants to blame the opposition for his promises. No one made you do it. No one made you say that; nobody made you put that on page 13 of your platform. You based it on information you had—

Interjection.

Mr Flaherty: No, the Tories actually brought in the tax credit, Minister of Tourism. That's who brought it in. You've been here so long that you probably even remember that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. The Minister of Tourism and the member for Whitby-Ajax seem to want to have a discussion. That's better done outside. If you want to direct—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm asking the member for Whitby-Ajax to direct his questions through this Chair. Proceed.

Mr Flaherty: Thank you, Speaker. The promise was made by the now Premier: "We will boost the Ontario film and television tax credit from 20% to 33%." The auditor reports yesterday that the government has no information about the impact of the tax credit. Not only that, but the government agency involved and two ministries—culture and finance—can't even decide what to measure. That's what the auditor tells us.

So I say to the Premier, you have no new information, according to the auditor. What you have is a promise you made last year that you would take this action. The hundreds and hundreds of people who were here this morning in the rain, many of whom are in service industries supporting the film industry, want some action, and they want it now, not three years from now. What's the timetable for increasing the credit?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Apparently, the member opposite is now a man of the people and he's very concerned about their daily challenges in life.

The reason we included this commitment in our platform is because we understand how important this industry is to this province, to the community of Toronto and the greater Toronto area in particular. We understand how many people are employed in that industry, how many families count on that income. That's exactly why we incorporated that commitment in our platform.

I'm not sure about the inconsistency put forward by the member. He says we don't have any data that supports the very existence of the tax credit itself. On the other hand, he's saying that notwithstanding that, we should proceed with its enhancement. We, unlike the members opposite, have been committed to this from the

outset. That's why we put it in our platform and that's why we'll deliver on that.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. In September, you announced the closure of the three remaining regional centres that house some of this province's most vulnerable people. These are people who call those centres their home. These are people who have lived in those centres, most of them, all of their lives. These individuals have severe developmental, medical and psychological conditions. They need and deserve constant and extraordinary care, care that is not available in almost every community living program.

Madam Minister, I'm asking you to talk to the families. I'm asking you if the change that you are advocating can be tolerated by their families. I'm asking you if you have any plans—because we have not seen any and we do not believe there are any—to manage the change. They demand to know where their children will be sent, and you have not provided answers. My question is simple: Why are you proceeding with the closures when you have no budgeted funds, no buildings to accommodate these poor individuals, and no plans to care for them?

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I very much appreciate the question. The members of your own caucus will know the history of these three remaining institutions across Ontario. All members of this House were here in the beginning, in 1987, when the decision was made to close institutions in Ontario. What happened in the last five years was that about 1,000 people moved from the institutions into the community. What we're doing is maintaining that same flow from institutions into the community, no more, no less. The difference is that we're down to the last 1,000 people in these institutions. I have had an opportunity to meet with people in institutions, to speak with the staff there. I am planning to do much more in informing parents.

The difficulty is that we had to announce the closure and set the date so we can go about the plan, which is a five-year plan. We were not prepared to be clandestine about going behind people's backs to plan a closure and not have them be a part of this plan. Now that we've made the announcement, that is exactly what we're engaging in: development of that plan.

1450

Mr Prue: It appears that the plan is, as you say, ongoing, but it has not been made. Everyone agrees that community living is ideal for those individuals who can handle it. I commend what has happened in the last 10 years for the majority of the individuals involved. But what has happened now is that we have 1,000 individuals who have severe problems. You haven't taken the time to date to talk to the families or to the caregivers who look

after these regional centre residents. You have dictated to them that the families have five years to find alternatives, yet there is a seven-year waiting list for group home placement into the other facilities. How can they make plans when in five years there won't even be a space for their children?

Minister, I'm asking you to visit those centres, all three of them. I am asking you to meet with the families and with the caregivers. I'm asking you—and I know it's busy, so I'm asking to you do it when the House is in recess—will you agree to meet with these families in the period between December and February? Will you come to the Huronia Centre, which is having a meeting on January 8? Will you stop your ill-conceived plans, work with the staff and families and invest in a system that has proven over the years that it works?

Hon Ms Pupatello: Actually, on the discussions I've had with the organizations of parents that represent people: We spoke with them, I spoke to them individually, before we made our announcement so that they wouldn't hear about it on the news. They heard it directly from me. We told them then that we will be on-site, that we will bring parents with us whose children were also in institutions and moved into the community. We are bringing parents with us who were extremely angry, frustrated and scared of that move and who today realize it was the best thing that could have happened for their children. We understand this fear. None of us can live and walk in those shoes. We are doing our absolute best to be open about this process, to make sure they will be involved in a plan for their children.

There are varying degrees of needs with the people who live in institutions today, the 1,000 who are left in Ontario. One individual who lives there actually works all day in the community and then comes to his home in the evening. Another individual goes for five-mile walks on his own, every day, outside. So it is extremely varying in terms of what their needs are.

There are also very high needs for people who live in this institution. It is our job to be certain, when those plans are made, that there will be supports available, as they need them, in the community or they will not be moved out. We are determined to do this well.

GO TRANSIT

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): My question is for the Minister of Transportation and highways. Commuters who live in Mississauga, Brampton and neighbouring communities crowd the GO trains on the Milton line every day. If we had more trains, we'd fill each and every one. If we had more capacity on the existing trains, commuters could fill that capacity. Specifically, in the area I represent, the riding of Mississauga West, commuters in Streetsville, Meadowvale, Lisgar, Churchill Meadows and Erin Mills face the frustrating prospect of a daily commute to commute, driving along traffic-clogged roads such as Derry Road, Aquitaine, Battleford, Britannia, Eglinton and Burnhamthorpe to connect to the

Meadowvale, Streetsville and Erindale GO stations. Minister, will there be any relief from this east-west commute with the new GO train station in the northwest corner of the city, and is there any way we can increase capacity on the existing GO line?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the honourable member from Mississauga West for asking this question. I want to assure him that I represent the neighbouring riding, so I'm very much aware of the issue he's talking about. As the member is aware, earlier this year we partnered with the federal government to announce about a \$1-billion investment in GO Transit, and some of this investment will actually work its way through to make some of the improvements the member is talking about. I know he has a keen interest in the Lisgar GO station. That is in GO Transit's capital plan. We're going to move ahead with that GO station and we are in the process of acquiring the property to do so.

Mr Delaney: Thank you, Minister. As a resident of Lisgar in that northwest corner of Mississauga, I look forward to being among the first to ride that inaugural GO train out of the new station of Lisgar. Perhaps you would join me as we both make our way to work. I can speak for the commuters of northwest Mississauga in urging you and GO Transit to move forward on this very urgent need, to help more people leave their cars at home.

Minister, will GO Transit rail commuters on the Bradford, Georgetown, Stouffville and Lakeshore corridors see any new capital expansion of their services as well? For those of us who enjoy excellent rail commuter service when the good weather is in, but who suffer through annual delays during the cold and the snow, can you outline what steps GO Transit has taken to enhance its ability to get the trains to their destinations, on time and in bad weather?

Hon Mr Takhar: I want to thank the honourable member again for asking this question. As I have indicated already, we have committed to making a \$1-billion investment, along with the federal government, in GO Transit operations. Recently we opened a GO Transit station in Gwillimbury, and the honourable member from the other side was there as well. We are expected to open two or three more GO Transit stations.

As to some of the issues we faced in winter last year, GO Transit has already put a contingency plan in place to have heat below so that we don't face the same kind of issues this winter. We look forward to having smoother operations as we move forward.

HERITAGE LEGISLATION

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): My question is for the Minister of Culture. This morning the six largest church denominations in Ontario, representing more than three million members in this province, presented a joint brief to the standing committee on justice policy. Some of their representatives are here with us today in the

gallery. In that brief they strongly opposed parts of Bill 60, which amends the Ontario Heritage Act. They said it creates serious problems for them as the largest non-government holder of designated buildings under the act, and that your ministry never consulted them about these changes. They said they believed these serious problems could have been resolved with this consultation to everyone's benefit, but no one has talked to them. Minister, why did you not consult with Ontario churches before introducing this bill?

Hon Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): First of all, the consultation regarding the amendment to the Heritage Act was started with the previous government. We continued the consultations, and we had a wide consultation. We recognize the churches have a problem. I have met with them. We have listened to their concerns. I want to reassure them that this provision we are proposing to put into the act has been present in about seven provinces in Canada. So I don't think they need to worry, because it's the time provision that is present and the churches across these provinces are under this time provision.

1500

Mrs Munro: Minister, I appreciate the fact that you acknowledged the work that was done by the previous government. However, I would suggest to you that that's not an excuse for the lack of consultation that has taken place.

The churches say that a fundamental problem with the bill is that it treats all designated property owners as either governments that can meet rising maintenance costs out of tax revenues or as commercial enterprises that can raise the price of their products, but there is no place in the structure for congregations who pay the bills from a Sunday morning collection plate and who are designated over their objections.

These churches may have to take money from programs such as Out of the Cold to meet the requirements imposed upon them by this bill. Some growing congregations will not be able to adapt their buildings for affordable housing or other community programs because of this bill.

Minister, you made reference in your response to other provinces. I suggest you look at the fact that there are other provinces that do have opportunities for buildings such as this. Are you now prepared to delay passing this bill and to take the time to consult with the churches to resolve their concerns?

Hon Mrs Meilleur: As I said, we have met with the churches and they have explained their concerns. We have reviewed the concerns with staff.

I wanted to remind the member of the opposite party that she supported the amendment to the bill. She voted for it on second reading.

Of course, there is concern. There is a process built into the proposed amendment whereby they can appeal to the OMB. So if they wanted to demolish the churches and they were refused by the municipality, they will have recourse before the OMB.

AUTISM SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, the auditor's report on the government's autism program noted that children are regularly shortchanged IBI hours that they were promised.

Adam Shane was accepted into the program in July 2003. He was promised 24 hours of IBI every week. From mid-August 2003 to September 2004, he only received 15 hours of IBI treatment weekly. This September, Erinoak increased his IBI treatment to 20 hours a week. But now, the clinical director has told Adam's mom she wants to transition him out of the program even though his senior IBI therapist who works with him says he needs the IBI that he was promised and he's not due to turn six until September. Erinoak wants to reduce his hours after Christmas to 18 per week, and then down to 15 after the March break.

