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(Hansard)**

Wednesday 23 February 2005

Mercredi 23 février 2005

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 23 February 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 23 février 2005

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREENBELT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR
LA CEINTURE DE VERDURE

Mr. Gerretsen moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 135, An Act to establish a greenbelt area and to make consequential amendments to the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001 and the Ontario Planning and Development Act, 1994 / Projet de loi 135, Loi établissant la zone de la ceinture de verdure et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi sur la planification et l'aménagement de l'escarpement du Niagara, à la Loi de 2001 sur la conservation de la moraine d'Oak Ridges et à la Loi de 1994 sur la planification et l'aménagement du territoire de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Gerretsen.

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant for rural affairs, the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, and the Minister of Agriculture and Food.

I am very privileged and honoured today to begin third reading on Bill 135, the proposed Greenbelt Act. This proposed legislation is a priority of our government and it's a priority of the people of Ontario. Since we began the process of trying to establish a permanent greenbelt in the greater Golden Horseshoe, I've heard from many Ontarians who applaud our efforts and the directions we propose to take.

I might say, at this stage, that it has been a 15-month process that started off with a minister's zoning order and the original Greenbelt Protection Act. I want to take this opportunity to thank the ministry staff, my own staff, the people of Ontario who attended the numerous public meetings that were held by both the Greenbelt Task Force and our ministry, and the members who came to the standing committee on general government, chaired by Linda Jeffrey, which was another full day of debate and presentations that took place there. Whether or not you're in favour of the greenbelt or not, I would like to

thank them all for being involved in the democratic process. Many individuals were involved, both from the ministry and from the general public.

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I've met during the consultation process and I've talked, as I've been speaking on the proposed greenbelt, at venues across the region. The ministry has received thousands of letters, e-mails and faxes. Ontarians are eager to share their views and offer their support. They clearly see the benefits of the proposed greenbelt plan, and respond to the vision behind it. David Donnelly of Environmental Defence Canada said that our plan "stands on par with the introduction of OHIP and the public school system in terms of Ontario history."

Ontarians know we need to take the right steps now to sustain a high quality of life in the future. They want to see the plans and policies put in place to curb urban sprawl; save our rural areas, our forests and farmlands from being paved over; preserve the natural environment and protect our ecologically sensitive areas from disturbances; and ensure clean air, clean land and safe water. They understand that our proposed greenbelt legislation and the draft plan are the keys to getting us there.

Let me remind the House what our greenbelt plan would do, should it be passed. Fundamentally it would respond to the challenges of projected growth. By the year 2031 there will be four million more people in Ontario than there are now, bringing the population total to 11 million people just in the greater Toronto area. To accommodate them properly—to ensure we have the schools, hospitals, public infrastructure, roads and transit systems, homes, factories and offices that they'll require—we must plan carefully for long-term growth, and this plan is part of showing how we are doing that.

A key component of this long-term planning lies in curbing sprawl and protecting agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands. These are the core functions of the proposed greenbelt. Our government knows that greenbelt protection and growth management must work hand in glove, and that's why we're moving forward simultaneously in both areas. Together, these two initiatives—our proposed Bill 135, the Greenbelt Act, and Bill 136, the Places to Grow Act, introduced by my colleague the Minister of Public Infrastructure—would, if passed, enable a scale of regional and provincial planning that has never occurred before in the history of this province, and they would make a real, positive, across-the-board difference to the future of Ontario.

Our proposed plan for greenbelt protection is visionary yet practical. A recent editorial in the Toronto

Star said it “is a bold bid to safeguard open space by virtually preventing all further development on more than 7,000 square kilometres in the Golden Horseshoe” area. It would more than double the area now protected on the Oak Ridges moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. It would protect specialty crop, prime agricultural, environmentally significant and rural settlement lands within the Golden Horseshoe, supporting agriculture as the predominant land use. The proposed greenbelt would be protected from major urban development. It would link lands already protected on the Oak Ridges moraine and the Niagara Escarpment into a continuous band of green space. More than half of the area—about 542,000 acres—would encompass a natural heritage system where the first priority would be protecting, restoring and reconnecting natural features such as wetlands and woodlands and their associated functions. This emphasis on protection and enhancement would be balanced with opportunities for farming, compatible recreational and tourism uses, and resource uses.

Quite frankly, our proposed greenbelt is critical to Ontario. We need to act now to protect the green space being relentlessly reduced through development and sprawl—yet the existence of which is so imperative to maintain the strong communities, healthy environment and thriving economy that are so necessary for a strong Ontario.

Consider the following. Ontario’s prosperity depends upon the ability of the greater Golden Horseshoe area as Canada’s prime and premier wealth-generating region to compete with major city regions across North America and around the world. If we are to continue to attract business and investment, high-value jobs and the most talented people to our province, it is fundamental that we offer them a high quality of life. That means ensuring focused growth, reducing gridlock and giving individuals and families the option of escaping the concrete jungle for the parks, trails and open spaces of the healthy outdoors. If we are to continue to feed the people who live in Ontario now and who will be moving here in the future, we need to protect our ability to grow fresh produce and ensure that we are not unduly dependent on imports from other countries when getting food across borders cannot always be counted upon.

Further, Ontario’s agri-food industry contributes more than \$30 billion to the provincial economy annually and employs more than 650,000 people. By protecting the fertile agricultural lands in this area, we are hoping to ensure the continuing strength of this important industry. If we are to secure our environmental legacy and make sure Ontarians remain healthy, we must act conscientiously to protect our air, water and land.

For instance, the forests, meadows and wetlands in the Golden Horseshoe absorb the water that is filtered through the ground, that is deposited in the aquifers that help to provide clean, fresh water for about 7.5 million Ontarians. We simply cannot tamper with that. Water is a necessity of life and we can’t allow its natural progression to be threatened by sprouting subdivisions and unfocused sprawl.

If we are to ensure the continuing enjoyment of Ontario’s beautiful countryside in one of the most heavily developed regions of Canada, we simply have to act now. But there are a number of people who seem to think that we can wait, and let me deal with some of the concerns expressed by them during our consultation period.

First, some believe that every acre of land we’ve included in the proposed greenbelt needs a new scientific study to back up its inclusion in the greenbelt.

The designation of the proposed greenbelt area is the result of a complex combination of technical science and land use planning. The proposed greenbelt was developed through a combination of technical, scientific and land use planning analysis to identify areas for permanent protection.

We have used the best methods used by municipalities and their planners in drafting their own land use planning policies. It’s the method used by previous governments in developing protections for both the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine.

The systems approach that has been used for identifying the greenbelt area is based on municipal and conservation authority data and builds on the systems approach of the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine conservation plan. This includes a natural system: natural heritage and water resource systems developed by the Ministry of Natural Resources; an agricultural system, including specialty crop, prime agricultural and rural lands, commonly referred to as the LEAR system, developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food; and settlement areas that include towns, villages and hamlets, as designated in municipal official plans.

There are many land uses in existence today, such as junkyards, cemeteries and landfills, that may not meet with our goals for the proposed greenbelt plan’s protected countryside area. But it’s important to note that we are dealing with many land uses in areas around towns and villages in the greenbelt that already exist legally. That’s why the greenbelt has to be based not just on good science but on good land use planning principles as well.

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After extensive consultation with stakeholders and municipalities, we are focused on making improvements and refinements to the plan. While these arguments alone should stop these naysayers in their tracks, if the science is of so much concern, why does Dr. David Suzuki, together with 74 of his learned colleagues, academics and scientists, support our greenbelt? They simply have no concern about the science, because they know it’s there, and we have chosen to listen to them.

In addition to the individuals I just mentioned, we have endorsements from numerous municipal leaders in both the 905 and 416 areas, the Ontario College of Family Physicians, the Environmental Defence League, and many, many other endorsements that it would simply take too long to deal with at this stage.

Second, there are those who believe we must address the viability of farming before we protect valuable

agricultural land from development. They say we must support the farmer to protect agriculture. We agree with that. The proposed Greenbelt Act and draft greenbelt plan would preserve existing agricultural uses and support and enhance agriculture and agriculture-related activities. The Minister of Agriculture and Food will speak on these issues to a much greater extent later on.

Where land values are concerned, experts considered that the plan would have little effect in this regard. Farmland is currently assessed on its value as a farm, and farm-to-farm sales are used when determining values. This will continue under the proposed greenbelt.

Many have asked that they be compensated for the loss of perceived future opportunities. This will not occur. It has not occurred with respect to the Oak Ridges moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. Landowners cannot expect to be compensated for any assumptions they may have made that at some point in time their farmland might be zoned for urban development. Both the agricultural advisory team and the Greenbelt Task Force confirm that understanding. As Burlington mayor Rob MacIsaac, chair of the Greenbelt Task Force, noted, "Certainly there will be some people who were speculators or some people who were counting on turning their farms into big subdivisions. Those people will be disappointed. But they never really had the right to do that."

We are simply not taking any existing rights away. There is no automatic right of increased development in Ontario or anywhere else in Canada. Our government is committed to preserving the current rights of our agricultural landowners while giving them the flexibility to expand and improve their operations. Our plan would protect the farmers, the farmlands and the rural way of life, and ensure the strength and growth of the agricultural industry.

Third, some say that by containing sprawl and protecting land in the Golden Horseshoe, house prices will skyrocket. This government is well aware that we will need housing for the four million more residents we expect in this area over the next generation. That is why we have left a significant amount of land available to develop if such a need is determined. Our proposed plan would ensure room for urban areas outside of the greenbelt to accommodate the long-term growth. The proposed growth plan will direct how this growth will be accommodated, and urban areas currently designated within the boundaries of the proposed plan will remain available for development, subject to normal municipal planning processes.

In the short term, GTA municipalities have at least a three-year supply of serviced land for residential units approved for development. This level of supply is customary in most municipalities in Ontario. Over the medium term, many GTA municipalities have a 10- to 15-year supply of urban land available for residential development. Over the long term, the proposed greenbelt plan leaves about 150,000 acres of land available for development across this area, for both residential and business development.

In addition, our new provincial policy statement will encourage more compact development to accommodate growth more efficiently. Municipalities will build at higher densities and promote infill and brownfield redevelopment. This would help ensure that the supply of land currently designated for future urban development lasts even longer. My colleague Minister Caplan, as I mentioned before, has proposed a growth plan that will focus on that issue on a regional scale.

Additional variables that factor into the price of land and housing are delays in development approvals, lack of certainty as to whether development can occur, availability of servicing, and interest rates. Attempts to pin the rising cost of housing on a greenbelt are simplistic at best and misleading at worst. We are tackling growth and development issues on numerous fronts, and we're doing it because it needs to be done.

Fourth, some will say that we need to have an appeal mechanism for the greenbelt. A legacy is not something that should be weakened. I would just refer people once again to those sections contained in the Greenbelt Act that deal both with the 10-year review and with any review that takes place within those 10 years: sections 10 and 11. I won't have the time to go into it, but there is a full public process laid out therein that makes sure that people, in effect, will have their say. It simply cannot be done right away.

I'm getting notes here at the same time, Speaker.

The government consulted with the public and stakeholders, the Greenbelt Task Force consulted with the public and stakeholders, and we extended the consultation period to discuss the draft plan and the proposed greenbelt boundary in greater detail with municipalities.

A greenbelt boundary will not simply float; it will be anchored. The provision in the act specifically states that if, for any reason, an acre of land is taken out of the greenbelt, it should be supplanted with another acre of land.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: This is much stronger than anything that currently exists in any legislation, and I believe the members of the opposition know that as well.

I am going way over my time, so I will cut this short.