Minister, what will you do to ensure that Adam Shane will receive the treatment that he was promised?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I thank the honourable member for bringing me another specific case. I can tell you that the other specific cases the honourable member brought forward have been looked at by the ministry, and this one will be as well. If there is any rule or criteria that is not being adhered to to give this boy the therapy he deserves and needs, we will look into it right away.

With respect to the program as a whole, we took the Provincial Auditor's report, we appreciated the report, and we are looking at better ways of funding that particular program.

Ms Martel: Minister, there's an additional problem facing Adam, one that I made your ministry staff aware of on September 14 and again in the estimates on October 26. Adam started afternoon kindergarten this September. Even though his teacher, his special education teacher and his principal all agreed that his IBI therapist should be allowed into the classroom, the Peel District School Board said no, so he cannot get IBI at school. At the same time, this September Erinoak gave Adam more hours of treatment but they changed their hours of operation. So in order to access the additional treatment, his mom has to pull him out of school two afternoons a week to attend Erinoak.

Minister, it's wrong that the Peel District School Board will not allow his IBI therapist into the classroom. It's also wrong that Erinoak would change its hours of operation so that it cannot support this family. What will you do to force Erinoak, a service provider of your ministry, to change its hours so that it can support this family and not force Adam to miss any more school?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I will let the honourable member know that I will look into this matter, because if this boy is under six and he meets all the criteria, he should be getting IBI therapy.

DRIVE CLEAN

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday, the Provincial Auditor reported several abuses involving the Drive Clean program. I'm certain that most Ontarians understand the importance of monitoring and limiting tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks. After all, cars and trucks are major contributors to the smog that threatens the health of many Ontarians and compromises their quality of life. However, I'm certain that most Ontarians cannot tolerate abuses of the Drive Clean program like those that the Provincial Auditor has reported.

Minister, what is the government doing to prevent continued abuses of the Drive Clean program?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I want to assure the members of this House and the people of Ontario that, first of all, the Ministry of the Environment welcomes the report of the Provincial Auditor. It certainly informs us as a ministry. It's a program that we need to pay some attention to.

With respect to the duplicate certificates, this was an issue that was identified in 2000, that duplicate certificates were being used to process drivers' licences. When we came to office in December, my ministry, along with the Ministry of Transportation, began to work on the problem. I'm very happy to report that as of July 2004, no longer were duplicate certificates allowed to be used for the purchase of drivers' licences.

I think it's important to remind the people of Ontario as well that the vast majority of people who provide the testing services for the people in the province operate legitimately. But the very clear message of our government is, when you offer Drive Clean services, if you cheat, you are out.

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I'd like to thank the minister for the actions that the government is taking to prevent continued abuses of the Drive Clean program. I'm certain that the people of Ontario will be encouraged to hear that the government intends to crack down on any fraudulent activities involving the Drive Clean program.

The introduction of cleaner fuels like ethanol, reported improvements in vehicle emissions control technology and increased usage of public transit must combine to warrant periodic reviews of a vehicle emissions monitoring program like Drive Clean. For example, I have heard that now more than half of the cars on Ontario roads are 1997 models or newer. That must mean that many more cars now have on-board diagnostic systems that monitor the emissions.

Minister, knowing these things, moving forward, what role will a vehicle emissions monitoring program like Drive Clean have in the government's plan to clean up the air and protect human health?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: Our government is certainly committed to cleaner air for the people of Ontario. We believe that the Drive Clean program has had an impact on reducing pollutants in the air.

I also want to say to the people of Ontario that if there's any question about the facility they might use, if

they want to see if there is a history for that facility of perhaps a questionable nature, they can check the Drive Clean site.

With respect to our plan going forward, it was part of the initial Drive Clean plan that there would be a review in 2006-07. What I announced yesterday is that my ministry will conduct that review beginning in January 2005. I'm looking for a report back from that review by the summer of 2005.

It is a program that we do want to pay some attention to, and we believe that we need some information on it. We're looking for recommendations from a science-based perspective. We think that it's very important. As the member has identified, there's new technology out there, and we believe it's time to look at this program from that perspective.

GREENBELT LEGISLATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Minister of Agriculture: In a news release yesterday, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture president, Ron Bonnett, called on the McGuinty Liberal government to slow down the greenbelt process to ensure that you get it right. Specifically, he asked you to extend the deadline for submissions on the draft plan and to send this bill to an all-party committee before it is called for a third reading vote.

Minister, the official opposition agrees with this request. Do you?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): As the Minister of Agriculture and Food, I'm the minister responsible for making sure that we stand up for farmers in this province. One of the things we want to make sure of very clearly in this province is that we leave a legacy for future generations, and that legacy we're going to leave behind is the greenbelt. We're going to make sure that agricultural land is there for farming, that agricultural land is there for raising crops. We do not want agricultural land to be paved over. We do not want agricultural land raising subdivisions. We're going to stand up and make sure that we preserve that agricultural land.

In your supplementary, I'll be very happy to refer your question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who has the lead on this issue.

1510

Mr Hudak: Obviously Ontario farmers, particularly those in the greenbelt, aren't going to be too happy with your ducking a very simple question. They're going to want you to get off the wanted posters and get out there and advocate for Ontario farmers.

Ron Bonnett said in his release, "There are too many unknowns by citizens about the impact of the legislation and an obvious lack of understanding by government officials of the impacts of the legislation on"—Ontario—"farmers."

The official opposition, like Ontario farmers, believes in protecting green space. We have done that successfully

through Lands for Life, the Oak Ridges moraine plan, which won an award, the Niagara Escarpment plan, the Bruce Trail; but when we do it, we do it based on good science and a plan to make sure it works. Ontario farmers are asking for the time to make sure you get it right, municipal leaders are asking for time to get it right and concerned taxpayers are asking you to take the time to get it right. I ask you, Minister, will you please say yes to the OFA's request and send this to an all-party committee? Let's make sure we get the greenbelt right, based on good science.

Hon Mr Peters: I'll refer the question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): First of all, we have done more consultation on the greenbelt over the last year—through our greenbelt task force, which had at least 10 or 12 consultation sessions, through the consultations that have been held recently where we've gone to eight different communities and listened to the people—than that party ever did on the Oak Ridges moraine.

Secondly, let me make it absolutely clear that although we hope this legislation will pass by December 15, we have made it clear that we hope to pass the actual mapping and the regulation under the legislation within 45 days after December 15. The farming community is aware of that, all the people we've spoken to are aware of that, because we want to make sure the final delineation of the greenbelt is right and correct. That's why we're going over all the submissions and that's why the mapping will be done at some time before February 1, next year.

TFO

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Ma question est à la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Madame la ministre, vous allez savoir que la dernière élection, dans votre plateforme électorale vous avez promis très clairement l'autonomie à TFO.

Je suis venu à l'Assemblée au mois de mai, l'année passée, et j'ai demandé : « Qu'est-ce que vous faites pour garder votre engagement? » Vous m'avez dit, à travers l'autre ministre, « Oh, ne vous inquiétez pas. On va augmenter la représentation des francophones sous la commission de trois à six. »

Madame la ministre, comment expliquez-vous qu'aujourd'hui on a seulement deux personnes sur le CA de TFO qui sont francophones? Vous avez promis qu'ils étaient pour au moins six.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Merci de la question. C'est une question très pertinente. Je veux vous dire qu'à TFO, premièrement, il faut attendre qu'il y ait des vacances avant de nommer des gens. À chaque fois qu'il y a une vacance, on nomme un francophone. Alors, on a des francophones qui vont être nommés parce que c'est un engagement que l'on a pris, et on veut continuer dans cette même veine-là.

Alors, pour la deuxième question, la question supplémentaire, je vais la référer à la ministre responsable de TFO-TVO. Merci.

M. Bisson: Madame la ministre, les seules vacances qu'on va avoir sont des vacances des promesses brisées que votre gouvernement donne au reste de l'Ontario. C'est clair. Vous avez promis dans l'élection—on était pour avoir une autonomie pour TFO. Ce qu'on apprend : pas d'autonomie. On parle même de réduire le budget. Là, on arrive à la Chambre après l'élection et M^{me} Chambers dit, en anglais : « Don't worry. There are 13 members on the board. We're going to give you six. » We were three then; we're now down to two.

Madame la ministre, vous avez brisé votre promesse quand ça vient à ce que vous avez promis dans les élections, et là, vous brisez même votre mot sur ce que vous avez dit à cette Assemblée le printemps passé. Qui, de ce bord-là, est préparé à parler pour TFO et s'assurer que TFO continue dans le futur avec une gestion franco-phonie et un budget qui fait du bon sens?

Hon Mrs Meilleur: I will refer the question to the minister responsible for TFO-TVO, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'm really happy to respond to this question. The third party has expressed supposed interest in the film industry today. I think their area of preferred entertainment is actually fiction. We actually have 13 board members, and of those 13 we have made a commitment to five francophone members. At this point we have four, because we actually did two more appointments today. You should be up to date. So it's done. I can also tell you that we are working on number five, because in fact we would have five francophone members on that board except that, unfortunately, we have just had one resign because of illness. We're working on number five as we speak.

HYDRO GENERATION

Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): My question is for the Minister of Energy. As you know, the Lakeview coal generating plant is located in Mississauga South. The people of Mississauga South, in Peel region and in Toronto are certainly looking forward to better air quality once the Lakeview coal plant has been shut down.

In July, Toronto public health released a study which estimates that the air pollution in the city contributes to about 1,700 premature deaths and 6,000 admissions to hospital each year. It is clear that closing the Lakeview plant will help clean up our air. However, as you are aware, when this plant stops burning coal, it stops producing electricity. Could you tell us what the government is doing to ensure that we have enough clean electricity in Ontario going forward?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The member is absolutely right. Lakeview accounts for 26% of the GTA's SO₂ emissions and 8% of its NO_x emissions. Lakeview will be the first

coal-fired station to close. I can confirm for the member that it will close on or before April 30, 2005, as per plan and in spite of the objections of the Conservatives and New Democrats to that important initiative.