Fifth and finally, others are concerned that we are proposing to allow too much development in the greenbelt. Roads may be needed to support the vibrant rural communities in the greenbelt, linking them to each other and to other communities across southern Ontario. Aggregate extraction will be allowed but will also be subject to more rigorous rehabilitation requirements than ever before. These are resources we need to build roads and housing for the coming population growth.

Policies dealing with these issues and others will be addressed not by the proposed act but by the greenbelt plan that would be authorized by this act. I really want to stress that. We are dealing tonight with the enabling legislation. I can tell you that changes have been made to the draft plan to deal with many of the concerns that I've outlined so far. Policies dealing with these issues and

others will be addressed, as I indicated before, in the plan itself.

We released the draft greenbelt plan as an integral part of the proposed legislation that we are debating today. This plan identifies where urbanization could and could not go in order to provide permanent agricultural and environmental protection. It also includes detailed maps that clearly illustrate the designated areas and the land uses proposed. It is based on the recommendations of the Greenbelt Task Force, which, as I mentioned before, consulted for months.

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Our government is fully aware that we must ensure the continuing relevancy and currency of our proposed greenbelt. Bill 135 would commit to the plan being reviewed every 10 years. This would give us the ability to reflect on the changes in policies and revisit the levels of protection given to key features or land. As always, the public not only would be invited to take part in but are an integral part of the review process, as clearly set out in the act.

Finally, this government is taking full advantage of that opportunity to achieve something extraordinary. It's an opportunity to create a great legacy for future generations of the province. It will also be a great legacy for you, Speaker, for those of us in the Legislature, for every person here and for every person in the city of Toronto and in the greater Toronto area.

The proposed greenbelt is a visionary response to long-term growth. It would protect the green space that we all value so much. It would ensure that our fertile and environmentally sensitive lands would not disappear under concrete and paving. It would enable us to pass on the gift of open space and countryside to the children of the next generation and the generations to come.

Our government understands that permanent greenbelt protection, combined with solid growth management, is mandatory for ensuring a high quality of life in Ontario, now and in the future. I urge all of us in this Legislature to support this bill.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I will be sharing my time with the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London.

I am glad to join Minister Gerretsen in speaking on the importance of Bill 135, the proposed Greenbelt Act. This legislation is imperative to a strong and healthy Ontario, now and in the future. Minister Gerretsen has worked tirelessly on this greenbelt initiative for just this reason. He feels that the greenbelt represents this government's legacy to generations of future Ontarians. I feel that the greenbelt is also a tribute to him and his efforts. These efforts included talking repeatedly to thousands of members of the public, farmers, representatives of environmental groups and municipalities over the past 14 months. He repeatedly said that he is determined to get it right.

I applaud his efforts. But I am not the only one to do so. Municipal leaders, stakeholders and, yes, even members of the opposition have recognized and commended

Minister Gerretsen for all the work that he has done to bring this landmark initiative to fruition. Municipal leaders have remarked that he is the first minister in many years to actually sit down with them personally to hear and discuss their views on the greenbelt. Many of them have commented on how refreshing they found Minister Gerretsen's hands-on, accessible approach. We heard this many times at the standing committee hearings. We heard from the leaders of our communities, including Mayor Gary Burroughs of Niagara-on-the-Lake. We heard also from Debbie Zimmerman, who is CEO of the Grape Growers of Ontario. We also heard from one of our fellows on the other side of this House—the member from Erie–Lincoln, to be specific. He has commended and recognized the minister and his staff for their hard work and approachability on this initiative: "To credit Minister Gerretsen, his staff are all here. They met with Grimsby and they're working hard." That was from the member for Erie–Lincoln.

Let's consider what this greenbelt would do. It would protect one million acres of land from Rice Lake to the Niagara Peninsula. That would raise the amount of protected land in the Golden Horseshoe to 1.8 million acres, including the protected lands on the Oak Ridges moraine and the Niagara Escarpment. This House has the unique opportunity of ensuring that this amount of land remains protected in the midst of the most densely populated region in the province.

I have a personal history in farming. This proposed greenbelt would preserve and protect farmlands and agricultural lands around the greater Golden Horseshoe. This is good news for the agricultural community.

Combined with the government's plan for long-term growth management, it would have a real, positive impact on future generations. It would ensure a valuable legacy to the people of Ontario, and it would ensure a continuing high quality of life and a greenbelt forever.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): It's my pleasure to stand here tonight and speak in support of Bill 135.

The proposed Greenbelt Act, if passed, would create a greenbelt protecting 1.8 million acres of environmentally sensitive and, more importantly, agricultural land in the Golden Horseshoe from urban development and sprawl.

While this government has never doubted that protecting this land is the right thing to do, a recently released report from Statistics Canada underlines the necessity of taking steps to preserve our natural heritage, our resources, our agricultural land. The report, entitled *The Loss of Dependable Agricultural Land in Canada*, concludes that one half of this country's urbanized land has been located on good agricultural land. In fact, in a 30-year period, from 1971 to 2001, Ontario alone lost 4,300 square kilometres of land to urban development. Add to that the hamlets, the rural residential development and farmsteads, and this province has lost nearly 23,000 square kilometres of land. This land is lost. This land cannot be replaced. We cannot allow any more of our highly productive land to be cropped for houses or

topped with pavement or concrete, and let me tell you why. Ontario is home to the majority of Canada's class 1—the most productive—agricultural land. This has allowed the country's most diverse and largest agricultural sector to flourish here in the province of Ontario.

We should be proud of the fact that this province produces more than 200 commodities and accounts for one quarter of our nation's agricultural production. These farms, in turn, support a thriving food industry, with more than 1,200 food manufacturers located here in Ontario. Together, the agri-food sector generates \$30 billion for the economy in this province and 650,000 jobs. This feeds the province of Ontario, and it must be protected.

The contribution that this sector makes to our quality of life as Ontarians is equally as important as the economic benefit that it provides. We enjoy fresh, high-quality, safe products and pay far less for our food as a percentage of our income than almost anywhere else in the world. Some 10% of our disposable income is spent on food; it's 14% in the United States, 30% in Mexico and 50% in India.

The agricultural sector improves our social well-being in other, less noticeable ways by providing renewable sources of energy, alternatives to plastics, and pharmaceuticals. Farmers, too, are the original stewards of the environment, preserving and often improving our natural resources of soil and water.

We need to recognize the role that agriculture plays in the societal challenges that we all face. From health care to education to the environment to energy, agriculture plays an integral role in our lives. We need to support agriculture, but we also need to ensure that we preserve agricultural land.

This government has heard members on the other side state that protecting farmland counts for nothing unless you protect the farmer's ability to earn a living from that land.

This government is committed to a sustainable agriculture and agri-food sector, both within and outside of the greenbelt. That's why we signed on to the federal-provincial agricultural policy framework. In partnership with the federal government, we will invest nearly \$1.7 billion in a wide variety of initiatives designed to enhance the competitive and the long-term sustainability of the industry.

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Yes, we hear the criticisms of the CAIS program, but that CAIS program is supporting the viability of farmers in this province. The 2003 payouts alone will be in excess of \$190 million of support for the agricultural sector. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food annually invests more than \$35 million in agriculture and food-related research. We also continue to work with the research and agricultural communities and government partners to identify new opportunities for the sector.

However, to ensure that this government fully understood the unique needs of the farming community in relation to the greenbelt, we sought the counsel and

advice of the agricultural advisory team. The team presented its report a little over four months ago. We have already begun to act on that advice.

We're mapping our agricultural land resources. We're revising the planning tool known as the "minimum distance separation formula" to ensure consistent treatment of farm and non-farm development and growth. We've strengthened the provincial policy statement to better protect specialty crop land, to clarify that all types and intensity of livestock are permitted in prime agricultural areas and to restrict severances in prime agricultural lands. We are, though, allowing farmers to sever surplus farm dwellings as a means to assist in that farm viability. We are working with the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board. We have taken steps to ensure greater reliance on the Farming and Food Production Protection Act both inside and outside the greenbelt, and we intend to conduct an awareness campaign regarding normal farm practices to increase everyone's understanding of the business of farming.

The government is committed to acting on the advice of the advisory team, and we are. In some cases, however, consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders is required; in others, several government ministries and many municipalities will have to work together. All of these things take time. We intend to take the time to get things right the first time, just as we've done with this bill.

This government recognizes and values the contribution that agriculture, no matter where that farming activity occurs, makes to the economic and social well-being of every person in this province. That's why this government has proposed the Greenbelt Act to preserve and protect one of this province's most valuable resources: our farmland.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, one way that each of us can do our part to help farmers every day is to make that conscious decision when you go into a grocery store to buy local, to buy Ontario, to buy Canadian.

We can send another message. When the crops are in season, we can go out and enjoy the greenbelt and the beauty of that area but also gain a better appreciation of the hard work of the men and women who spend their lives supporting agriculture in this province. Go out and visit a farm stand. Go talk to a farmer. Learn more about what they do to make sure they put safe, healthy and nutritious food on our plates every day. We need to recognize that. We need to thank the farmers for what they do. We're conscious of what they do. That's why we're there to support farmers, but as well we're there because we recognize that protecting farmland is as important as protecting and supporting farmers.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I want to say that that's a perfect example—particularly to the Minister of Agriculture's presentation on the greenbelt legislation—of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The first part of the presentation, when he spoke directly to the greenbelt—in fact there isn't a farmer in the greenbelt who appreciates the

fact that their land is being expropriated without compensation or the fact that all their land is being downzoned at a time when they cannot get government help to pay the grocery bill as they're producing on this land.

I thought I was hearing from the Ministry of the Environment, and that's why it was good to preserve this greenbelt and the green land for our natural environment and for people to use. It's important to recognize that there's a part in the legislation that says that all this land will have public access. I don't know why farmers would want public access to their farmland. It seems to me that's more related to parkland. I think maybe the bill would have been better to be named the "farmbelt" if that's really what the Minister of Agriculture is trying to tell us, that it's being done to protect farmland. It should have been the farmbelt, not the greenbelt.

Then the minister talks about the money the government is going to—and I emphasize "is going to" because they haven't done it. They're going to give some money to help farmers pay the grocery bill that I talked about that they couldn't pay. The farmers have taken to the streets to try and get the message to the minister and the Premier that they need help or they will no longer be with us. There will be no farmers to farm that good farmland he's talking about.

He said the CAIS program has some problems. You want to believe it has some problems. It is intended—at least the minister said it was intended—to replace the NISA and the whole farm relief program and save the government \$65 million a year. That's why the farmers aren't getting cheques, that's why they're not getting the support they should be getting, and that's why they are so mad and so frustrated with the present government.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): The government had a great opportunity to achieve something great here, and blew it. Talk about botching an opportunity.

Yes, there will be some green space, some environmentally sensitive land preserved and some agricultural land preserved. But the legislation before us this evening will not achieve two of the main stated purposes of the bill: One, to curb urban sprawl. It's not going to do that because of leapfrog development and what we refer to as the peach fuzz, or that band of land that's been left out. Second—it was the Christian Farmers and other farmers who told us this; it's not just me saying this—some of the most valuable farmland in the entire area has been left out of the greenbelt when you take out the Holland Marsh and the Niagara fruitland area. You have the farmland within the greenbelt, they tell us, less valuable than what's being put in.

I just want to say to the Minister of Agriculture, who spoke to this, that we did listen to the farmers, not only talked to them but listened in the hearings, and all farmers—I disagree with the Tories on this—are in favour of preserving agricultural land. What we heard is that there is an unprecedented crisis in our farming communities with or without the greenbelt, and they need action now. The problem goes well beyond the greenbelt,

but I want to say that standing up here tonight and saying that this is going to resolve their problem—it doesn't even come this close. You need to do a whole lot more, and I will talk about that a little later. But this is not doing what the government says it wants to do with the greenbelt.