We have taken a number of steps already to ensure an adequate electricity supply in the greater Toronto area. First, Hydro One has already redirected a number of transmission lines to provide for that. But more importantly, this government is the first government in many, many years to provide new, clean, non-hydro renewable electricity: wind power, biogas. The Conservatives ignored that; the NDP ignored that. This government, under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, has assured and made certain that conservation will be part of this province's culture. The New Democrats cancelled all conservation programs in Ontario, and the former Tory energy minister said it didn't really work.

We're moving ahead with a cleaner, greener electricity plan, and because of your efforts and the efforts of other members from the Mississauga area, Lakeview will close on or before April 30, 2005.

PETITIONS

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario about supporting chiropractic services in the 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; and

"Whereas 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; and

"Whereas 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

"Whereas 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 have signed my name.

1520

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have thousands more petitions from people concerned about cuts to chiropractic services. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the 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;

"Whereas 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;

"Whereas 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

"Whereas 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 agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): "Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Ontario's three remaining regional centres for people with developmental disabilities, located in Smiths Falls, Orillia and Blenheim, Ontario;

"Whereas the regional centres are home to more than 1,000 disabled adults, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

"Whereas closing the regional centres will have a devastating impact on people with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and economies of the local communities; and

"Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of the regional centres to extend specialized services, support and professional training to thousands more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Ontario's regional centres for people with developmental disabilities open, and to transform them into centres of excellence to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they might live."

This petition is signed by a number of residents from Tilbury, Blenheim, Chatham, Wheatley and beyond.

PET SCANNER

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed by 202 people who are supporting that funding be provided for all patients who use the new PET scanner at

St Joseph's Hospital in London. The majority of these signatures are those of the cancer survivors who were taking part in our Woodstock Cancer Relay for Life on June 18, 2004. As I said, there are 202 signatures on it, to provide that funding for the hospital.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Ontario's three remaining regional centres for people with developmental disabilities, located in Smiths Falls, Orillia and Blenheim, Ontario;

"Whereas the regional centres are home to more than 1,000 disabled adults, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

"Whereas closing the regional centres will have a devastating impact on people with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities; and

"Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of the regional centres to extend specialized services, support and professional training to thousand more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Ontario's regional centres for people with developmental disabilities open, and to transform them into centres of excellence to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live."

It is signed by about 300 people, primarily from the Orillia and southwestern Ontario areas. I am in agreement and affix my signature thereto.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

"Whereas, since Bill 99 was passed in 1997 by the Harris government, the situation for injured workers with respect to income, recognition of their injuries by the compensation system, treatment by the employer and opportunities for re-employment has dramatically deteriorated; and

"Whereas employers have more power today to frustrate and intimidate injured workers and are less accountable for their actions; and

"Whereas employers are increasingly putting greater effort into avoiding reporting of claims and associated costs than into preventing injuries; and

"Whereas the compensation system is increasingly more concerned about minimizing costs for employers than ensuring full compensation for workers; and

"Whereas it is the responsibility of the provincial government to ensure fair and adequate compensation for workers and to ensure healthy and safe workplaces;

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

"To direct the provincial government to immediately:

"Change the name of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board back to the Workers' Compensation Board;

"Implement full cost-of-living protection for injured workers;

"Establish full coverage for all workers and all work-related disabilities and diseases under the compensation system;

"Abolish experience rating which encourages employers to, and rewards them for, hiding occupational injury and illness by giving them money back from their premiums;

"Enforce health and safety in the workplace by hiring more inspectors and sending them to workplaces without giving advance notice to the employer;

"Enforce employer re-employment obligations and abolish provisions which deem workers to be receiving wages from jobs they don't have;

"Conduct a complete review of the workers' compensation system in order to write new legislation which ensures fundamental benefits and rights for workers, including survivors of workers killed on the job, as called for in the CAW Jobs or Full Compensation platform."

I put my signature to this petition as well.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for support for chiropractic services in the Ontario health insurance plan. It reads:

"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 affix my signature in support of this petition.

OPTOMETRISTS

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with the petitioners and I have affixed my signature to this.

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 have signed a previous copy of this petition, and I give this to Nicholas.

1530

TUITION

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

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

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

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

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

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

I’ve affixed my signature as well.

CHIROPRACTIC SERVICES

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the 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;

“Whereas 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;

“Whereas the 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

“Whereas 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 agree with this petition, and I’ve signed it as well.

OPTOMETRISTS

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As I am in agreement with this, I affix my signature.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): This is “Save Our Regional Centres for People with Developmental Disabilities.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government were elected based on their promise to rebuild public services in Ontario;

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Ontario’s three remaining regional centres for people with developmental disabilities, located in Smiths Falls, Orillia and Blenheim, Ontario;

“Whereas the regional centres are home to more than 1,000 disabled adults, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing the regional centres will have a devastating impact on people with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities; and,

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of the regional centres to extend specialized services, support and professional training to thousands more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies,

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Ontario’s regional centres for people with developmental disabilities open, and to transform them into ‘centres of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to

Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I’m pleased to sign my name to this as well.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CONSEIL EXÉCUTIF

Mr Bryant moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 17, An Act to amend the Executive Council Act /
Projet de loi 17, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Conseil
exécutif.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to conduct this afternoon’s proceedings on Bill 17 as follows:

The time available for debate, up till 5:50 pm, shall be apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At 5:50 pm, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of Bill 17 without further debate or amendment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): If the debate doesn’t take till 5:50 pm, I assume we would adjourn thereafter?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Agreed? Agreed.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: According to the motion, if the debate goes to 5:50, we put the question at that time. If the debate collapses before that time, I will then put the question at 10 minutes to 6.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: At the time. There, now it’s clear—and the vote will be deferred.

OK, we’re ready to go. Mr Bryant?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): It’s a pleasure to lead off the debate on this bill. We believe the Legislature matters. I hope everybody in this Legislature agrees with that. This bill is about accountability. It’s about setting up some minimum rules to ensure accountability in this House. We’re doing so by way of a bill which, if passed, will entrench some rules as a commitment of this government to ensure that that critical moment of accountability that happens in our parliamentary democracy—that is to say, question period—is in fact respected and observed in a fashion that sees the Premier and members of the executive council here on a regular basis, in attendance for question period.

The bill underlies our commitment to having the Legislature work better for the people of Ontario. We are

taking action to strengthen our democratic institutions. Bill 17 is one example of that commitment in action, and I'll be speaking about a few others.

Before I forget—there are going to be some distinguished speakers, I know, on both sides of the House speaking to this—I'll be sharing my time with the members for Kitchener Centre, London-Fanshawe, Etobicoke-Lakeshore, and Bramalea-Gore Malton-Springdale.

In December of last year, as the first step toward renewing democracy in Ontario, pursuant to our commitment made well before the last election to renew our democratic institutions, we made a number of changes and announced those changes, including amendments to the Executive Council Act.

If passed, the bill would require cabinet ministers to attend at least two thirds of all question periods over a government's term in office. We believe that cabinet ministers should be in the Legislature to be asked questions in question period, participate in debate and be publicly accountable to the people of Ontario for their actions. It should be self-evident. I think most people would agree that cabinet ministers and the first minister, the Premier, should be here to answer questions. It's obviously a fundamental part of our parliamentary system.

Why are we doing it? We're doing it, in part, to entrench the commitment. We're doing it, in part, because it has not always been the case that we have had a situation where we felt that the level of accountability by the executive council was reflected in their attendance in question period. So this way, we are setting a standard for this government and leading by example by ensuring that we attend question period at least two thirds of the time. The bill is obviously before the Legislature, but we have been ensuring even before the bill is passed—if it passes, after we consider debate in this House—that the Premier and cabinet ministers are here on a regular basis, and we are.

1540

This bill will confirm that this is the place in which elected MPPs hold the government and the executive council to account, not only here but before the cameras, so that people watching at home can get answers to questions about what the government of the day is doing. The bill will strengthen the foundations of the parliamentary system: ministers of the crown being answerable to the members of this House during question period and, through members, to the people.

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): That's the way it's supposed to be.

Hon Mr Bryant: It is the way it's supposed to be, my great seatmate says. I guess this is self-evident. The only criticism I've heard about this bill so far is that it really shouldn't have to be necessary, and the reality is, I wish it weren't. There is not only an important principle but an opportunity here in that we're not only entrenching this requirement for attendance, we're also doing so

by way of statute in a way that is quintessentially Canadian.

It is not the case in all other Legislatures of the Commonwealth that members of cabinet or the Premier have to be in attendance to the extent to which we are here in Ontario. In the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister must be present for question period for 15 minutes, two times a week. For the other ministers, they answer questions by way of a roster. They're rostered, so though there may be an important issue of the day before the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, the shadow cabinet member is not able to stand up and ask a question to his or her counterpart about that particular issue. In fact, the way it works out is that a minister is up about once every 15 days to answer questions, whereas here in Ontario, and rightly so, in varying levels across Canada and also in the federal House of Commons, we have a requirement that the Premier and cabinet ministers are here in question period every day and we can be asked a question any day, and sometimes more than one, particularly if you're the Minister of the Environment, who tends to get a lot of questions, it seems.

Interjection: Good answers too.

Hon Mr Bryant: Excellent answers.

Also, in the United Kingdom, the minister gets a heads-up as to what the question is going to be. Written notice is provided to the minister, who gets a question every 15 days, as to when it's going to take place. That's not a criticism of that House, but that is their tradition.

Our tradition is that the Premier and cabinet regularly be here to answer questions, and this bill entrenches that very important Ontario convention and tradition in a way that will ensure that no matter what the rules of the House are, in the event that this bill passes, as long as it is the law of Ontario, that will be the requirement. It is not just a procedural matter, I would submit; I think it is also an important historical opportunity for us to say, "Here is how our Legislature works."

I hope we're all in agreement that we need to do everything we can to make this Legislature work better, to make our parliamentary system work better and to make our democratic system work better. A lot of parties will talk about that from time to time, but what we are doing with our democratic renewal agenda is actually implementing all of these reforms that many people, frankly, have been talking about for many years. So this bill is just part of our democratic renewal initiative. It is the most ambitious agenda for democratic renewal in the history of this province since Confederation.