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate regarding Bill 135.

This is my opportunity to thank the farmers in Niagara-on-the-Lake for the kindness and generosity they have shown me since I've been elected as their member of provincial Parliament, for allowing me to come into their homes and sitting with me and explaining to me the seriousness and the difficulties they're facing, but also to learn about the contributions they make not just to Niagara-on-the-Lake or Niagara Falls but to the entire province.

There are a couple of things I want to mention. First, I want to mention a councillor from Niagara-on-the-Lake, Austin Kirkby, who is well recognized and well respected in that community. One of the things that Austin pushed for, and I was pleased to see the changes in the bill, was on surplus dwellings. That was something that Austin was very passionate about, and I was pleased to see that the government made the changes to recognize that.

I also want to say that in 13 years on city council, particularly the last nine years, we never had a minister, no matter how many times we asked the previous government, come to visit us, and I was pleased to see Minister Gerretsen not only come down to Niagara-on-the-Lake and spend time with the council for a couple of hours, but also make a point of visiting the mayor of Grimsby and the mayor of West Lincoln. He also met with the fruit growers, the wine growers.

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This is a bill that requires some additional assistance, and that's the viability and sustainability. That I recognize, and I know the government recognizes it. There are opportunities for us to ensure that those people who farm are well paid for the time and effort they put in in providing the food we all eat and enjoy. So it's an opportunity to preserve and protect the lands. If you ever take a drive on old Highway 8 out to Grimsby—I was shocked when I saw what had happened out there with all the lands that had been paved over and become subdivisions.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): You won't find a member in this Legislature who has had, perhaps, more to do with preservation of the Niagara Escarpment than I. As a cabinet minister in Bill Davis's government, I was responsible for bringing forward the first plan for the Niagara Escarpment, and I understand some of the processes that were put forward during the period between 1972 and 1984 to determine what area was to be covered, what the rules were to be around owners' rights to appeal what had happened to them or what was proposed to happen to them, and to deal with the whole idea of what was to be allowed to be built upon that land.

I really feel this greenbelt legislation is insensitive to the public in terms of their ability to challenge whatever “science” may be put forward here, or not. But I also want to comment on the Minister of Agriculture’s response and talk during this debate about the government proudly announcing that it’s going to limit severances off of farms across Ontario. I am one who has been very critical of allowing a very small-l liberal policy in this regard, but the timing of this kind of announcement couldn’t be worse for the farmers of eastern Ontario. They are hanging on by their fingernails. First it was cattle prices; now it’s grain prices. I know it has nothing to do with planning, but it has to do with finances. Some of them have survived by being able to sell a lot off their farm, a lot that doesn’t produce agricultural products but in fact produces a nice site for a home.

This is a failed policy in this government at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: A two-minute reply, member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Van Bommel: I want to thank the members for Oxford, Toronto–Danforth, Niagara Falls and Lanark–Carleton. Certainly a lot of things have been brought up, and I want to address all of them, especially the issues around agriculture.

I want to commend the Minister of Agriculture, Steve Peters, for the work he has done to help in this situation, where we are talking about not only a crisis within the greenbelt but an income crisis across the province. He has worked very hard to help us with the greenbelt situation, to work with the farmers in that area.

We definitely recognize there are issues, such as those within the CAIS program, but it was the Minister of Agriculture who insisted that there be an annual review. That review is about to take place. It is because of his insistence that we have the opportunity to correct the problems. Not everyone in this chamber is going to remember what NISA was like when it first started. It had its growing pains too. We have the same situation now, and because of the Minister of Agriculture, we have the opportunity to remedy those situations. So I’m quite happy, as a farmer, with what is happening in that respect.

In terms of severances, I have always been very opposed to severances on farmland. I don’t think you should be selling off your assets to cover your losses on a farm. If you’re going to keep slicing away at the tail that way, you won’t have a dog left at the end of the day. I think it’s important that we try to make sure there is land there for the farmers to farm. We have heard arguments that if we don’t have the farmers, the land means nothing. I can say the converse: You can have farmers, but if you haven’t got the land, it doesn’t mean anything either. It’s a chicken-and-egg situation. At this point, we are saying that we are working with both. We are trying to make sure that we have farmland for the young farmers to come to, and we want to make sure that we have our farmers here for us in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I am pleased to share my time tonight with my colleagues the members for York North and Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant.

I’m recommending to our caucus that we oppose this bill. The government is wrapping itself in a green flag. They like to talk in superficialities. They have an affection for platitudes, as we hear in the debate tonight, but the fundamental tools that are necessary to make a preservation initiative successful are completely absent in the government’s plan. I’m going to address some of those absences. I’m going to talk about the amendments that we brought forward as a Conservative caucus to truly make this initiative a success. Unfortunately, all but some very minor amendments were voted down during the committee process.

The government, as well, is asking us to give them a tremendous deal of trust to do the right thing, to enact this legislation. This, as has been described, allows the government to make a significant number of decisions, to implement a map and a plan, but it leaves in the hands of the minister and cabinet tremendous responsibilities, tremendous authority, all of which is taken behind the closed doors of cabinet and not brought forward in any kind of public, transparent appeals or science-based process.

There’s an old story about a scorpion and an alligator. The scorpion needs to get across the river. He sees his friend the alligator. He asks if he can ride along with the alligator across the river. The alligator says, “I don’t know if I can trust you. You are a scorpion; you may sting me.” The scorpion says, “No. You can trust me. If you take me across the river, I won’t sting you.” The alligator says, “Fair enough.” He gets the scorpion on the back of his snout, and they start going across the river. They make it a quarter of the way, they make it half the way, and at about the two-thirds point, in the middle of the river, the scorpion suddenly stings the alligator.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): My mother told me that story.

Mr. Hudak: You know this story? You didn’t learn from it.

As the alligator is blacking out, he says to the scorpion, “Why did you sting me? Now we’re both going to drown.” The scorpion says, “I can’t help it. It’s in my nature.”

Not that my colleagues are like that, but I think it’s always good to have a healthy skepticism of government and political parties of any stripe. To put that degree of trust—when we haven’t seen the science; we haven’t seen the plan; there is no appeals process—is asking us for far, far more than we are willing to give, particularly with a government that in only 16 months of office has broken some 40-plus promises, some major promises. To take tens of thousands of landowners’ fates in their hands, to give them that trust, would be to make the mistake the alligator makes in that old story.

One of the best presentations at the committee was from the OPPI, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute—not a partisan group; in fact, mostly public servants, some who work in the private sector, who are

interested in good planning initiatives. The OPPI made it quite clear at the hearings that a greenbelt initiative based on zoning alone will not be successful, that other tools are necessary—economic support plans, for example, and faith in the science—and that without these tools, the greenbelt would ultimately be unsuccessful and would unravel.

In fact, in the presentation on September 20, 2004, on Bill 26, they said: “Communities need not only the proper tools to deal with the range of issues affecting how they grow and prosper but a complete range of tools to do so. If the proposed legislation does not give them a complete range of usable tools, it will simply complicate the planning process rather than make it more responsive to local needs.” They went on to talk about the fact that without additional tools, the greenbelt would not be successful.

The government talks about other initiatives. I’ll give an example. The Premier himself envisions the greenbelt to be much like he experienced growing up in the Ottawa area, the famous Ottawa greenbelt. But what the Premier neglected to say is that when the Ottawa greenbelt was brought in—I think under Mackenzie King—the land was purchased outright or else expropriated, which meant that there was some sort of exchange of tax dollars for the land. The greenbelt area is now owned by the National Capital Commission. It’s not private land. The Premier uses it as an example, but in his own legislation there’s not a dime of compensation, and in fact expropriation rights are taken away from individual landowners.

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Mr. McMeekin: That’s a good point.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you. Maybe I’ll convince my colleague tonight. So that’s the Ottawa example.

The Napa Valley, in the state of California, is often cited as another example, and Napa Valley is similarly the work of local environmentalists and farmers who dedicated substantial dollars to making sure that the agricultural preserve in that area would be successful. As a side note, I’d like to add that wineries in the Napa Valley area have access to a number of winery licences, beyond just a single one at the winery itself, for retailing their products, and I think that greater market access has helped to propel the successful wine industry in the Napa Valley and, as a result, reinvestments in grape production in the wineries, in agriculture and in tourism. In Ontario, we’re limited to one, on the winery site only.

As an aside, my private member’s bill is coming forward next Thursday, March 3, which would give Ontario VQA wineries access to a new stream, which would be called Ontario VQA Wine Stores. I hope my colleagues will support it, because, as in the Napa Valley, additional market access would help our grape and wine industry and associated agriculture and tourism businesses in the province. I hope my colleagues will support that. If they truly support the greenbelt, I hope they will get behind my private member’s bill next week.

In Missouri, they have their own Missouri greenbelt. Through charitable donations of land easements, they’ve

been able to successfully protect natural and agricultural areas from conversion to urban uses. They were able to purchase land and easements that protect natural and agricultural areas. They raised money through memberships, donations, grants and other means. The Missouri greenbelt that has been talked about at some of the hearings, perhaps by government members, similarly had resources behind it. They purchased the land from individual landowners.

Mr. Sterling: That’s where Dalton’s from, isn’t it—Missouri?

Mr. Hudak: In time I think most people will be saying to Dalton, “I’m from Missouri, the Show-Me state,” because they’re not going to go on his word the next time around. I said a bit earlier today that trusting Dalton McGuinty is like sidling up to Pinocchio and not expecting to be poked in the eye.

But I digress. My colleague the former Minister of the Environment, who played a key role in the Niagara Escarpment Commission’s formation, talked about the appeals process, where in about two years’ time, individuals could take their property forward for exclusion or inclusion in the Niagara Escarpment plan based on science, at a public, transparent process to make sure they got the details right.

That is also absent from the greenbelt approach. It’s missing. It is absolutely missing. Sadly, when we brought forward a fair, transparent, science-based appeal process as an amendment to this piece of legislation, it was rejected by the government members.

I think at the beginning we wished we could support this legislation. We support the preservation of green space; in fact, I am proud to stand on the record of the Progressive Conservative governments of the 1960s that brought forward the Bruce Trail.

I talked about the Niagara Escarpment Commission, a world-recognized biosphere; under the Mike Harris government’s Living Legacy, the single greatest expansion of parks in the history of the entire country. Mind you, when the Mike Harris government brought forward Living Legacy, there was \$100 million invested to support those parks in protected areas, part of this province-wide initiative. Those support dollars are missing from the greenbelt plan. The Oak Ridges moraine legislation similarly had support behind it—award-winning, recognized by the Environmental Commissioner as an initiative.

I’ll stand proudly on what we did under Mike Harris as Progressive Conservatives for the preservation of green space, but when we did it, we did it based on a plan to make it successful, we dedicated resources to the success, and in those examples as well, we used a consensus model. It wasn’t done behind closed doors; it wasn’t suddenly announced. We brought together environmentalists, farmers, the building sector and municipal leaders to forge a consensus around where we were going. Sometimes it took time. It wasn’t always easy, but at the end of the day I will argue that they will stand the test of time. They are award-winning.

The Dalton McGuinty government did not invest the resources, did not develop any kind of consensus model and has used questionable science. Therefore, I fear that, without fixing these major problems, the greenbelt will ultimately fail. A stool can't stand on two legs. You're going to need a support plan for greenbelt farmers. You're going to need to justify the science. You're going to need to assist the greenbelt municipalities to ensure that they can continue to prosper and be strong communities within the greenbelt area. But, again, these things are missing.

I talked about the OPPI. I'll refer to them again and their presentation on February 3, 2005. The Ontario Professional Planners Institute, a learned non-partisan group, "support the overall direction that the province has taken with regards to growth management," but they go on to say, "we are concerned that the proposed policy and legislative initiatives be brought forward in a manner that allows considered review of the critical details, consistency and coordination between complementary initiatives, and meaningful participation from stakeholders." They go on to say, "The area defined by the greenbelt plan raises many questions. There is a need to clarify and explain the parameters used in defining this territory."

That's the OPPI. They're going to be very respectful and very polite. If I were to paraphrase: This has been botched. It is not a greenbelt; it is a "greenbotch." Did I take licence with the paraphrasing? They're very polite, but basically what I read from that is that they are questioning the boundaries and whether this plan will be successful without the complementary tools. It's very clear. To put it boldly, in terms that I have been using, it has been a botched initiative. It's not a greenbelt; it's a "greenbotch," because it's based on questionable science without a plan to make it work.

I talked a bit about the platitudes that the government use. They wrap themselves in the green flag and stick to very superficial levels of debate. They say that they're protecting farmland, but that's not what we heard from farmers who came to our committee.

Peter Lambrick of the GTA Federations of Agriculture said on February 1, 2005, in Markham, "Our key messages to you today are that keeping agriculture in the GTA is not just a land-use planning issue."

Albert Witteveen, of the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture, said in Grimsby, "Freezing land is a band-aid solution to a growing problem. If the government is serious about preserving viable agricultural lands, then help us to produce our products with pride and provide us with the tools to make this land productive and prosperous."

Paul Mistele, vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, went even further, with very strong language showing the frustration of greenbelt farmers, by saying, "It is our submission that Bill 135 is the most draconian piece of legislation farmers in this province have ever been faced with. The legislation seeks to impose a one-size-fits-all approach to one of the most diverse regions of Canada. It ignores science, it ignores

economics and it ignores farm businesses and their contribution to the Ontario economy." Very strong language. It runs against the arguments we hear from government members. That's from the vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

We brought forward some well-thought-out amendments—I would argue, non-partisan; we got them from people who came to the committee—to actually make this bill work. We heard over and over again, "If you want to save farmland, you need to save the farmer." One suggested by the OFA, the Christian Farmers of Ontario, the Grape Growers of Ontario and other commodity groups and interested parties was to make sure that there was an agriculture support plan as part of the legislation. That was endorsed by these types of farming groups. In fact, the government's own greenbelt advisory committee made a special point to emphasize that you need a greenbelt farm plan as part of the legislation. But it has been rejected—in fact, not only rejected but ignored by the government, who say, "No, no, we're going to work on positions for the province as a whole," ignoring the special reality of greenbelt farmers and running against the recommendations of their own committee.

In fact, Mary Lou Garr, a woman of eminent qualifications, who was hand-picked to sit as part of the Greenbelt Task Force, said, at committee on February 2 in Grimsby, "We hoped to create a legacy for the future, but I think Bill 135 in its current form is fundamentally flawed, not by what's in it but by what isn't in it."

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Ms. Garr went on to talk about the importance of enshrining in the bill a duty upon the government of the day to have an agricultural support plan. Sadly, the Mary Lou Garr amendment that we brought forward was voted down.

We also talked about bringing forward an environmental benefits task force to look at a way of rewarding farmers for good environmental practices: for preserving fresh, clean water; for preserving fresh, clean air for citizens to breathe. Similar programs exist in some states like Pennsylvania. They're common in Europe. Great Britain has its own greenbelt. They do this. That amendment was voted down by the government members.

We suggested, based on the advice of a land trust task force and other farm groups, creating a land trust task force to report back to government. That was voted down.

We had a suggestion, as well, to see if the government is accurate when it makes the argument that land values are going to increase in the greenbelt area. Actually, they said that they'll sometimes decrease, but generally they say that they will increase. So why not put their money where their mouths are and have a land-value-monitoring task force to monitor the value of land in the greenbelt? If they truly rise, as the government predicts, then the government will be found to be correct. If not, then it would probably imply some duty for the government to act on behalf of those landowners who have been aggrieved. The government, while it makes predictions,

voted down an opportunity to actually measure what's going to happen to the land supply.

So this notion that this is about protecting farmland is nothing but spin. It's simply a zoning process that could ultimately just protect fields. If farmers don't find it economically viable to produce on their farms, they would simply walk away and let the land go fallow. In some years' time, there'll be tremendous pressure on municipalities to develop that land since it's no longer in viable agricultural production.

The government has claimed that it has made its decisions based on science—well, perhaps expert political science.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs has talked a couple of times in this House about the LEAR system, which is a tool for the Ministry of Agriculture to evaluate a farm's economic viability as well as the viability of its soil. If it's close to market, for example, it would be more of a viable farm than it would be if it were an isolated farm in a developing area.

When I asked for the science behind this plan, my freedom of information request cost \$1,400. Any citizen who wants to see the science that justified putting his or her property in the greenbelt area would potentially have to pay \$1,400. The government could make that a lot easier by just putting out the science on a Web site or by tabling it here in the assembly for public use, avoiding this high bill. But again, that amendment was voted down.

The LEAR studies that the minister talks about are not available. I got hold of one; the parliamentary assistant was kind enough to give me one. But that one LEAR study was for Ottawa-Carleton, which is nowhere near the greenbelt. The LEAR studies for Niagara, Halton, York, Peel and Durham are non-existent; ghost studies.

I would suggest that any good scientist puts his or her data on the table publicly for review and stands behind it. The fact that the government is not putting forward the science behind their decisions makes me believe that either the science is absent, or it is bad science, or, in all likelihood, it's simply political science.

We see four major flaws in the legislation.

I've already addressed the importance of supporting agriculture. To save the farm, you have to save the farmer.

Our second major flaw was support for greenbelt municipalities. Greenbelt municipalities, especially the small ones, will have their future growth frozen. If they want to pay for improvements to the roads, water, sewers or bridges or to pay for a new recreation centre for the teenagers, without growth, they'll be forced to increase taxes substantially to pay for these costs. If the greenbelt is to be a jewel for the entire province to enjoy, it makes sense that the province should support those municipalities and not place the cost entirely on the backs of the local ratepayers. Unfortunately, our amendment to bring the province to the table to support greenbelt municipalities was defeated by the government members.

That's not just me talking about that. My colleague from Niagara Falls talked about Austin Kirkby, a

respected councillor and farmer in Niagara-on-the-Lake. What did she say about this topic? "The greenbelt legislation permanently freezes our urban boundaries, without a commitment of compensation to the municipalities. Who will pay for costly infrastructure in the future if there is none?" It's not just me.

Gary Burroughs, the Lord Mayor of Niagara-on-the-Lake, said in Hansard on February 2: "The proposed greenbelt legislation has the potential of creating, over the longer term, some significant financial challenges for municipalities located entirely within the greenbelt area."

Mayor Bob Bentley, town of Grimsby, same day: "The no-growth scenario that will result from this plan will have significant financial implications on the town of Grimsby and the region of Niagara. We feel that economic impact is an important consideration that must be carefully contemplated by the government if it is going to freeze out all growth options in this community. As well, the province must be prepared to provide ongoing financial compensation if necessary."

Our amendment to help greenbelt municipalities, based on the advice we've heard from mayors and municipal leaders from across the greenbelt area, was rejected.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): Welcome the kids.

Mr. Hudak: That's a good point. My colleague from Sudbury suggests I welcome the Scouts. Hello, Scouts. Welcome to the assembly. I hope you enjoy it. I won't ask where they are from, but I want to greet them on behalf of all members in the chamber. I hope they are enjoying the debate.

The other fatal flaw, we believe fundamentally—based on what we have seen here in the assembly, based on what we've heard in committee and based on our study of the greenbelt area—is that this plan is not based on environmental science at all, but on political science. There is no other reason that the government would target containing urban sprawl in Beaverton and leave wide-open sprawl all the way up Simcoe county to Barrie. That long line of traffic snaking its way down the 400-series highway is just going to get longer and slower. If you live in that area, even up toward Newmarket, set your alarm clock earlier, because without any kind of infrastructure plan, that commute will get longer under this legislation.

It's frightening as well when the parliamentary assistant who helped lead the consultations of this legislation, Mr. Duguid, November 17 in Hansard, here in the House said, "You know what? I don't give a damn whether it's real science or political science." That's a very unfortunate comment from the parliamentary assistant, which I think goes to the heart of the problem of this legislation.

No good science would cut a farm in half; no good science would cut a significant wetland like the Holland Marsh, as the draft plan did, or the Beverly marsh, as this plan did, in half. No good plan based on science would leave out Boyd Park, in the riding of the Minister of Finance. Many before the committee suggested that that

was the work of politics, not science, why the pristine Boyd Conservation Area was left out of the greenbelt. Perhaps if it was somebody else's riding, they said, it would have been included, but to date it has been left out.

There is an element of fairness missing that is key. Landowners in the greenbelt area have not been notified. There has been no notice about what's being impacted, how they are being impacted, what piece of land is impacted, restrictions that could happen on their property. The simple amendment we brought forward to notify those landowners was rejected. And if those landowners wanted to bring forward an appeal to say, "Why was my property included?" or if somebody wanted to bring their property into the greenbelt area, they would have no access to science and no access to any kind of formal, transparent and public appeal mechanism.

Sadly, this legislation, as it stands before us tonight, would restrict the appeals process to one channel only, and that is directly to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. If you're well-connected, if you know somebody in the minister's office or you go to the right fundraiser, maybe you would have your day in court. But for the vast majority of landowners, ordinary farmers, ordinary taxpayers, any of these individuals would not have fair and open access to any kind of transparent appeal process. They wouldn't have the science, first of all; second, they would never have their day in court.

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The minister says, "That's fine; in 10 years' time we'll look into it." But even criminals have a chance at appeal, a chance to look at the evidence. The science here is missing, and there's no chance for appeal for at least 10 years.

I know my colleagues want to address their heartfelt concerns about this legislation. I do think this legislation will likely pass. While my colleagues are raptly paying attention to my remarks, I don't know if I'm convincing enough to swing the vote the other way. But we will play an important role. We will continue to push for clear science—environmental science, not political science—and we will continue to push for fairness, to fight for landowners to know how they're impacted and upon which kind of science a decision was made.

We will also watch closely the minister's decisions. The minister has collected considerable power in his hands behind closed doors, so we're curious to see who gets an exemption and who doesn't when the final greenbelt map comes forward.

This notion of a floating greenbelt deserves considerable debate. I know my colleague from Beaches—

Ms. Churley: Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Hudak: Sorry; Toronto–Danforth. Beaches too, but Toronto–Danforth will be addressing that in short order.

I don't know what kind of faith people will have in the greenbelt if they see it floating farther east or north or west. This notion that some land could be taken out of the greenbelt if other land is put back in will be a tough sell for people in that area. So the notion of a floating

greenbelt will undermine people's faith in this. I think most people want certainty around it.

I know my colleague the Minister of Agriculture is here. We'll continue to hold him to task as well, to support farmers in the greenbelt area who will be treated differently under this legislation from a farmer who's across the concession and not in the greenbelt area.

I've enjoyed the hearings and enjoyed the opportunity to comment as the critic for the official opposition. I had hoped that a greenbelt initiative would have been successful, but sadly, a two-legged stool can't stand. If they don't bring these major pieces forward, I regret that the greenbelt ultimately will fail. I regret the way it was brought about as part of a political decision after a broken promise around the Oak Ridges moraine. If it hadn't been rushed out to change the channel, if it hadn't been rushed out in a political manner without bringing that consensus forward or a proper analysis of the science, there'd be a different debate tonight in the assembly, but because it was pushed out there after the broken promise to stop housing on the Oak Ridges moraine, we are left with a document that is primarily political and not truly based on preservation initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for my time. I hope my colleague will vote against this piece of legislation.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I wish to frame my comments on Bill 135 around the issue of property rights and compensation.