Recently, the Premier and I announced an examination of our electoral system by a citizens' assembly. This citizens' assembly will be not unlike the citizens' assembly that was convened in the province of British Columbia, in that it will be a random selection of citizens undertaken by the chief electoral officer, who, after the random selection has been done, will then ask citizens whether or not they want to participate, and if they do, then they will. As was undertaken in British Columbia, we'll make sure that we have complete gender balance

and, of course, complete regional representation from across the province as well.

Never before has a government in Ontario given citizens such a direct role in shaping how our political process works. It is to say to the people, "You have inherited a certain electoral system," as the Premier often says. This is an opportunity for the people to say whether or not they think it works and whether or not we need changes to it. In the event that the citizens' assembly recommends that changes indeed need to be made, we will put that question to the people by way of a referendum.

We will also set up a citizens' jury to consider a new political finance regime that will ensure that people have confidence when it comes to the role of money and politics and the members of this Legislature. What better way to determine whether or not the people have confidence than to put it to the people by way of a citizens' jury? Again, that jury would be selected randomly. We would require the chief electoral officer's assistance in choosing potential candidates for the citizens' jury, and if they're willing to participate, then they will.

We're also seeking to involve young Ontarians by asking them to help us find new ways for all Ontarians to get involved in the democratic process. We're doing that specifically in a couple of ways. One is to say that we aren't going to have the youth engagement process alone and not do our best to try to ensure that we are involving young Ontarians in all our democratic renewal agendas. So there isn't the kids' democratic renewal process and then the grown-ups'; we want young Ontarians to be involved in both.

When it comes to engaging young Ontarians, instead of presuming that we know what the problems are and instead of presuming that we know what the prescriptions are, we are turning to young Ontarians, those who are already quite active with respect to youth engagement—people like Taylor Gunn, who has been running the Kids Voting operation that has been so hugely successful across the province, and many others. The goal, of course, is to get to some young people who heretofore had not been remotely interested in politics or government or Parliament or matters public. The goal is to get them more interested, more engaged and more involved, and we're doing it by going to them first. So they're going to be designing a process.

We launched this about two weeks ago. At the time, it was very well received by them, I think I can say accurately, in that we were asking them to design some initiatives and opportunities to improve youth engagement, to take steps toward democratic renewal by engaging them like never before.

Why are we doing this? I think everybody senses this significant malaise among the populace when it comes to confidence in matters political, legislative, parliamentary and governmental. The system of government that we have was established in 1867. Much of it remains to be commended, but it is one that is over a century old. We have not had a serious opportunity for citizens to have a

say as to whether or not this particular electoral system, this particular political finance system that we have, is one which they feel is accurately reflective, operational, functional and accountable for Ontarians.

Our democracy is rooted in the British parliamentary tradition. Certainly, it evolved over the centuries to its current form. It's a good system, it has served us well, and nobody is denying that. Today, Ontario is unparalleled in the strength of its democracy and the opportunities it offers, but there are obviously some disturbing signs as to the state of democracy as we know it.

1550

Our institutions were developed, one might say, for the industrial age, and we're now in the information age. Our institutions were developed for a different time and place, and we are seeing the effects. Now, some will say that in fact those institutions have in small and important ways undertaken reforms to reflect the needs of the day. Others would say that not enough has been done. Fundamental reforms have never truly been looked at.

One of the most disturbing signs of this malaise, of course, is voter turnout. Barely half of eligible voters participated in the last provincial election. The participation rate has steadily and rapidly declined in the past several elections. I think members of this House know this, particularly when you're knocking on doors when there isn't an election. Obviously, people become more engaged during an election, but in the early days of an election when people are figuring out when elections are—by the way, I'll have a word on that in a moment—and otherwise, when we canvass, as many of us do, in between elections, there's a really palpable sense. It's not unusual for the door to open and for somebody to say, "Oh, politics? You're a politician? Never mind." The door closes. Maybe that's just me in St Paul's. I think that's what the member opposite would like to say.

But I think we all know and feel, as we go door to door sometimes, and as we interact with members of the community, whether it be through a town hall meeting or otherwise, that many, many people are just tuned out of this business that we do, and yet it is such important business that we do. There is no doubt in my mind that, outside of the family, this is the most important secular institution in people's day-to-day lives.

We collect people's hard-earned taxes, and we spend their money. We spend their money on the most critical services that any secular institution outside of the family can provide to people: their health care, their education, the air that they breathe, the water they drink and the safety of their streets, to name only a few. That is the ascendancy of the importance of provincial government and provincial Legislatures, which were definitely, without a doubt, the farm team at the time of Confederation and which have now become a level of government, I think, that provides the most important services.

It is important for us to be relevant and engaged with the people of Ontario. This is even more true, I'd say, for young Ontarians. The statistics are dismal in terms of their voter turnout and, as a result of that, we have a

tautology of those not participating and feeling that they are not represented appropriately. We're going to change that.

I talked just a minute ago about elections, and in the early days of an election, we all get the same question: "Oh, was an election called?" Some people missed it, some people didn't, and when you're out there knocking on doors or, in my case, out there in front of subway stops, bus stops or at community events, sometimes they'll see me out there, and I'll say hi, and they'll say, "What, is there an election going on?" Why? They're cynical. They don't accept or appreciate or understand that there are many members in this House who are very active in between elections in trying to represent their communities.

On the election front, of course, we have introduced a bill that will fix the date of elections. As long as that is the law of Ontario, if the bill passes, that will fix elections on the first Thursday of October every four years, starting from the last election on the first Thursday of October about a year and a bit ago, so people will know when the elections are and so that the government of the day, the incumbent party, will not have that inherent advantage that every other previous incumbent government had.

So I believe that this is an important component of our democratic renewal agenda. There are many more components that I know other members may wish to speak of: new powers for the Provincial Auditor to go where the Provincial Auditor has never gone before; pre-election audits to ensure that people know from the auditor as to what the books are going into an election; the banning of partisan advertising so taxpayer dollars are not spent on one of the most cynical exercises that turn off voters and the citizens and residents of Ontario more than anything else; and a Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act that, for the first time, if now passed, will disclose the salaries of Hydro One and OPG employees.

I hope we're able to get support of all parties on this particular bill. It's up to those parties to express their concerns, wishes or thoughts about it. It is about entrenching an important principle and convention that we've long had and need to have in Ontario, and we want to make sure it is not observed in the breach in this province. I ask members for their support.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition):

In case you were curious about what the position of the Progressive Conservative Party might be with respect to Bill 17, probably the best word to describe our position might be, or our view, anyway, is bemusement. It is not surprising that the minister didn't deal at length with the legislation itself because really there's not much here. What is here, you don't know whether to laugh or cry with respect to this piece of legislation.

We talk about priorities of the government, the full agenda, and how they want to get on with the important business of the people, and they put legislation like this in front of us which is in effect, I think, an insult to the

intelligence of the Ontario electorate and certainly an insult to the members of the current executive council. They don't have enough confidence in their showing up in this place to represent their portfolio responsibilities if they have to introduce legislation to compel them and obligate them to do what they're being paid to do. That is passing strange, to say the very least.

We can look at a whole range of initiatives that this government has introduced where they're telling the public, the hard-working taxpayers of Ontario, that we have this enormous agenda that we have to get through, that we have to get through, and they bring in legislation like this, and they bring in legislation like bring-your-own-booze, they bring in legislation like pit bills, which addresses clearly, in that particular instance, a real concern of many people, but they do it in such a way that it lacks complete consultation with people who may have some intelligent observations to offer and would assist the government and members of this place in the drafting of comprehensive and effective legislation. No, they do the knee-jerk public relations thing, and the bring-your-own-booze was another example of that in this legislation, obligating the members of the executive council to appear in this House.

The minister suggests that that is part of this overall effort to bring democratic reform to Ontario. Of course, those of us who are here on a daily basis know that that doesn't stand up to scrutiny either. I was listening to the minister talking about, and I wrote down a couple of the things he said, "This is the place to hold the government to account, to get answers, the way it should be." I don't think that any of us would disagree with that, yet we're living the reality here on a day-to-day basis. In terms of trying to get answers to very serious questions and serious concerns of people in Ontario on a regular basis, we don't get that.

We asked specific questions, as an example today, related to a taxpayer-funded poll, which was what we call a poll to drive people's views with respect to negotiations with the Ontario Hospital Association. Specifically, I think we asked something like six individual questions on that poll: why it occurred, what was the intent, what was the cost etc. Not once were any of those direct questions answered in a direct way. The Premier took the opportunity to talk about issues that he wanted to talk about. Fair game, I guess; that's the way the place works. That's the reality of this place. That's one other element, I believe, when we talk about disillusionment among the electorate, when they tune this place in—question period. That's the part of this operation, I suspect, that gets the most attention from the viewing public, and they expect when questions are posed that answers will be delivered. That is consistently and regrettably not the case.

1600

When we talk about this whole issue of democratic reform in the broader context—I mentioned this in a private members' debate last week, I guess it was—this is the flavour of the day. We talk about proportional representation, and I'm certainly prepared to take a look

at that issue, but I think that when we look at disillusionment among the electorate, we should, as an assembly, be taking on the responsibility of exploring this issue, the broader issue of disillusionment—not the proportional representation issue, but disillusionment.

Why are fewer and fewer people participating in the democratic process? Why are we getting these declining turnouts at provincial, federal and municipal elections? I believe the dean of our caucus, the dean of the Legislature, Mr Sterling, has suggested an all-party select committee to take a look at this issue. Then we can determine where to go. What are the problems causing these folks to become disillusioned?

I've been around here going on 24 years and I suspect one of the reasons, which we've seen growing in this country over the past 30 or 40 years, is the increasing amount of influence, if you will, vested in the corner office, the Premier's office, in a group of unelected officials who surround the Premier of the day and have much greater influence on decisions affecting the impact on the province—

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Leslie Noble.

Mr Runciman: I'll say it has happened in all governments. I'm not being partisan about this. You want to interject in a partisan way? I'll come back at you in a partisan way. But I've been around here for Premiers of all provinces, of all political parties, and it happened with all of them. That's the reality and it's happening with you today. Unelected people around Premier McGuinty have more influence than you do as an elected official. It happened with Mike Harris, Ernie Eves and Bob Rae. It certainly happened with David Peterson. It happened, when I was first elected, with Premier Davis. That's the reality. That's the way this system is set up. To me, that has created growing disillusionment with the impact that all of us in this place can have on important issues facing us as legislators in Ontario.