I think back to a headline I saw in the Ontario Farmer last spring. To summarize, "If you want it, buy it." This was written by Jim White, a columnist with the Ontario Farmer.

Farmers have been mentioned a number of times this evening. I got together with 600 farmers last night in Port Perry. There was a meeting hosted by the Lanark Landowners Association. The topics last night: the crisis in agriculture, and property rights. Much of the discussion was around the greenbelt. We heard from Jim White and Bob Fowler with OPERA, the Ontario Property and Environmental Rights Association. We heard from Randy Hillier, of course, president of Lanark Landowners; a couple of dairy farmers from Caledon presented; also Anna Bragg, who is connected with the corn producers. At the meeting last night, a number of my tobacco farmers came up from the Tillsonburg area: Courtland, Houghton, Hawtry and Oxford. There's an example of a group that, as a result of government property, had a taking, a reduction in the value of their land, their plant and equipment and their labour, with as yet no announced or promised compensation.

Now, we know land grabs are nothing new in provincial politics. While many court cases and planning hearings have reiterated the rights of owners to enjoy their property, the Legislature has the power to override any perceived rights. I do remind those assembled that we do not have property rights, neither in the province of Ontario nor in the Dominion of Canada.

This goes back many, many years. I'll give an example. In 1973, the Treasurer of the day, John White,

explained why he did not purchase the land to pull together the Niagara Escarpment Commission: “In my view and the view of my colleagues, this is completely unnecessary. We can conserve through planning designation for the benefit of all our people.”

Over the years, as you can see, a philosophy has come forward that, “We don’t have to buy it because we have the power to designate it in any way we want, regardless of the landowners’ interests.” I’ll use the words of Jim White: “Don’t buy what you can steal.” That is a quote from OPERA.

I will mention that I attempted to address this issue within a few weeks of first being elected in 1995. My first private member’s bill—I think it was the first private member’s bill from the Mike Harris government—was Bill 11 and was entitled the Property Rights Statute Law Amendment Act, 1995. That was nine and a half years ago. There is a resurgence of interest in this. I can say that on behalf of 600 farmers who attended the meeting last night. That’s when I met the people from OPERA—Bob Fowler, Jim White. I think you’re going to see a resurgence of an attempt to restore property rights in Ontario. Quebec has property rights, the Yukon has property rights, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Canada does not. Ontario does not.

People—and I’ve heard this at other greenbelt meetings I have attended—are suspicious of this greenbelt initiative. There is concern that it’s supported by speculators, for example, who would use the greenbelt to see a reduction in the value of land so they can purchase it at the lower value. One speaker at that Caledon East meeting, which I attended with the member from Erie–Lincoln, pointed out the potential for developers to buy the land and then, down the road, get the regulations and the zoning revised by the next jurisdiction. At that Caledon East meeting—you can tell something is wrong when you show up at a community hall and there is a flashing red light out front on the highway and you walk in and there are five OPP officers. I couldn’t get in the hall. I was actually directed by the OPP to go down to the basement and join a few hundred people down there kind of hovering around a microphone.

I note that Randy Hillier, one of the speakers last night—there’s that name again; you’re going to hear his name on March 9, when farmers arrive at Queen’s Park with their combines and tractors and backhoes and tractor-trailers. I will mention too, stay tuned: Don’t forget March 2, the OFA-initiated rally out front. Randy Hillier addresses the issue of property rights, or I should say the lack thereof, and sent out a press release. You’re going to hear about this on March 9. This press release included a number of resolutions. These were circulated last night. I wish to alert people present of what may be coming.

Resolution 1 is titled the Right of Ownership Act, and I quote: “The right to own, use, enjoy, and the opportunity to earn a living from private property is the basis of freedom and democracy. However, this right does not supersede or allow an individual to cause harm or injury

to another. Ownership rights shall not be abridged or usurped without due process of law and shall include full, fair and timely compensation. The federal government shall be requested to amend Canada’s Constitution by inclusion of this statute in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”

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A second resolution was distributed last night, entitled the Land Use Act: “Private property shall not be rezoned, re-designated or reclassified in any manner that limits the natural and private use of property without the owner’s prior written consent and approval. When, in the course of society’s advancement, it becomes necessary in the public interest to abridge this fundamental right to private use, then full, fair and timely compensation shall be awarded.”

We’ll have to wait and see. I don’t know whether this direction would fall on fertile ground with this government; I’m not holding my breath on that one.

This inaction on property rights did create the OPERA organization, a coalition of groups with a common mandate to “protect and entrench in law the rights and responsibilities of private landowners against arbitrary restrictions and decisions of government.” They have a background discussion paper that refers to the greenbelt: It’s “sure to be popular with environmentalists and other urbanites that get a free green park at the expense of present landowners. The government is taking advantage of the failure of legislators to pass property rights legislation at either the Ontario or the national level.”

They continue in this document, “The greenbelt protects land with lower agricultural capability at the expense of prime agricultural lands in Halton, Peel, York and Durham. The claims of protecting agricultural lands are a sham except for the Niagara fruit lands and the Bradford Marsh area.”

They are concerned about the total lack of recognition for those people who own the 1.8 million acres of land under this planning initiative that ignores the fact that landowners are really the primary and only true stakeholders. There is no recognition, no discussion of the cost to these people.

I will wrap up. I know the speaker for York North is awaiting her turn. I just wish to reiterate that when we talk about the greenbelt and the broader planning initiatives, we received a briefing on the greater Golden Horseshoe. That’s an area that now includes half of my riding. I always felt I lived out in the sticks. I am now subject to the outer ring, I guess it’s called. Haldimand county and Brant county are now part of the GGH, the greater Golden Horseshoe. Stay tuned. We know the leapfrogging is occurring in the Caledonia area. Just in the last few weeks, there has been a lot of interest in farms in that part of my riding.

I thank everyone for listening intently, and I’d like to hand this over to the member for York North.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): It certainly gives me pleasure to rise and respond in third reading of Bill 135.

When I was looking at what comments I would put forward this evening, one of the things I wanted to ensure I talked about were the key messages that I believe we received from the public hearing process. I was very disappointed when, together with the critic, we put forward various amendments to this bill based on what we had heard throughout the public hearings. The reluctance—in fact the denial, I would say—of the government to look at the particular amendments we put forward, which reflected the kinds of messages we received in the public hearing process, is most disturbing.

It's very disturbing because, at the outset, all of us understand and appreciate the notion of green spaces. We all recognize how valuable they are to our quality of life, to our health, to our food supply, to the various aspects of our own personal and corporate lives.

It seemed to me that when the government undertook this notion over a year ago, they would have an opportunity to make some changes, to listen to the experts and understand why we needed to make some changes. The minister refers to this piece of legislation as framework legislation. If that's the case, then it suggests to me that there should be an openness about listening to the experts. It took a great deal of pressure from the opposition to even get four days of hearings. Obviously, the number of people who wanted to be heard, who made written submissions, speaks first of all to the interest, but it's beyond interest. It's not academic interest. It's not even self-interest. It's interest in a much greater, long-term societal interest.

In the few moments I have, I want to concentrate on two particular submissions that I think represent the kind of thoughtful response that people in this province have provided for us. The first one, which I'll just go through quickly, is the initiative that had been undertaken back in 1998 by the GTA Federations of Agriculture. They commissioned an impact study because they were only too aware of the challenges to the prime agricultural land that exists in the greater Toronto area. They recognized the fact that there needed to be a broader public understanding of the impact of agriculture in those regions. People needed to understand that there is an economic benefit to the Toronto area, to the GTA itself, to the province as a whole, as well as the individuals who make up the agricultural community.

As a result of this impact study, it became clear that it was the second most important economic driver in the cumulative regions—that is, York, Peel, Durham and Halton. As a result of this study, the four federations of agriculture came together. So also did the four regional municipalities. They began to work together to prepare themselves to go out into the broader community, to approach all levels of government, which they did successfully, to create a level of understanding of the importance of agriculture in the greater Toronto area.

There are some key messages that they wanted to bring forward. One of them, and this is most important in the light of the legislation we're debating this evening, is that keeping agriculture in the greater Toronto area is

not—I emphasize “not”—a land use planning exercise. When you look at the legislation before us today, the government seems to have failed to understand the fundamental concept that to maintain the kinds of agricultural lands we have, we have to talk about agricultural sustainability and we have to have a coordinated action plan. People have to understand, within the agricultural community, within all levels of government and within the broader community, that this is something worth working on, worth accepting the challenges and the opportunities.

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It became clear when this group met, as it continued to meet into last year, that there were some extremely important parameters under which agriculture in the GTA operates. On the plus side, there is the fact, as I already mentioned, of the billions of dollars from the agricultural economy, and also that it has high productivity and that sales had increased. But it required some action; some strategic plans had to be put forward. They had to include plans for economic development, education and marketing. People who go to the grocery store have to understand the impact that their decisions have on the agriculture in this province and in this country. It's only through education and marketing that people will understand that they are supporting their local economy. The action plan also included the importance of understanding land use policy, that you can't chop up agricultural lands. There has to be a critical mass. They can't have economic viability if people must travel two hours one way to get a farm part. They can't have economic viability if there's no veterinarian close by who is a large-animal specialist.

Those are the kinds of initiatives that had begun to be developed. They understood that there had to be a shared vision, that agriculture had to be financially sustainable and that farmland value had to be protected to be able to sustain the ongoing investments necessary to maintain agriculture.

All of that was pushed aside by a political agenda that said, “We're going to protect all of this land.” It seems to me that a great disservice has been done not only to the agricultural community in this area but also to the kind of planning that municipalities had engaged in. They had made, through the regions, some commitment to this agricultural action plan. It needed support from Queen's Park; it didn't need the kind of initiative we are seeing from this government. Provincial participation was crucial, but it had to be the kind of participation that provided support for those guiding principles I mentioned. Instead, the agricultural community has been dealt a tremendous blow. There is no sense of compensation, no creativity in looking at land use, no creativity in looking at issues around easements or initiatives that would support young farmers. None of those things is in this piece of legislation.

Those who have spoken before, the member from Lincoln and the member from Haldimand, also referred to property rights. One of the things that would have been

so easy for this government to have considered was the simple question of informing landowners. No one has received any kind of directive, any kind of information as a landowner in any of the regions we're talking about. They have no idea. Constituents in my riding don't know whether they're in protected countryside or in areas of settlement. They have no idea. They have no idea that they just lost the ability to make decisions on their land. They have no idea that they have lost value on their land, that they have lost opportunity in terms of providing for their own retirement on their own land. There are many areas of land ownership that simply disappear with this particular piece of legislation, things as simple as cutting down trees to replace fence posts. That's the kind of thing that almost borders on the absurd. Unfortunately, it's the new reality with this bill.

Ms. Churley: Had I known what was going to happen to this greenbelt legislation, I don't think I ever would have agreed, as the three parties did, to have tonight as the final opportunity to debate this bill, because I have some very serious problems with it. I tried to make amendments at committee, but none of those amendments passed, except one very important one that was accepted, the Minister of Agriculture will be pleased to know, by all three parties, and that was on farm viability. It was a resolution I put forward, which was amended somewhat. Tim Hudak was there from the Conservatives, and the Liberal members and everybody agreed that that amendment should be accepted. But other than that, none of the amendments which could have fixed the problems within this bill were accepted.

There are some very serious shortcomings with the Greenbelt Act, and the recent release of the government's draft growth strategy makes them even more pronounced. This was a concern I had. It wasn't available during the committee hearings and the final clause-by-clause. It was announced just the other day by the minister, and it leaves me with even more concerns about ongoing development around the greenbelt area.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. There seems to be a growing amount of chatter. I'd like to hear what the member for Toronto-Danforth has to say, so please help me.