You want to be political about it? You want to bury your head in the sand? Fine and dandy. But that's the reality. That's one of the root causes of disillusionment in this country, not just in the province of Ontario. We certainly see it at the federal level. We've seen it for years and years. If we don't come to grips with that, no matter what we do on the surface with proportional representation or initiatives in this place, we're not going to have the impact we hope to have. That's my view. Accept it, scoff at it, what you will, but that is my view. I would like to see us start to take a look at these kinds of meaningful issues.

I know this is a dynamite issue in many parts of the province, let alone the country, and it certainly, probably, would be in my part of the country, and that's this whole question of separation of the executive and legislative branches. Is that something we perhaps should be looking at in this country? Obviously it requires constitutional change, but I believe those are the kinds of big issues we should be taking on. We should be taking them on, playing a meaningful role in this place and taking a look at these kinds of significant issues as to how we can

really address disillusionment and the turning off of the electorate and the hard-working taxpayers, not only in Ontario but in Canada.

We can lead the way in this largest province in this great country by looking at these issues. If you want to do something that's dynamic, innovative and exciting, I suggest to the Attorney General, the minister responsible for democratic reform, that's perhaps the sort of thing we should be looking at as an assembly, and not looking at it in the partisan way in which we always tend to do, and we're all guilty of that.

I don't think our party is going to oppose this legislation. There's no point in opposing it. We don't see that it's going to perform any useful function. As I indicated earlier, I think that in some ways it's a slap in the face to the current occupants of chairs around the executive council table. But we won't prolong the debate any longer.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? I recognize the member for Kitchener Centre.

Mr Milloy: Thank you—

The Deputy Speaker: I'm open. I get a frown.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Kitchener Centre.

Mr Milloy: It's a pleasure to participate in this debate on Bill 17 and follow the remarks of the gentleman from Leeds-Grenville and also the minister. I want to congratulate the minister on the bill. This is part of a series of pieces of legislation that he has brought forward.

The minister has referred to the contents of the bill. Essentially, it requires cabinet ministers to attend two thirds of all question periods, and there is a \$500 fine for those who can't attend, or who don't attend.

When you look at this bill, it deals with two things. First of all, it fulfills our commitment to do things differently. Second, as the member from Leeds-Grenville pointed out, it fights the cynicism that exists sometimes in Ontario when it comes to politics. A lot of people have asked themselves various questions about government. They see government as being outmoded and as not being reflective of the times.

I have spoken in this House before about how after the last election, when we had the incident with Mr Peters coming forward to show that the books of the province were not in the shape that had been proclaimed during the election by the government, individuals came to me and said, "Why can't we have a government that comes forward and asks the auditor to take a look at the books before the election and report on them just prior to the election?" There is no good answer to that, which is why we brought forward legislation, the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, to do just that.

Others have asked me why the Provincial Auditor is limited in his or her powers. Right now, when it comes to those institutions which receive grants from the provincial government, if we're talking about universities, colleges, school boards and hospitals, which I think account for 60% of the government's expenditures, the

Provincial Auditor has no power, has no control to go out and deal with them. So people have said to me, “Why can’t the Provincial Auditor go and do value-for-money audits? Why are we limited with so much of the money going out the door?” Yet again there is no good answer, which is why we brought forward changes to the Audit Act to create an Auditor General who can have that sort of power.

Then there is the issue of fixed election dates, which the Attorney General spoke about, the issue being that for year three, year two and 364 day onwards, governments come to a standstill. At that point, for the final year, the bureaucracy sits around waiting for that proper poll or that wonderful focus group which is going to call a government to move forward and actually call the election. Now we have a fixed election date: October 4, 2007. Mark it on your calendar, because that’s the moment when we’ll be going to the people and, I would argue, having an electoral system which is much more workable and which addresses some of these concerns.

We can talk about partisan advertising, a bill which is right now, I believe, being examined at one of the committees. Why for so many years have we seen governments send out glossy brochures telling everyone how much they are doing for health care or education? How many constituents have said to me, “Why don’t you spend that money on health care or education instead of buying these glossy partisan brochures?”

It’s all about taking a fresh approach. It’s all about coming forward and doing things which make sense. It’s unfortunate that the previous government has maligned the term “common sense” and made it into something that’s partisan, because the fact is that we need more common sense in government. We need more people who will go forward and ask the types of questions that my constituents have asked, and, when there aren’t good answers, move forward.

I think it makes sense that we have a system whereby cabinet ministers show up for work. If you were to ask the people of Kitchener Centre who go to work every day whether cabinet ministers should be in the Legislature to be accountable to the opposition, to be accountable to the people of Ontario, I think they would agree that that’s a good thing. They would see that imposing a fine means we finally have teeth, that we are telling the people of Ontario that we take the job of governing seriously, that we want to bring forward the types of democratic changes needed to make sure we are a government that is reflective of the times, a government that’s moving forward.

That’s why I welcome Bill 17 and I’m pleased to stand and support the minister. Yet again we’re coming forward with something that we promised in the election and delivering on it.

1610

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I’m at last pleased to be able to take part in this debate. Let me say I want to make a few brief comments, because I

know there are important matters to deal with out there. There are really important matters to be dealt with in Ontario.

The part of Ontario that I’m from has lost 6,000 jobs in the last year, and they’re going to lose more. The Association of Major Power Consumers says that if the McGuinty government goes down the road of their electricity privatization plan, it will close more paper mills, more pulp mills, more mining operations, more smelting operations and more steel mills. We should be dealing with that.

I know, for example, that there are lots of autistic children in Ontario who were promised by the Premier in the last election that they would have access to what is called IBI treatment. I’d like to be dealing with that issue.

There are important issues in terms of college and university students who can’t afford to pay their tuition fees, who are going increasingly into debt, many of whom are saying, “I can’t afford to go to college or university. Even though I want to go and I’m qualified to go, I don’t have the money.” I’d like to be dealing with that issue, because those are really important issues.

Then there’s the issue of parents who are forced to rely upon social assistance, who have watched the cost of living go up by some 35% over the last 10 years. They can’t pay the rent. It’s hard to put food on the table; it’s hard to provide clothing for their children. I know the Premier promised he was going to end the clawback of the national child benefit so that these parents would have enough money to put food on the table, to pay the rent and to send their children to school with a lunch and perhaps some new clothes. I’d like to be dealing with that issue, because those are real people, real lives, people who are being hurt and in some cases in ways that will affect them for a lifetime.

I just read the Provincial Auditor’s report. Despite the fact that the Walkerton tragedy happened four years ago, that seven people died as a result of the tainted water and thousands remain ill—illnesses that will last for the rest of their lives—the Provincial Auditor tells us that the province of Ontario is no further ahead today in terms of protecting safe drinking water or protecting the quality of water than we were. I’d like to be dealing with that issue, because people’s lives are involved and we could do something about that.

Similarly with air quality, the Provincial Auditor says that the air quality index this government uses is useless. It’s out of date. It doesn’t provide people with accurate information. We know from the Ontario Medical Association that people are dying in this province from bad air and other people are being afflicted such that they will have lifelong illnesses as a result of bad air. I’d like to be dealing with that, because that’s important. That matters to people. People’s lives and people’s health are at stake. I think it’s important that we deal with that.

There are several other issues: Municipalities: Every municipality I’ve spoken to in the last year—they’ve all got the same plea. After all of the downloading of responsibilities that happened—seniors’ housing, social

housing, child care, land ambulance, fire, water, policing—after the downloading of all the costs and responsibilities of all those important services, they still have only one main source of revenue: the property tax. Many municipalities don't know how they're going to do it and, frankly, I don't know either. That's important. We should be dealing with that issue. That's what we should be addressing here: important issues that affect people's lives.

But do you know what, Speaker? We don't get to deal with those. Do you know why? Because we have to debate a bill that even the minister who is responsible for it didn't want to talk about today. Do you know why? Because he's embarrassed by it. It's embarrassing. It is frankly an affront to this Legislature to even be talking about this piece of nonsense. That's what it is. It's rubbish. The time of the Legislature shouldn't be taken up with this, but you know what? This is a priority of the McGuinty government.

Let me tell you what's in Bill 17 and how absurd, how ridiculous, how wasteful of our time it is. The bill amends the Executive Council Act to provide a purely nominal requirement that "ministers must attend question period on at least two-thirds of the days on which the House holds routine proceedings." That sounds good. That sounds like cabinet ministers will have to attend question period. But then you read the fine print, and it says they can be absent and if the Premier excuses them, it doesn't matter. I say, what's changed? Without this bill the Premier can say to his cabinet ministers, "You be in question period, and you answer the questions," and he can tell them, "If you're not in question period, you won't be a cabinet minister any more." The Premier could do that today, so what comes with this bill? Nothing. This is a waste of legislators' time, it is a waste of taxpayers' money, and it is a waste, frankly, of the time of the citizens and voters of Ontario.

Let me read some of the other fine print, because it gets more ridiculous: "At the end of every session ... a status report showing each minister's attendance at question period" will be prepared by the Premier's office. But what difference does it make? The Premier can simply say, "I excuse you. I excuse you." So it makes no difference whatsoever. Again, it's complete nonsense. Then it says that the Premier assesses "a penalty of \$500 for each day of non-attendance." You know what? The Premier could do that now. The Premier could say, "You weren't in question period 20% of the time. Give back 20% of your pay or you're out of cabinet."

What does this bill do? Nothing, absolutely nothing. That's why the minister didn't want to debate it. That's why he was too embarrassed to mention this bill. That's why he talked about everything other than this bill, because it is so ridiculous, it is so stupid, it is such a waste of legislators' time. I want to on, because you know what? The more you read about this, the more ridiculous and absurd it becomes.

There is a history to this, a great irony to this, as a matter of fact. On April 26, 2001, George Smitherman—

we know him now as furious George, who goes around the province attacking the doctors, attacking the hospitals, attacking the lowest-paid workers in the hospitals, telling the nurse practitioners to buzz off. That's how we know him now. But George Smitherman, then, thought that he had another brilliant attack strategy. He was going to attack, so he brought in a private member's bill that said that cabinet ministers would lose \$100 of their pay if they missed 60% of the question periods.

All right. He thought this was a way that was going to embarrass somebody. But do you know who got embarrassed? Ironically, it was the then leader of the official opposition, Dalton McGuinty, because in the next session of the Legislature he skipped 21 out of 31 question periods. He was missing two thirds of the time.

The Deputy Speaker: The member knows that you shouldn't refer specifically to other members' absences, and I would ask that you take that into consideration.

Mr Hampton: I apologize, Speaker, and I take that back, but it is difficult to discuss this bill without talking about what really went on and how absurd it is. But I'll take that back.

Anyway, it's just to say that as a result of this private member's bill, some members of the official opposition got caught in their own trap and were embarrassed by it, and they should have been embarrassed by it. In fact, I think this private member's bill should have been ruled out of order when an attempt was made to introduce it, because if I can't refer to a member's presence or absence here directly, someone shouldn't be able to refer to it indirectly. But that's water under the bridge. Now Liberals will get to live in the bed that they made, and that's what's happening here.

1620

So here's where we are: That's what led to the introduction of this silly, absurd, bizarre, ridiculous and nonsensical piece of legislation. But do you know what? When you further read the fine print, it gets even sillier. Read some of the actual sections. The essence of it is that the Premier polices his cabinet. Well, that's the way it is now, without this bill. The Premier can tomorrow say, "Rick Bartolucci, you're gone from cabinet." He can say to the Minister of Health, "You're gone from cabinet."

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): You can grieve.

Mr Hampton: "You can grieve," says one of the aspiring cabinet ministers.

Mr Patten: No, I was there. I've had it.

Mr Hampton: When you heckle, you get some retort. Anyway, this bill doesn't change anything, it doesn't do anything, it doesn't add anything. It's a complete waste of our time, but it's a government priority that we debate this nonsense.

I want to refer to subsection 7(2) of the bill. It states that "if the Premier is of the opinion that the absence is justified because of illness, bereavement, a religious holiday or some similar reason," then the absence doesn't count. The Premier can do that now. He doesn't need this ridiculous bill.

Let me read subsection 7(3), which states, “A day on which a minister is absent from the chamber during part but not all of the period set aside for oral questions is not counted as an absence for the purpose of this section if the Premier is of the opinion that the absence is permissible.” What’s changed? The Premier can do that now. He doesn’t need to be tying up precious legislative time for this nonsense. So on it goes. There are more and more exceptions.

I listened carefully to the minister’s speech, because I wanted to see if he’d actually mention this bill. He was too embarrassed to mention it. But do you know what? He started talking about voters becoming cynical. Let me tell you what makes voters cynical. When people learn about this kind of nonsense, that governments are wasting their time on this kind of nonsense, this kind of absurdity, this kind of silliness, it leads people to be cynical. People say, “I can’t believe this. Why would any serious person spend their time on this kind of nonsense?”

Let me tell you something else that makes voters and citizens generally cynical. What makes them very cynical is when a Premier, then Leader of the Opposition, rhymes off promise after promise after promise after promise. I can’t count them any more. Somebody said that there were 231; other people say, if you read the fine print, it works out to something like 331. What makes people cynical is when someone like the Premier promises the sun, the moon and the stars while he’s out there trolling for votes and then, the day after the election, tries to pretend that he didn’t make any of those promises or that if he did make those promises they don’t count any more, they don’t matter. That’s what makes people cynical. That’s what turns people off. That’s what leads people to say, “What’s the use? Why should I bother to vote, when the day after the election he or she is simply going to say, ‘Oh, that was then. I’m elected now. I can just ignore all those promises?’” That’s what makes people cynical.

I’ll give you some further examples, because the minister referred to this. I remember when Premier Dalton McGuinty was on this side of the Legislature. On the issue of doctors and the health care community, for example, he used to thunder and roar at the former government, saying they were attacking public servants, they were attacking nurses, they were attacking doctors, and they were demeaning and vilifying and undermining dedicated health care providers. He used to say that, and he used to vilify the former government.

I look at what’s gone on with the current Minister of Health and the current Premier, in terms of going out there and trying to undermine hospital administrators and volunteer hospital boards, suggesting, as the Minister of Health did, that the way you find money in the health care system is to attack the lowest-paid workers in the hospital system—the cleaners. That’s how you’re going to save lots of money.

As we saw earlier this week—and I just saw another letter from physicians today. To do what the Minister of Health and the Premier did last Friday—to literally

connive a situation where they attacked the physicians of the province, where they vilified the physicians of the province, where they used what can only be described as cynical push-polling to try to undermine the physicians of the province.

I saw a blistering letter today from a group that formerly supported the government’s position, in terms of the doctors’ agreement going forward, saying that the tactics—and they list them: the cheap politics, the vilifying of physicians, the humiliation of physicians—are going to do great damage, that the very agenda in terms of primary health care reform that the government wants to move forward on may, and in fact likely will, be undermined by the government’s underhanded tactics.

Let me tell you, that creates cynicism. That creates an attitude among voters where they say, “Thirteen months ago, he said he would never do that. Thirteen months ago, he used to criticize the former government for doing that. Now he’s doing worse.” That creates cynicism.

Let me tell all members that it will make all our jobs that much more difficult. It will make our work in here that much more difficult, it will make our work out there on doorsteps that much more difficult and it will make governance of the province that much more difficult. Despite whatever partisan hide you may lose in this exercise that you put together last Friday, it will hurt all of us.

Do you what I’d like the minister responsible for democratic renewal to do? Please withdraw this bill that you wouldn’t even speak to in your own speech, that you took great pains to avoid referring to in your own speech. Have the decency to withdraw it. Recognize that it was a bad idea, that it’s more of the cheap politics that the physicians are now so angry with you about. In fact, this very bill undermines this place, undervalues this place, demeans the work we all do. Have the decency to recognize that and withdraw this piece of nonsense, because you know and I know it is nothing but a piece of cheap propaganda designed to get a one-day or two-day headline, but it is not productive in terms of this Legislature, it’s not helpful in terms of the work legislators do here and frankly it’s completely out of place.

So I say to the minister, the proper thing to do, the right thing to do, if you’re truly interested in democratic renewal, would be to withdraw this legislation, because it is silly, it is bizarre, it is absurd and it accomplishes nothing that the Premier couldn’t do already by exercising his authority as the Premier of the province.

I could have lots more to say, because there is lots more to say about the issues that aren’t being dealt with that should be dealt with here, that urgently need to be debated here. That’s what we should be doing. That’s why I’m not going to spend any more time on this bill. Withdraw it, get it out of here and let’s deal with the issues that really matter to the people of Ontario.

1630

Mr Sterling: I associate myself with many of the remarks the leader of the third party put forward. This, in fact, is one of the silliest bills I have seen in this Legis-

lature. But there is some damaging effect to this bill. Not only is it wasting the time of the Legislature, but it also demeans the character of our cabinet ministers. I don't believe that cabinet ministers should be subject to a school-like attendance report. I don't believe that some of the most respected—or they should be the most respected—people in our province should be subject to this kind of thing.

We've heard so much about the power of the centre, the power of the Premier, and the Premier does have unbelievable power under our system. When he was in opposition, and during the campaign, we heard the Premier talk about giving the individual MPPs more latitude, more freedom, to do what they should or shouldn't do in this place. As I've mentioned before, we've not yet seen any MPP from the back of the Liberal benches vote against any one of the 40-plus bills. So we haven't seen a dissemination of the powers from the Premier out to the members; it has actually been the other way.

It's odd, too, that we're giving an afternoon of debate to this particular piece of legislation, which is actually nothing, and we're not having one minute of debate on what the citizens' committee is going to do. That has been a fiat of this government. This government has said, "We, the Liberal government of Ontario, the Liberal Party of Ontario, are going to make the decision as to how this citizens' committee is going to be set up and what their mandate is going to be." I presume they're going to tell them what the reporting mechanism is going to be etc.

It's amazing that a phony attendance record kept by the Premier of Ontario about his cabinet ministers is more important than consideration of proportional representation in this province.

We've had two other pieces of democratic reform legislation as well. One has been the fixed election date, which has been acknowledged by the media as nothing more than a mere promise by Dalton McGuinty to hold an election on October 4, 2007, as he has the power to walk down the hall to the Lieutenant Governor's office at any moment between now and five years, I guess, to October 2, 2008, and call the election. So that particular bill amounts to a promise by Dalton McGuinty to hold an election on that particular date. That's part of the other leg of democratic reform.

The other one relates to this pre-election audit. In our parliamentary system, an election can happen by the Premier walking down the hall and calling an election when he would like it, or after a vote in this House, in terms of a non-confidence vote passing, although that's very unlikely with this government. If that did happen, of course, there wouldn't be time for this audit. Within that bill, there are also all kinds of opportunities for the government to just bow out and say, "We're not going to do it."

So we have three useless pieces of election-like democratic reforms, so that they can hold out to the public that in fact something is happening.

The last one, proportional representation, does mean something. It is an important electoral reform. Because our institution at Queen's Park has been here for 137 years, I don't think any member of this Legislature thinks that we should go ahead with this kind of reform lightly or necessarily quickly if it's going to have a tremendous effect on what happens here.

My concern with this particular path the government has set out has been that they haven't really sat down with members of the Legislature, many, many of whom have a lot of experience. I have a lot of experience, Mr Speaker, as you know. I've been here since 1977 and have served as government House leader, and as a cabinet minister in Mr Davis's government. I've been a cabinet minister in Mr Harris's government and Mr Eves's government, I've been in opposition on a couple of occasions, and I've been in two minority Parliaments etc.

I think the prudent approach would be for the government to sit down and say, "Let's have a talk about this, maybe not only with our present members, but let's get in some of the people who were representatives and sat as MPPs in this place. Let's talk to them about what should be involved in, perhaps, this voting reform, what should happen in this place, how we can actually make this place more functional." Because it has become dysfunctional, particularly over the time since we allowed TV cameras into this place.