Ms. Churley: Thank you. They say they're listening, and I'm sure they are.

Before I give you some of my comments, I'm going to read specifically from the Neptis commentary on the greenbelt plan. They say what a lot of the other environmental groups who came before the committee said, and I think they encapsulate the problem I'm trying to identify here, the problem that has not been fixed, but some of which can be fixed. This is the introduction to their commentary on the greenbelt. I'll point out some of the major concerns that I wanted to fix. It says:

"Yet the proposed plan will not solve the problem of protecting vulnerable lands at the scale of the region. Most of the problems the government has vowed to rectify are not, in fact, confined to the greenbelt. Most of

the region's environmentally sensitive lands and features, and much of its prime agricultural land, lie outside the proposed greenbelt and are already facing strong development pressure. A limited belt of protection will not only leave lands outside the belt vulnerable but could actually increase pressure on them by deflecting development beyond the belt and by implying that they are somehow less deserving of protection."

It goes on to say, "As well, the proposed greenbelt will do little to promote a more compact, efficient, transit-supportive form of development at the edges of the region's cities and towns. The plan would provide a swath of unprotected farmland more than twice the size of the city of Toronto between its southern and eastern boundaries and the current edge of urban development in the GTA and Hamilton. Without the introduction of a range of new policies, plans and programs, these lands will likely be converted over the coming decades to the same business-as-usual auto-dependent sprawl that the government aspires to avoid. In areas such as south Simcoe and Wellington counties, the greenbelt may engender unplanned 'leapfrogging' beyond the belt."

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I'll skip a few pages and read a little more: "The problems of future sprawl will be particularly acute for those who live at the edge of the urban area, in places like north Oakville, north Brampton, Woodbridge, Richmond Hill and Markham. These areas are already experiencing traffic congestion, but are not designed to accommodate public transit networks."

On the next page: "Will the greenbelt help?"

"Although the greenbelt would prohibit urban expansion within its own boundaries, it would not generally serve as an effective regional growth management tool—at least, not for several decades. The claim in the plan that the greenbelt will serve as the 'cornerstone' of a new regional growth plan is overstated."

Those are some of the comments that we heard time and time again during the committee hearings and in clause-by-clause, and which my amendments attempted to deal with.

So yes, the greenbelt is protecting some environmentally sensitive land, and yes, the proposed greenbelt is protecting some agricultural land. Nobody is denying that. If the government would just admit that that's what it's trying to do here, but that it's failing in its stated plan to actually bring in a permanent greenbelt that curbs urban sprawl, then I'd say, "Fine, let's go with that. Let's all admit that's what this is doing, and that's a good thing."

I got kicked out of the Legislature the other day, Mr. Speaker, as you know. You weren't in the chair, but I got kicked out. I don't like calling—I didn't actually call him the L word, but I did use the L word in terms of his response to a question I asked about what we now call the "floating greenbelt." The minister stood up again tonight and said it's a permanent greenbelt. It is not a permanent greenbelt. What he did, when I asked him a question about that, was to reiterate again that it is a

permanent greenbelt. He went after me and quoted a couple of times when I said, "Yes, I will be supporting the greenbelt," and chastised me for daring to question him on this.

I gladly stood up in this House when the greenbelt was first introduced. And I believed the minister—foolish me—when the minister said it was going to be a permanent greenbelt. I was very pleased, because this was so desperately needed. But then, as time went on and we had a chance to read the greenbelt legislation and we had the hearings and heard from people who had examined it, it became increasingly clear that there was a problem—many problems. The fact that it was not going to be permanent was one of them.

So yes, I said I would support a permanent greenbelt, thinking that's what was before us. But it isn't, and the minister keeps saying that it is. I stood up to say that John MacKenzie, a spokesman for Municipal Affairs Minister John Gerretsen, conceded that there is a provision in the greenbelt to allow the government to modify the greenbelt boundaries. This is a staff member of the minister whom I've been dealing with, a nice guy who worked really hard on this and who I think was really committed to doing the right thing. In fact, I know he was. It didn't work out for him, as it didn't for me. But he has admitted this as well. It is not a permanent greenbelt. It's floating. The minister can move it around. Yes, you can keep the premises: as long as you have the same acreage of land, then it's okay to take something from the south—good, prime agricultural land—and bring something maybe from the north in to replace it. That's not permanent.

So I told the minister that if he gets up and keeps accusing me, in a sense, of breaking my own word here or being hypocritical—I can say it in this case because I believe that's what he was suggesting, because I did say I'd support it. I want to be really clear that what I said was that I would support a permanent greenbelt.

What we have here—and I should have known, because by now the McGuinty government is infamous for breaking one promise after the other after the election. Laying the groundwork here, one of the first broken promises was the 6,000 new homes on the Oak Ridges moraine about which they lambasted the previous government and said, "If we get elected, come hell or high water, we will stop those houses from being built." And then what happened? In no time at all, they caved in to the developers and built those homes.

I believe that one of the partially good things that came out of that was that the government was really desperate to put on the green cloak, and worked hard to come forward with the greenbelt. But at the same time, I should have known it wasn't as good as it looked. I was the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, and one of the things that I learned is that if it looks too good to be true and if it sounds too good to be true, it usually is. Read the fine print. That has to be true when it comes to government bills too. Read the fine print really carefully.

I'm going to refer to what some respected critics, such as the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment, said regarding the government's so-called permanent greenbelt:

"The Liberal Party majority on an all-party legislative committee examining the Greenbelt Act, Bill 135, voted down an opposition amendment that would have made the Golden Horseshoe greenbelt boundaries permanent. In so doing, the Liberal government has broken an election promise made in 2003 and repeated when the Greenbelt Act was first introduced in the Legislature in October 2004 that the greenbelt would be 'permanent.'"

These are the long-standing protectors of the Niagara Escarpment plan saying that the greenbelt isn't permanent. It's not just me.

With respect to the greenbelt's lack of permanency, CONE goes on to state: "Over time, lands at the 'inner' boundary of the greenbelt that are the subject of more intense urban development pressure may be taken out of the greenbelt in exchange for lands elsewhere, likely at the 'outer' edges that experience less development pressure. The result could be yet more urban sprawl. It is possible that the entire greenbelt could slowly 'migrate' outward as urban boundaries are allowed to expand at the edges of existing cities in the Golden Horseshoe."

This is a very serious problem. That's why I am focusing on it. It's a very serious problem. It is not a permanent greenbelt. It's a problem that the Liberal members, the majority on the committee, had an opportunity to fix by supporting the motion.

There's a great deal of disappointment in the conservation and environmental community regarding this greenbelt not being permanent. To this end, the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment goes on to state:

"The Liberals have painted themselves green and CONE had held out great hopes for this government's environmental initiatives. This decision seems to demonstrate, however, their true colours shining through. We expected better."

I share the coalition's disappointment in this, I really do, because I am extremely supportive of a permanent, real greenbelt, The Liberals promised Ontarians a permanent greenbelt and what they've delivered instead is what we call a floating greenbelt. It floats. It can move around. During clause-by-clause in committee, I introduced a motion, as I said, to remedy the problem. I actually thought it was an oversight. I really did. There was even interest, I believe, from the government side in my amendment. There was a lot of discussion and back-and-forth. Remember that, Tim? Then I think the whip came in and cracked the whip and when the chips were down, Liberal members of the committee voted against a permanent greenbelt. They brought in—you remember this—a weird amendment to my amendment, I believe, that did nothing except keep the status quo in the bill. We'll still be able to move pieces of the greenbelt around.

Perhaps most importantly, this floating greenbelt, which provides the government with the ability to remove lands from one area as long as they add lands in

another, makes a mockery of the government's claim that the greenbelt is a cornerstone of the government's efforts to curb urban sprawl. I ask the government, how do you expect the greenbelt to stop urban sprawl when developers know very well that when they need more land it can simply be carved off at the bottom of the greenbelt as long as an equal amount of land is added somewhere else, most likely along the northern boundary?

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I believe that what this is all about, sadly and unfortunately, is eliminating fears in the development community that their lands inside the southern boundaries of the greenbelt will be frozen, eliminating the opportunity for future development. Of course, if that's the truth, if that's the reality here, it just backs up my and others' claim that this greenbelt will not prevent urban sprawl.

I want to take a few minutes now to talk about sprawl, highways and infrastructure. In committee, I also introduced a motion to expand the greenbelt to include the pieces of land lying between the southern greenbelt boundary and designated urban areas. I'm not allowed to show maps in here. I guess it would be considered a demonstration, which is too bad, because I'd really like to demonstrate exactly what I mean by the greenbelt and the other bands around it. As we heard in the committee, this piece of land I'm talking about, which has been referred to as peach fuzz because of the colour on the map and various other things, is actually better farmland than the land included in the greenbelt. This was told to us by the Christian Farmers group and others. This amendment was also voted down by the Liberal members. What is clear is that without the inclusion of these pieces of prime farmland—that is, the land left stranded between the greenbelt and the designated urban centres—urban boundaries will continue to sprawl to the south of the greenbelt. I already quoted from the Neptis Foundation on the implications of that.

Not only are existing urban centres going to continue to sprawl on to lands south of the greenbelt, but areas to the north and east of the greenbelt, such as south Simcoe and Northumberland county, are also experiencing extreme development pressures. The committee heard time and time again during the public hearings about what is now constantly referred to as leapfrog development. We've raised it many times here in the Legislature during the course of discussing this greenbelt legislation. There are a couple of problems. With the fact that the south Simcoe area is left out, development will simply—it already is—leap over the proposed greenbelt, which will increase urban sprawl. It will just mean that people will have even farther to drive to get into the city or wherever they're going, along with all the infrastructure that has to be built.

Communities in south Simcoe, such as Bond Head, are facing proposals from Metrus Development and the Geranium Corp. to develop a city of 70,000 people on 6,200 acres, of which 78% is prime farmland. The council of the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury recently passed a motion requesting the minister to

include—this is a request to be included in the greenbelt—the Bond Head heritage highlands in the greenbelt, but so far the council's request, like the request of the regional municipality of Waterloo—remember that? They came and begged to be put in because they feel that their own municipal bylaws etc. are not enough to protect them, as there are such development pressures. The region of Waterloo and the Bond Head area are begging. They want to be put in. The municipality just passed such a resolution, but the government has not included them in the greenbelt.

Now, the good news about this is that it's not too late. It is too late to fix the floating boundary aspect, because the amendments to that within this enabling legislation were turned down and there is nothing more we can do about it. That will have to wait until the NDP is back in government so we can fix that.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): You never know.

Ms. Churley: Well, you never know.

But that cannot be fixed right now, unfortunately, unless we were to bring it out to committee and try the amendment again, which I think is highly unlikely. But the good news is, this enabling legislation does allow the minister, between now and March 9, to set the final boundaries of the greenbelt by regulation. So unfortunately, after the fact, the minister and cabinet can move in and move pieces of land around; they still have the opportunity right now to put these pieces of land into the regulated boundaries for the greenbelt.

I want to talk about something of great concern, and that is the new major highways that are being recommended. I think we really have to question how the sprawl is going to jump the greenbelt and impact areas north of the greenbelt such as south Simcoe. You may be wondering how people are going to access these areas, aren't you, Mr. Speaker, if it's going to be developed up there. What do you think? The answer is, on all the new major highways you are going to build through the greenbelt, as revealed this week in the draft greater Golden Horseshoe growth plan.