There was a marked difference when TV cameras came into the Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately, even though we were warned by our federal counterparts that it wasn't a very smart thing to do, we did it. It's very difficult to argue that you shouldn't have TV cameras in your Legislature and that the public shouldn't see what you're doing and all the rest of it, so there's no retreating on it. But there's no question that when that happened in 1987 or 1988, there was a significant change in the behaviour of the members of this Legislature, and a very much more partisan edge took place in terms of the debate etc.

We really do have problems here. We have power that is overwhelmingly concentrated at the centre. We have a lack of independence in terms of members of this Legislature. We really have no independent accountability for the decisions we make. When you're sitting as a back-bencher, as an MPP for the government, all you do is say, "How did you vote on this particular matter?" "I'm a member of the government. This was a government bill. I supported it." End of story.

Therefore, members of the government don't feel—and this is true for members on the other side. In the eight elections I participated in, of course I wouldn't have been asked this in the first election, but in the subsequent seven elections I don't think I was ever asked, "Why did you vote yea or nay on a particular piece of legislation?" I don't think I was ever asked the question. That's because the people of Ontario have become accustomed to the argument that you vote with the government, or you vote with your party. There's no individual independence or freedom to do what you think should be

done for your constituents, and that is reflected in the debate in this place.

The debate in this place is abysmal at times. It's usually partisan. It usually has little to do with the piece of legislation in front of us. Therefore, it's very difficult to sit in this place and listen to it on a long-term basis. I often have one ear cocked for a good speaker in this Legislature, which unfortunately comes too seldom, but I often bring reading material and read while I'm in this Legislature, or try to do some other work.

In my view, being in this place for 27 years, and as I say, being the government House leader and having actually instituted some fairly significant reforms, or the most significant reforms in this place that have had some positive effect on individual members—it was at my initiation that the committee bill was initiated. I copied the Saskatchewan Legislature in bringing forward the opportunity for the government House leader to put a bill out after first reading, which has been done successfully, I think, by our government—I don't know whether this government has put one out after first reading—with regard to getting a more co-operative effort by members of the committee, to not feel that they were cornered on a vote and had to take a position on second reading debate before they got out to committee and really found out what the matter was about. You can do that with certain kinds of issues.

1640

During my parliamentary career, I have tried to make this place work a little bit in the positions that I've held, either in opposition as a House leader or deputy House leader or as the government House leader, which I was for three years from 1997 to 1999.

One of the problems that we have in this Legislature, and one of the things that I think we should really address if we want to change this place around, is that we've got to talk about the financial authority not only resting in the hands of the cabinet. I can never forget Bob Nixon, who was a former leader of the Liberal Party, saying to me, when we were in opposition in 1987 or 1988, "Norm, you don't have any role in legislating. You're in opposition. Norm, you have one job, and that job is to embarrass us." That's what Bob Nixon told me in 1987 or 1988, and he's right. We really have one job here, and that's not to be constructive. That is, in fact, the way the system plays out.

I think that's wrong. I have been constructive in opposition. I forced the government to bring forward the first piece of legislation controlling smoking in the workplace. I started in 1985, hammered forward with seven private member's bills, from 1985 to 1989, and asked embarrassing questions in this Legislature about smoking policies in the government.

Mr Hampton: He wouldn't go home at night.

Mr Sterling: I did not give up. I really, truly believed I had a goal in that.

I also had a constructive role in opposition with the NDP government, in 1991 and 1992, with regard to enduring powers of attorney and the Mental Health Act. I

worked very constructively with them. Those two issues are good examples of where you can do something, but it's not happening now. It hasn't happened for the last 10 or 15 years.

One of the problems we have here is that as we go out and try to reform this place, we should really not look at proportional representation in isolation, because there can be many forms of proportional representation. New Zealand has a system where they have 46% of their Parliament elected by proportional representation and 56% by first past the post. Members there will tell you that they want to keep it, but they will also tell you that some of the people who are appointed through the proportional representation system are lazy, unaccountable and don't do their work etc, and those who represent a constituency geographically are very upset with their colleagues in that particular system.

We really have to understand what the dynamics of this question are and what the outcome could be. If it was all proportional representation or maybe one or two or three of the different kinds of models, we'd effectively be putting this place in a perpetual minority government situation. Before you ask people if they want proportional representation, people should understand that that's the likely outcome and that it will be very, very difficult for governments in the future to make difficult decisions—decisions in not necessarily good economic times when you're collecting lots of tax revenue. As they found in Germany, proportional representation is great in the good times, but in the bad times, when the government has to buckle down and say no to some particular wants and needs, it's not being viewed as that great.

My concern about this is that I really view this place, the institution, in about three different categories, and the way you elect people to get here is probably about third on the totem pole in terms of what is important. The first and most important part is whether we want to restructure this particular place. Would it be wiser for us to look at the system that is south of our border in terms of saying the legislative branch has some of the financial power and shares that with the Premier or the governor, and the civil service or the bureaucrats or the implementers have to come to the Legislative Assembly, or the Senate or whatever you have, and prove their case and bring it forward?

That would be a much greater change to our system and would require constitutional change, but we should think about those things if we are going to really change how this place lives and works.

I've seen, as I say, governments from all different sides, and I don't see it as just a problem that's located in this legislative chamber or among politicians. I see it very much in terms of the relationship between the 80,000-some people who work directly for us and the I don't know how many thousands who work indirectly for us. I don't believe there is a good accountability mechanism between those people who work for us and the cabinet, as it stands. And I'm not saying this government, I'm saying all governments, because, as a cabinet minis-

ter, you walk into a post—and I've been a cabinet minister in nine different portfolios. It's very difficult to get your hands on what is happening around you and what the accountability mechanisms to you are when you have very large responsibilities.

I really don't think, as our government has become more complicated, as the issues we're responsible for as a provincial government have become very large, that the system we have in terms of accountability between the legislative branch and the bureaucracy or the civil service or the providers of those services is working at the present time. I don't think it really can, quite frankly, and therefore I think we need to look deeper into this.

That's why I guess I was a little bit upset when the Attorney General and the Premier stood up and said, "We are going to start off on this path with regard to how we're going to elect people over here." We're basically going to do this without consulting or even having a debate in this Legislature about how we should put this out so that the public will understand what the options are, what the likely outcome of choosing any one of those options will be, what the future government will likely be and what will be the disadvantages of it.

The only good part about this bill is that it's given me an opportunity to speak about other democratic reform ideas, particularly the proportional representation issue, which I guess we're going to put out to an unelected citizens' committee without any kind of formal debate in this place with regard to that move.

It's so odd that we have this bill dealing with attendance of cabinet ministers in this place and we're not going to have a piece of legislation to set up the citizens' committee; we're not going to have a resolution in this place, as far as I know, or a debate to set that up.

I just want to thank members of the Legislature who have listened to a little of my bantering about perhaps a route we should take. I will have a very difficult time either voting for or against this bill, because I don't really think it needs to be embodied in legislation.

1650

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I take great pleasure in having the opportunity to debate Bill 17. I apologize for my delay. I was in another meeting and have been running around, like we always do in this lovely place.

I had an opportunity very briefly to hear some of the comments that were made by my leader, Howard Hampton, the member for Kenora-Rainy River, and I understand that the issue is not so much with the bill itself, but rather with the things that are missing from the bill, particularly around—my understanding, anyway—the process by which the alleged—what would you call it?—atonement for absences gets dealt with in the case of this bill.

My understanding, notwithstanding the fact that my leader had to leave to go into the lounge to have an interview with my local newspaper, the Spectator, is that the bill puts the situation in the hands of the Premier to determine whether the minister in question had a good excuse or a bad excuse.

Although the bill purports to bring accountability—I think that's what the minister mentioned when he introduced it—the accountability still is very minimal, because it only goes to the decision of the Premier to determine whether there has been a justified absence.

I guess the issue is that if the Premier is in a position not to feel like punishing any of his ministers on that particular day, then he can decide not to do so. If, on the other hand, he is not in that type of mood and is in a different type of mood, then the punishment will be meted out. The issue then becomes, where is the real accountability? If you're going to put a bill in place that's going to have some accountability, you really need to look at some of the specifics around what exactly is going to be a "get out of jail free." I don't think that's covered in the bill.

Subsection 7(2) states that "if the Premier is of the opinion that the absence is justified because of illness, bereavement, a religious holiday or some similar reason," then the absence pretty much doesn't count. So you see again that it's a matter of opinion, a matter of judgment. It's not really a hard-and-fast rule, which is how it's being presented by the government in terms of what this bill is supposed to be doing.

Subsection 7(3) states, "A day on which a minister is absent from the chamber during part but not all of the period set aside for oral questions is not counted as an absence for the purpose of this section if the Premier is of the opinion that the absence is permissible."

There again, it's being touted as the bill that keeps ministers accountable by making sure they spend more time in the Legislature during question period. It's saying, "Here is what it's supposed to be doing," but when you look at the language of the bill, it really talks about whether the Premier's opinion will come into force: Does the Premier think it's going to be an absence? Does he think it's justifiable? That's how we determine whether people will be held to account.

I think that, as to the title and intent of the bill, as stated, people would say, "Of course, that makes sense. Everybody wants more accountability. Everybody wants the government to be accountable and the ministers to be there when important questions are being brought during question period." However, the problem is that's not what we see to any great extent in this bill. We just see a great deal of opportunity for opinion and for the Premier to judge every instance separately, which is not the same as having a set of rules or a set of hard-and-fast guidelines or a framework that needs to be dealt with in each and every case.

When you look at that, you think, "OK, here's what the government is promising to do in regard to this particular bill." When you then see what is actually in there, you realize that that promise does not really come through in the bill itself, so you begin to wonder if this bill is not just another broken promise.

As you know, the previous speaker from our party, my leader, spent some time talking about that, and of course we dealt with those issues again in question period today,

as we've unfortunately been forced to do every day since I've been in this esteemed chamber. That's pretty frustrating for the people of Ontario, and it doesn't help when the government brings bills forward that, first of all, have nothing to do with their platform and, second, don't even fulfill the promise that's stated at the front of the bill as it's being touted by the government.