Let me tell you about some of these highways. An extension of Highway 404 north to Ravenshoe Road at Keswick means sprawl all the way to Lake Simcoe; an extension of the 427 north into the greenbelt will bring development pressures to the greenbelt's southern boundary; a new 400-series highway from Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph to Brampton through the greenbelt and fuelling sprawl into the Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph region; the mid-peninsula highway in south-western Ontario—

Mr. Hudak: I like that one.

Ms. Churley: I know Tim likes that one.

Mr. Hudak: Don't make fun of that one.

Ms. Churley: I'm just talking about all these highways that are proposed to go right through the greenbelt. After the release of the greater Golden Horseshoe growth plan, the greenbelt looks, unfortunately, more like a highway preserve than an environmental preserve.

Infrastructure: Again, if you build it, they will come. That is a given fact now. Not only has the government decided to carve up the greenbelt with highways, but the Liberal members on the committee also voted down my amendment to the bill that would have kept Great Lakes sewer and water systems from cutting through the greenbelt, fuelling urban sprawl on the greenbelt borders. Running these massive, big-pipe sewer and water systems through the greenbelt just goes against everything the government is claiming it wants to accomplish in its greater Golden Horseshoe growth plan. It's complete doublespeak.

We have heard from many groups that are expressing real concern about this. In fact, I don't know how many people here were aware of it, but there was a press conference recently by the College of Family Physicians, which studied sprawl. I don't know if you were there for that. They found the impact of urban sprawl on human health. They pointed to urban sprawl contributing to increasing traffic fatalities, and air pollution as a factor in rising incidence of respiratory and heart disease. According to the College of Family Physicians, people in car-dependent neighbourhoods walk less, weigh more, have higher blood pressure, a higher incidence of diabetes and heart disease and are more likely to suffer from mental health problems.

Some of these things we've known about for some time, but to have doctors do extensive studies making these links is something I think we need to take very seriously, as well as all of the issues around air pollution and asthma and traffic jams and all of that. There's evidence now that there are a whole host of other health problems that go along with urban sprawl. These links between urban sprawl and human health make it absolutely imperative that the government commit funds to public transit and incentives aimed at urban intensification and not to new highways or Great Lakes-based water and sewer systems through the proposed greenbelt area.

This is something that I've raised many times in the House, and that's the King big pipe, which has caused a lot of controversy. We hear back from the mayor and from those who support it that it's a health issue, and this big pipe has to be built because there are problems with the drinking water in the area. But all kinds of proposals have been put forward to deal with that problem. The concern is that building this kind of huge, massive big pipe through the area will lead to more sprawl.

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I'm going to come to one of my other favourite issues that I've raised many times in this Legislature around the greenbelt, and that is aggregates. I heard the minister say again tonight that this bill is going to improve the situation in the greenbelt area when it comes to the extraction of aggregates. That's just not true. There are a few little restrictions put in here and some natural heritage areas. But actually, things are going to get worse, and I'm going to tell you why. We have to ask the same question: What are all these sprawl-fuelling highways and new infrastructure going to be made from? Aggregates from

the greenbelt, or should I say "gravel belt" at this time? Or perhaps "the park for pits" is more fitting terminology if this goes ahead.

This is very serious. Thanks to the government's revisions to the provincial policy statement released this week, multinational aggregate companies do not even need to prove there is a need to increase aggregate supply prior to developing new greenfield quarries and gravel pits. Congratulations. The Liberal government amendments to the provincial policy statements make their aggregate policy more regressive than the Tories—and who would have thunk it, but it is true—because you did some damage as well. What the Tories did was eliminate provincial monitoring and enforcement of the aggregate industry in 1996, allowing the industry to self-monitor. Now, in 2005, the Liberals, despite an absolute, complete lack of independent information about the supply and demand of aggregates in Ontario, as documented by the Pembina Institute and by the Environmental Commissioner—twice now this warning has come from the Environmental Commissioner—are giving the aggregate industry free rein to carve up the greenbelt as they see fit. This doesn't make any sense whatsoever. This is made even worse by Pembina's conclusion in their report, *Rebalancing the Load: The Need for an Aggregates Conservation Strategy for Ontario*, that the government's aggregate policy fails to adequately explore conservation options as means of reducing demand for aggregates.

All of these come together—the growth plan, the new policy statement, the greenbelt—so that this land use policy is contradictory and, in the end, defeats the greenbelt's stated purpose to preserve environmentally sensitive land such as the headwaters and ecosystems we depend on for clean water, air and biodiversity. By encouraging the continued expansion of aggregate extraction within the proposed greenbelt, the government is undermining the environmental benefits of the greenbelt in the first place. The plan is clear. The changes this week to the provincial policy statement, in conjunction with the permissive approach to aggregate operations in the greenbelt plan, make the greenbelt, unfortunately, a gravel belt. This is not what Ontarians wanted, and this is not what Ontarians were promised. It was not what I thought the government meant when they announced that they were going to bring in a permanent greenbelt.

I'm just going to spend a few minutes talking about the agricultural side of this, because we spent a lot of time listening to and talking to farmers when we went out on the public hearings on a couple of occasions. It was interesting that, during these hearings, Statistics Canada had released a report documenting the fact that Canada's best agricultural land has been devoured by urban expansion over the last few decades. I know that that was the stated goal. That's why the government moved forward. There was a lot of pressure to deal with this. The report is called the *Loss of Dependable Agricultural Land in Canada*. It really provides some sobering facts about why we need to protect our agricultural land. It demonstrates that "in Ontario, in 2001, towns and cities occupied over 11% of our prime agricultural land, and

the demand for land to be used in agriculture grew as the availability of this land decreased.” Again according to Statistics Canada, “Farmers have had to bring lower-quality land into production to meet the demand for agricultural products.” StatsCan points out as well that “lower-quality land is often unsuitable for stable, long-term agricultural production.”

The Wine Council of Ontario came forward in support of the greenbelt. They also talked about some of the very serious issues of farmland in the Niagara region and throughout the province and asked the government to do more in terms of farm viability. They pointed out—and it was sobering information—that this Stats Canada report came out while we were debating the need for a greenbelt.

The protection of prime agricultural farmland is absolutely critical, as well as stopping urban sprawl. But despite the McGuinty government’s attempts to preserve some farmland, they lack a plan to deal with the real issue, which is the preservation of farm viability and our farm communities. In terms of the greenbelt and the preservation of farmland, there’s real irony in the government’s attempt to preserve prime farmland, and it was not lost on the farmers. They saw it.

During the committee hearings on Bill 135, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario stated:

“So part of the weakness in this legislation, as far as we’re concerned, is that you’re only giving permanency to specialty cropland and the Holland Marsh. We badly need it for all of agriculture. Who else would draw to your attention the fact that you’re leaving out a whole lot of the best farmland in the greater Golden Horseshoe in the land that has the line drawn around it as greenbelt.... There’s some 175,000 acres that you’re leaving out with this particular bill.”

That came from the Christian Farmers. So it’s not just the environmentalists and it’s not just me and conservationists and some of the other groups that came before us; this is from an important farm group which is very anxious to preserve and conserve farmland, particularly viability for the small family farm.

The Christian farmers went on to say, “On average ... once you take out the specialty cropland and the Holland Marsh, the land you’re leaving out is of significantly better quality than the farmland you’re protecting in the greenbelt. It troubles us deeply that the approach of the greenbelt is to protect the mediocre-quality farmland.”

This backs up what I was saying earlier, that this not only fails to preserve prime farmland but fuels urban sprawl, both of which are contrary to the stated objectives of the act.

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With regard to including truly prime farmland in the greenbelt instead of some Liberal construction of what constitutes prime farmland, we were speaking this week—my leader, Howard Hampton, who is also our agricultural critic, may or may not be in to speak to this issue as well. I know that he wants to and may be heading this way. But I am speaking on behalf of the NDP leader and myself, because we both met with these

people. They were farmers from the area of Bond Head and West Gwillimbury, where there are incredible increasing development pressures as a consequence of the greenbelt being implemented just to the south. These farmers work prime farmland and run dairy operations. I’m just going to give you some information about what they said. This is the group I referred to earlier, who want to be included in the greenbelt, who are begging to be included in the greenbelt. The municipality has just passed a resolution asking the government to include them in the greenbelt, and yet they have not been, to date. This is why they told us they needed to be included: Each acre of land in Bradford West Gwillimbury averages \$1,031 of farmgate sales; the Ontario average is \$560 per acre. Every acre in Bradford paved over for development means that these annual sales are lost forever.

The development pressures in this area are extreme. Presently the Geranium Corp. has partnered with Metrus Development—I believe I mentioned this earlier—to propose a city of 70,000 people in the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury. There’s a proposed city of 70,000 people on prime farmland at the edge of the greenbelt boundary, with one of the owners being among the biggest development companies in this country, and suddenly, it appears the Liberal stomach to preserve prime farmland ends. Go figure. What is going on here? Why is this land not included?

I am sure that the government and, I assume, the Minister of Agriculture are aware—if the minister isn’t, he should be made aware—that last week the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury passed a motion at council requesting that they be included in the greenbelt. They have been ignored so far. The farmers were asking to be included even before the resolution. The time is running out, but as I said earlier, there is still time to bring this area into the greenbelt. So I’m calling on the government tonight to stand up and say that they will include this truly prime farmland in the greenbelt so it won’t be paved over and lost forever, along with the continual economic contribution it makes to the local and provincial economy. That is what will happen. This is a very good example of some prime farmland, of farmers who want to be in the greenbelt and are being ignored.

There are some farmers, no doubt about it, who don’t like the greenbelt and are concerned about losing—some of the Tories have talked about this—the speculative value. Some were planning on using that to retire. That’s all true; those concerns were raised. But time and time again, what we heard from the farmers, whether they liked the greenbelt—some do—or whether they didn’t like the greenbelt—I can assure you some don’t—was that, with or without the greenbelt, the farming community is in an unprecedented crisis and desperately needs support. That’s because of a whole bunch of reasons: commodity prices; it goes back to free trade and how that’s been dealt with; BSE; a lack of government support on all levels. There’s a whole host of reasons for why there is such a crisis in the farm community. But they did talk about some of the things that need to be done. They made some recommendations to us.

These farmers in the town I was just talking about, for instance, who want their farming community included in the greenbelt, are dairy farmers. Given the supply management system for dairy operations, they are guaranteed their cost of production, so they are profitable. They told us that. But many farmers both inside and outside the greenbelt are not so lucky.

I mentioned earlier—and I believe this was an important step for the farm community within the greenbelt—the one NDP motion that passed the committee with unanimous consent, which dealt with the importance of farm viability and the viability of small towns within the greenbelt. This is just an amendment to a seriously flawed act, but it is an amendment that was accepted, and we want to see some action from the government.

We know that the farm community in this province is in a crisis, and the McGuinty government clearly has no plan. These farmers need to see a plan. My view is that the greenbelt in itself, along with all the other pieces of legislation that have been brought in, particularly since the crisis in Walkerton, impact our farmers. There's the Nutrient Management Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the greenbelt now, and a number of others. They did get reinstatement on the Drainage Act, I heard today. What we're hearing is, there are huge impacts on them with all these new acts that they have to comply with, as well as all the other more international and larger-scope problems. This is the tip of the iceberg. It's like, "Oh no, not one more thing that's going to impact us," without any kind of support within the greenbelt, without any plan brought forward to tell the farmers that the help is going to be there.

I know some people might be thinking, "What does she know about farming? She represents an area in downtown Toronto." I guess I've learned a lot about the agricultural community in this province over the years I've been elected here. But I should also say that people know that I came from Newfoundland. It's a different kind of farming there: fish farming. People used to fish in Newfoundland. I remember when the fishermen, as they were called then—the fishers—would talk about disappearing fish.

Interjection.

Ms. Churley: Ah, he's here to talk about farming. I'll wrap up in a sec.