What I'm hearing is that people want to see transparency in government, yes; they want to see accountability in government, yes. But that doesn't mean bills like Bill 17. It means things like keeping promises around everything from hydro rates cap to auto insurance rates, P3 hospitals, the Oak Ridges moraine, environmental issues, education funding, all kinds of—I mean, we could just go on and on, right? I have the list in front of me, and I don't think I need to go on to any great extent. You have people, on one hand, seeing government talking about wanting to make things better in Ontario, that people in Ontario did the right thing by choosing change and putting the Liberals into government, and what they're seeing are bills that say one thing and do another, which is reminiscent of the previous government, I have to say.

They're also backtracking and backpedalling not only on their promises but on the things they happen to get caught promising during question period, for example. We saw that today with the film tax credit. It was very interesting to see that. Now we're hearing, today particularly, from the government that's made so many promises, "Well, we did make that promise. We are going to make good on it, but maybe in 2007 or maybe in 2008." Certainly I don't think that's the time frame that the voters of Ontario, anyway, were very clear about. I'm quite sure the voters of Ontario thought they would get some change when they elected the Liberal government and didn't expect to have to wait year after year after year before those changes came into force.

Whether it's the delisting of health care services, whether it's the 407 tolls that haven't been rolled back, whether it's scandalous issues like the tainted meat inquiry and other issues of that nature, I have to tell you that the bottom line is, broken promises are the theme of the government. The one promise of transparency and accountability that they have a real opportunity to see fulfilled right now with a bill addressing that issue is not going to be fulfilled. It's not going to be fulfilled because the bill really falls short of putting real, measurable accountability requirements on the honourable ministers across the chamber here.

It's really unfortunate. Once again, I think it's not dissimilar to lots of other legislation that's come forward and many more efforts that have come forward from the government. People's hopes get built up. People get excited, or at least get some sense of forward movement and support. They think, "Wow, the government's going to do something about this," and then those hopes are dashed when they read the fine print, when they actually take the time to look at the details and determine that it was really just a public relations exercise; it was just an

opportunity to get something out there that the government could spin to make it look like they're responding to the fast-diving confidence that people have in the government. People are saying, "We don't trust you. You're breaking your promises. We don't like the way you're governing. You're not doing the things you said you were going to do, and you're doing all kinds of things that you never told us you were going to do." So the government comes out with Bill 17 as a way to try to perhaps restore faith with the public.

1700

I've got to tell you, it's going to take more than Bill 17 on cabinet attendance to restore the faith of the public, particularly when the public finds out that it's not really very effective. It's not a real opportunity to hold the ministers to account; it's a matter of giving the government a way to tout this bill as the answer to accountability in the chamber.

It's going to be another frustration. It's going to be another letdown. It'll be interesting to watch the spin doctors from the government side-spin this into a good-news story, how it's somehow going to be the panacea for the situation we've faced many times when ministers are not able to be here.

Everyone knows and everyone would agree that real life takes over, and that, regardless of the very busy, very hectic and very high-demand role we play as members of provincial Parliament, we do have real lives too, and sometimes things happen and sometimes events occur that we simply cannot avoid. Again, ministers are human beings, and they too are going to have situations that they can't avoid and that in fact they should be attending to in their personal lives.

I would be the last person to say that people shouldn't attend to issues in their personal lives that are of extremely high importance. It keeps you human. It keeps you in touch with what the real things are in life and what the real people whom we purport to represent every day are feeling and are dealing with every day in their real lives. So I don't take issue with that at all, but what I do take issue with is the fact that this bill doesn't really provide an opportunity to ensure that that accountability is there in an effective way.

It's a little bit frustrating to have this bill in front of us, knowing that it's going to be touted as one thing and understanding through reviewing it that it's going to do something quite different. Giving the Premier the final rubber stamp, yea or nay—"Yes, this person was allowed to not be there"; "No, that person should have been there"—is really not appropriate at all. It's tantamount to asking Al Capone to keep an eye on Mob activity, and that's certainly something that we know is not appropriate to do. In fact, it's like that old adage—the fox looking after the henhouse or something like that. Not to say that anybody is one of those particular characters specifically, but just the model around which we have the accountability built in, the last person to make a decision on this being the Premier—I don't think it's going to be effective. In fact, I'm sure it's not going to be very effective at all, and it's unfortunate.

I think the government had better watch themselves, because there's a very large risk that the public is going to see that the emperor has no clothes when it comes to this bill, and that what they are claiming to be doing in this bill is going to turn around and bite them. When it becomes very clear that this is really a nothing bill and that this bill has very little opportunity to keep ministers accountable in the question period process, people aren't going to be happy about that. They're going to be seeing a situation where they were sold a bill of goods.

From my perspective—and that's just me on this side of the room—the public is fed up with that kind of stuff. The public has had enough of that kind of thing. They've had enough of the government selling them one bill of goods and then opening the package and, holy smokes, it's something else altogether. Whether that's a broken promise or whether that's something that was not on the agenda of the government in their election platform and is being implemented now, like the delisting of chiropractic, physiotherapy and vision care, or whether it's this bill itself, Bill 17, on cabinet attendance, the public are tired of the inconsiderate tone the government has when dealing with the public.

If this is just out there as a way to try to spin some kind of major government activity on accountability, then you had better watch because the spin might come back and hit you where you're not expecting it. You know what? This public, our public, our residents of Ontario, are quite capable of seeing through this kind of stuff. They're going to have some things to say, I'm sure. I tend to hear from people in my riding when they are wondering, "I saw you talking on TV that day. You were talking about this particular thing. What was that all about?" When you take the time to explain it to them, some of them laugh, others shake their heads and others get angry. That's the kind of response I'm hearing from people who elected me. I wouldn't be surprised if some of you over on that side are hearing it too. So you have to be careful about these bills that you decide to kind of put out in an attempt to spin them whatever way you want.

Nonetheless, I know there's been much discussion about the bill already. I don't have it in front of me, but I see it over here. I have looked at it by myself. It's only, I think, two pages, so there is not a lot of content, as people would know. I wish I had it in front of me. I would hold it up. I'm not allowed any other props, but I am allowed to hold up bills, right, Mr Speaker? Unfortunately, I don't have it right in front of me at this time, so I can't do that. I would like to actually quote a few things from it, but that's OK.

I think I've pretty much exhausted my points. I could go on and on and list all the different broken promises, all the disappointments, all the letdowns, all the put-offs, the latest tactic of the government, which is to say, "Oh, we're going to put that off, and yes, we are going to keep that promise, we're just not going to keep it any time soon. We'll probably keep it eight months or two years from now, who knows?"

I guess that's another bill or another piece of fodder for that fray. I think it belongs with all those other dis-

appointments the people of Ontario have had to endure in these last 14 months, and unfortunately, it looks like they're going to have to endure for the next I don't know how many months until the government figures out that they need to do something substantive and not just try to spin the public into thinking they're doing things around accountability with their ministers.

That concludes my remarks.

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm honoured to stand tonight and speak in support of this bill. I had the chance to listen this afternoon to many speakers who spoke about this bill. Some of them were supporting it and some of them were negative about it, which is normal in this House.

First, I want to congratulate the minister for making this bill see life and the light in order to proceed with our democratic renewal journey.

I listened first to the interim leader of the opposition party, and second to the leader of the third party, and I heard nothing but negativity about this bill and about the approach of our government. I have been puzzled since I have been here, since October, as a newly elected person to this House. At home I used to watch the debate on TV. I used to listen to the opposition. I used to listen to many different parties talking. I thought that when they debated, they brought up important issues concerning the people. Now I learn that the opposition's only job is to be negative, to be destructive regarding the government's journey.

I was listening to the Attorney General, the minister who brought in this bill, when he was talking about the intent of the bill. The bill, of course, seeks democratic engagement for all the people in this House and also speaks about the attendance of the ministers in this place. I was listening earlier to the minister when he introduced this bill. It's funny when we have to speak and have to have a bill, when we have to talk about this issue. We wouldn't have to if we didn't have past experience. In the past government, during Mike Harris's time, only 50% of the cabinet ministers attended question period, and 18% in the Eves government attended question period.

It's very important to all the people, to the opposition, to every member, to have the ministers in attendance, to ask questions and to get exactly the right answer directly from the person who is in charge of the portfolio. We didn't have to make it in the form of a bill. We didn't have to bring this bill forward if we also didn't have a bad experience in the past.

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We never had a bill saying the budget should be announced in this place. Traditionally, all past governments introduced the budget from this place. The past government broke all the traditions and they announced it from a private place. I believe this bill is very important to eliminate all the confusion and to put everything in place.

I again congratulate the minister for working hard to make sure all our procedures, all our activities in this place, are democratically done, and for trying to engage

all the people of this province in democratic elections. That's why he spoke earlier about finding a mechanism to engage all the people to choose us in this place, to choose the MPPs, to choose the government they like. He's trying to study all the right approaches.

It was interesting when I was listening to him talking about how other countries work and the attendance of the Premier or cabinet ministers. I was listening to him when he brought that example from England, the UK. I was surprised when he said ministers don't have to attend in the House of Commons and the questions are submitted to the minister in charge of any portfolio 15 days in advance, which takes all the effect and all the honesty from the questions, I believe.

As a matter of fact, the government's approach is very important, to have a democratic way in which the opposition or the government side can stand up and directly ask the minister and directly get the answer. We saw it today. Without any preparation, most of our ministers, all of those who had been asked a question today, answered the questions. Despite what the opposition is saying because they don't like the answer, they had a good answer right away, because the ministers know their jobs very well and they are working passionately in this place to make sure all ministries and all the staff have been prepared in their engagement with the people. That's why I think it's an important bill, and I hope at the end of the day we can see more coming forward in order to ensure democracy.

Hopefully the third party leader can hear me right now. We are confused in this place. I'm a little confused,

because if we talk about implementing our promises, they say it's silly. If we say we're not going to do it, they say, "You're breaking your promise." From now on, I believe we have to proceed, we have to go forward, because we believe we are on the right track. We are going to keep going on the right track, and I will support the government and the minister on this bill. Hopefully all of us will support it and let it go.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Bryant has moved second reading of Bill 17. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

I have received, pursuant to standing order 28(h), a request that the vote on the motion by Mr Bryant for second reading of Bill 17 be deferred until routine proceedings on December 2. It's been signed by the chief government whip.

Orders of the day.

Hon Mr Bartolucci: Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion of adjournment.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Bartolucci has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House is adjourned until Thursday morning, December 2, at 10 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1715.

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