They talked about the disappearing fish, and nobody listened to them. They're the stewards of the water. They knew the fish were disappearing, and they weren't listened to. Then, of course, the fish did disappear and the fish still haven't come back. So when farmers say to us that small farms and the agricultural land in this province are going to disappear unless the government does something, I tend to listen to them.

I'm going to turn the floor over to the NDP agricultural critic now, our leader, Howard Hampton, to finish the debate for New Democrats tonight. Thank you for this opportunity.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): There are a number of problems with the government's

stated objectives for the greenbelt, and we've heard many of them detailed here tonight. I want to spend my time to focus on two related problems: first, the protection of prime agricultural farmland, and second, despite the McGuinty government's attempts to preserve some farmland, their lack of a plan to deal with the real issue, which is the preservation of farm viability and the preservation of our farm communities.

First of all, in terms of the protection of prime farmland, in terms of the greenbelt and the preservation of farmland, the irony of the government's attempts to preserve prime farmland hasn't been lost on farmers. During the committee hearings on Bill 135, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario stated:

"Part of the weakness in this legislation, as far as we're concerned, is that you're only giving permanency to specialty cropland and the Holland Marsh. We badly need it for all of agriculture. Who else would draw to your attention the fact that you're leaving out a whole lot of the best farmland in the greater Golden Horseshoe in the land that has the line drawn around it as greenbelt.... There's some 175,000 acres that you're leaving out with this particular bill."

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The Christian Farmers further state, "On average, ... once you take out the specialty cropland and the Holland Marsh, the land you're leaving out is of significantly better quality than the farmland you're protecting in the greenbelt. It troubles us"—meaning farmers—"deeply that the approach of the greenbelt is to protect the mediocre-quality farmland." This is the Christian Farmers Federation speaking.

Leaving this land out not only fails to preserve prime farmland but, as demonstrated here earlier by my colleague the member for Toronto–Danforth, this is what fuels urban sprawl, both of which are contrary to the stated objectives of the McGuinty government's act. With regard to including truly prime farmland in the greenbelt instead of some Liberal construction of what constitutes prime farmland, we were speaking this week with farmers from the area of Bond Head and West Gwillimbury, where there are increasing development pressures as a consequence of the greenbelt being implemented just to the south of them. These farmers work prime farmland and run dairy operations. Each acre of land in Bradford West Gwillimbury averages \$1,031 of farmgate sales. The Ontario average is \$560 of farmgate sales per acre. Every acre in Bradford West Gwillimbury paved over for development means these annual sales are lost forever.

The development pressure in this area is extreme. Presently the Geranium Corp. has partnered with Metrus Development to propose a city of 70,000 people in the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury—prime agricultural land, some of the best agricultural land going. A proposed city of 70,000 people on prime farmland at the edge of the greenbelt boundary with one of the owners being among the biggest development companies in the country and, suddenly, the Liberals' stomach to preserve prime farmland ends—ends. Go figure.

I'm sure you are aware that last week the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury passed a motion at their council requesting that the McGuinty government include their town in the greenbelt. These are rural residents, many of them farmers, who know that this is prime agricultural farmland. They've debated the issue, they've looked at what's going on here, and they're asking to be included in the greenbelt. Why? First of all, they want to avoid the urban sprawl of 70,000 people and, second, this is prime agricultural land. This is what you say you're trying to protect. So they've passed a resolution at council, they've written to the Premier, they've written to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and what have they heard from the McGuinty government? Nada. Not a word, not a peep, not a whisper. There's a huge contradiction here someplace. Prime agricultural land should be preserved. A community wants to avoid urban sprawl and doesn't want a 70,000-population new city right next to the existing greenbelt. You'd think that, in half a second, this would be included in the greenbelt. Not a chance. Any reasonable observer descending to earth and looking at this would say, "What is going on here? How could this be?" Somebody is saying one thing out of one corner of their mouth and doing something else—something totally contradictory.

So here's a municipal council, here are farmers, here are rural residents who've requested, "Include us in the greenbelt. We're prime agricultural land. We don't want urban sprawl, we don't want to do a 70,000-population city," and the McGuinty government is ignoring them.

I'm calling on the government tonight to include this truly prime agricultural land in the greenbelt so it won't be paved over and lost forever, along with the continual economic contribution it makes to the local and provincial economy. I think Bradford West Gwillimbury will be the test. If you're serious about protecting prime agricultural land, if you're serious about avoiding more urban sprawl, here's the test case. Here's a community that's holding up the red flag, saying, "We hear what you're saying. We should be included." So far, they haven't heard a peep from the McGuinty government.

I just want to use my remaining time to talk about farm viability, because I think most people know, or ought to know, that there's a real crisis in farm viability out there; a very serious crisis. I've been saying it over and over again, I know farm representatives have been saying it over and over again, and next week, on March 2, I venture to say you're going to see thousands of farmers and rural residents here at Queen's Park saying it in terms and in a voice that this government won't be able to ignore. Farm viability is a big problem, and so far, the patchwork announcements that this government has made over the last year have accomplished very little. They're going to come asking this government for some answers on farm viability.

These farmers in the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, who want their farming community included in the greenbelt, are dairy farmers. Given the supply manage-

ment system for dairy operations, they are guaranteed their costs of production, so they can make a living—not necessarily an easy living, but a living. But most farmers, both inside and outside the greenbelt, are not nearly as lucky.

As to the Greenbelt Act, the one NDP motion that was passed in committee, with unanimous consent, dealt with the importance of farm viability and the viability of small towns within the greenbelt, but this is just one amendment to a seriously flawed act. That amendment itself will not clean up all the flaws in this government's Greenbelt Act.

The real issue, the broader issue—and the Minister of Agriculture and Food and rural affairs is here tonight. The broader issue, Minister, is that the farm community in this province is in crisis, and so far, the McGuinty government doesn't seem to have a plan.

Minister, your government has an investment plan for the auto sector: \$500 million over five years. It's a co-investment strategy. You'll invest some money in operations if Ford will reinvest. That's what's happening in Oakville. You'll invest in a paint plant with Chrysler in Windsor if they'll invest. I happen to think it's a good strategy. In fact, it's a better strategy than just offering these corporations tax cuts, because in the modern world, they'll take the tax cuts and invest somewhere else, most likely China or somewhere else in the undeveloped world.

You've just announced enhanced tax credits for the film and television production industry in Toronto. I'm told by our researcher that with the enhanced tax credits, it potentially comes to over \$100 million a year. In other words, you'll invest in the television and movie production industry if the industry itself will invest. It has the capacity to sustain and create jobs in the Toronto area. It's probably a good strategy—far better than just offering them tax cuts.

The government has just announced a \$400-million reinvestment strategy in the casino in Windsor to sustain and, you say, create jobs there. Whether this is going to be a good investment strategy or not, we'll see. I recognize that you've got to do something in Windsor because revenues are falling and usage of the casino is falling.

If your government can afford those investment strategies on the gambling side, on the movie and television production side, the auto side, where's the reinvestment strategy for the agricultural sector? Farmers need it. They need to know that this government has a strategy. Otherwise, tens of thousands are not viable and, within six months, they'll be out of business. I don't think I need to tell the Minister of Agriculture what that means for the broader community in rural Ontario. Once the farmers go, it's a domino effect and lots of other things go too.

So farmers have heard you. They heard you say in the greenbelt strategy that you wanted to protect farm viability. Where's the plan? We see a plan for the auto sector. We see a plan for the movie and television production sector. We see a plan for the casino in Windsor. Where's the plan for the tens of thousands of

farmers who are staring at bankruptcy, who are watching the possibility of their farm operation terminate? So far, they haven't heard an answer.

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At present, Ontario farmers are being forced into the streets. You've got more farmers working away from the farm now, working at jobs outside the farm to try to support the farm, than ever before. They want to hear some indication from the McGuinty government that you've heard the wake-up call.

During the recent committee hearings on the greenbelt, farmers from across southern Ontario told their stories. The one constant was that they wanted farmland preserved. But—and this is the big “but”—they also wanted the government to show leadership and move to implement long-term strategies to deal with the farm crisis.

To begin to address the farm crisis, the McGuinty government can move on a key recommendation of your own Greenbelt Task Force, recently also requested by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, namely, the establishment of a task force on the viability of agriculture in Ontario. To quote the Greenbelt Task Force, “Protection of the land alone does not ensure agricultural viability, and the province should pursue complementary initiatives including economic development, research and monitoring, promotion of agricultural easements and land trusts for farmers who participate in conservation activities and use best practices and management.”

Instead of undertaking a meaningful study of the farm crisis that is decimating farmers and farm communities across the province, what does the McGuinty government do? It appoints a two-person agricultural advisory team, one of whom was a former federal Liberal cabinet minister, gives them a ridiculously narrow mandate and sends them off to plumb the depths of Ontario agricultural policy. Let me tell you, there are depths of despair out there, but that's not what your advisory team is going to do anything about.

So here it is. Here is the McGuinty government's farm viability study, all nine pages of it—nine pages. You've got more farmers facing bankruptcy than ever before and your advisory committee comes back with nine flimsy pages: no co-investment strategy such as we see in the auto sector, no enhanced tax credits such as we see in the film and television production industry, no \$400 million such as we see for the casino in Windsor. Nine flimsy pages: That's all the McGuinty government can manage on this file. This is not the policy response you provide to the second-largest contributor to the Ontario economy, which the farm sector is. Ontario farmers are under unprecedented stress.

For example, at present, a Michigan farmer's cost to produce corn is \$2.56 a bushel, and that same farmer is guaranteed \$2.63 a bushel through government subsidies, whereas that same corn is being dumped into the Canadian market at about \$2 a bushel. I tell the Minister of Agriculture, I had a really interesting conversation

with some farmers from down around Chatham—corn farmers. You and the Premier have been down to Chatham talking about gasohol and what a wonderful opportunity that's going to be for Ontario corn farmers. In fact, Ontario corn farmers around the gasohol plant there are going under because the gasohol plant is, for the most part, purchasing subsidized American corn from Ohio. Is this the McGuinty government's agricultural policy? Is this your farm viability policy, to go out and hold a press conference advocating gasohol and then purchase subsidized corn from Ohio? I tell you, farmers down around Chatham are pretty angry. They're just about at their limit for talking. They want to see some action, and they don't want to see action on more subsidized American corn coming from Ohio while they go bankrupt.

These distortions are putting Ontario farmers in the poorhouse, and once again, the McGuinty government is nowhere to be seen. Farmers in Ontario need some means of having their costs of production dealt with, of having those costs of production addressed. Their unfair competition south of the border has it in spades. But the McGuinty government so far has no plan for Ontario farmers.

Protecting farmland without protecting the viability of farmers, as you heard time and time again during the greenbelt committee hearings, is a fast track to nowhere. In fact, let me tell you what'll happen: You'll set that farmland aside to be protected, farmers won't be able to farm it, they'll go under, and you'll have farmland sitting there not being used. In seven or eight years, as development pressures continue, some of you will be saying, “Well, why don't you develop that land?” Lo and behold, away goes the greenbelt.

You've got to have a farm viability plan, and so far the McGuinty government doesn't have one. When are we going to see it? Then you can talk about a greenbelt strategy with some integrity.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Gerretsen has moved third reading of Bill 135. 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've been handed, pursuant to standing order 28(h), a request that the vote on the motion by Minister Gerretsen for third reading of Bill 135, An Act to establish a greenbelt area and to make consequential amendments to the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001 and the Ontario Planning and Development Act, 1994, be deferred. It's signed by the government chief whip.

It being 9:30 of the clock, I think we'll agree.

This House is adjourned until 10 a.m. on Thursday, February 24.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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