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Thursday 3 March 2005

Jeudi 3 mars 2005

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Thursday 3 March 2005

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*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

VQA WINE STORES ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LES MAGASINS DE VINS
DE LA VINTNERS QUALITY ALLIANCE

Mr. Hudak moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 7, An Act to authorize a group of manufacturers of Ontario wines to sell Vintners Quality Alliance wines /
Projet de loi 7, Loi autorisant un groupe de fabricants de vins de l'Ontario à vendre des vins de la Vintners Quality Alliance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Hudak, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'm very pleased today to begin the second reading debate on Bill 7, which, if passed, would create a new type of retail establishment in the province of Ontario: 100% Ontario VQA wine stores. It is time for us to uncork the potential of our VQA wineries in the province of Ontario. We need to uncork the VQA wine stores today, because our wine sales for VQA are currently in decline. We need to uncork our wine sales as well, to assist our agriculture sector, our tourism sector and our wineries, not only in Niagara and Prince Edward county but in Lake Erie North Shore and Pelee Island as well.

This bill, if passed, would create a new type of retail establishment. We call it a VQA Ontario wine store. Basically, it would allow different wineries to come together in groups and sell each other's products. It would give cabinet the authority to determine the number, location and ownership model of these Ontario VQA wine stores.

Let me say from the outset, to frame this debate, the clear and simple illustration of the problem that this bill seeks to fix. This weekend is Cuvée, the Ontario Wine Awards. It's like the Academy Awards for wines in the province of Ontario. Of the top 49 wines nominated—the best of the best that the province has to offer—only 10 are currently available at the LCBO. So approximately 20% only are available at the LCBO.

One famous winemaker from Pillitteri Estates in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Sue-Ann Staff, said in the National Post: "It drives me crazy. How come I can't buy Ontario

wines at the LCBO?" I'm pleased to introduce Sue-Ann Staff, an award-winning winemaker, who is joining us in the gallery here today. Welcome, Sue-Ann.

Let me first illustrate the problem that causes only 10 of 49 wines to be available at the LCBO. Government policy in the province today actually hinders Ontario VQA wine sales and restricts the profitability of VQA wineries. For example, government policy currently limits the number of retail outlets a winery can have to a single winery. Any winery created from 1993 through the future is allowed only one retail outlet. So consumers may have exposure if they happen by in Niagara, Pelee or Prince Edward county, but otherwise, they wouldn't have exposure to all the wines that operator has to offer.

Second, not only that, but government policy strictly limits the single store. The retail store cannot be in a village or a town, or in downtown Toronto. It can only be at the site of the grape crush itself; so at the winery, as opposed to a place of potentially higher traffic. The Niagara Escarpment Commission today is putting increasing limits on what that retail space can be—if it's to be a restaurant, the number of seats it can have and the type of food it can sell—with the goal of protecting the environment, which we all respect. But there are increasingly more restrictions being put on that on-site winery, which wouldn't exist to the same extent if it were in a town or village.

The greenbelt legislation recently passed by this government—with our objections to it—Bill 135, can bring an entire new planning regime out of the office of the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In fact, if the Bedggood and Vanclief recommendations to the government are put in place, all the wineries that currently exist in the greenbelt area would not exist, under those recommendations that limit the square footage and how much value can come out of that. The greenbelt is a spectre of further restrictions on wineries as they exist today. It means that Henry of Pelham or EastDell Estates, for example, would never exist under those rules.

Third, government policy restricts the product itself. Only those wines produced at that particular winery can be sold at the retail outlet. By way of example, if a young entrepreneur like Sue-Ann Staff wanted to open up her own winery in the province and seek a retail license, she would find herself restricted to a single retail outlet in rural Ontario, with restrictions on the size and shape of the establishment and on the products she could sell.

The typical answer to that entrepreneur is, "You could always sell your products at the LCBO." But let me address that issue as well. The LCBO, as a creature of

government, is increasingly mandated to maximize its net revenues. This is a legitimate policy option, but there are downsides as well. It means that policies that promote domestic products like VQA wine and microbreweries could be the sacrificial lambs on the altar of revenue maximization. Similarly, maximizing net revenue drives the LCBO to favour large, non-Ontario wineries that can supply large volumes of wine and do so quickly. In other words, the LCBO has become the Wal-Mart of our beverage alcohol retail system. Larger wineries, French and Californian—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Well, with some exceptions—

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Wal-Mart needs a union.

Mr. Hudak:—they go with the big box retailers. So especially French, Californian and Australian wineries help the LCBO meet these demands, because their size enables them to meet the LCBO door-to-floor policy. Smaller Ontario wineries are disadvantaged in this system, because they produce a high-quality product but in smaller volumes and cannot consistently meet the terms required by the LCBO.

The LCBO will make inroads. The craft winery program, for example, is a success in that area. However, I would argue that the Wal-Mart of any retail system will never be a satisfactory solution for the craft product market. As in Leamington or Niagara Falls or Welland, while you're going to have Wal-Marts, you also need specialty stores at the same time. VQA Ontario wine stores are an example of that kind of specialty shop.

1010

I stand proudly on our record in government. I had a very good, strong working relationship with Andy Brandt and the LCBO, and I thank them for their support for the wine industry. For example, we introduced over 1.1 kilometres of additional shelf space for Ontario wines. We saw a 20% increase in Ontario wine sales at that point in time. I refer to the craft winery program, VQA advocates and such. These were important steps that were helpful to the industry, but there is a lot more that needs to be done. If we are mandating the LCBO to maximize revenue to move toward being the Wal-Mart of our system, it will never be a satisfactory solution to the problem that exists. Let me give some examples. Over two thirds of the wine currently sold in the LCBO is non-Ontario wine. Only 5% of the wine sold at the LCBO is VQA. So for every bottle of VQA wine sold, 14 litres of imported wine are sold at the same time.

How does the bill solve the problem? The bill, if passed, would create a new type of retail outlet called Ontario VQA wine stores to show off our award winning 100% Ontario product. Effectively, it would allow wineries to group together and cross-sell each other's brands, giving cabinet the authority to determine the number and location of these Ontario VQA wine stores. I would encourage cabinet to look at high-traffic and busy tourism areas to maximize the exposure of Canadians and tourists alike to our award-winning VQA wines.

Currently, this model exists in British Columbia. It began in 1995 with 12 stores; in 2003, BC authorized nine more stores. BC has not yet had any difficulties with international trade issues, as we may hear arguments about from the parliamentary assistant. In the United States, New York, California and Pennsylvania, among other states, have policies that favour exclusive outlets for their domestic wines. I'll anticipate some arguments from the parliamentary assistant about NAFTA and WTO regulations. My colleague from Niagara Centre says they have spurious arguments from the other side. Maybe he won't go down that path, and I hope he doesn't.

What aggravates grape growers in wineries to no end is that when you walk into the LCBO today, you see two thirds of the shelves dedicated to imported wine. If you walked into the LCBO in this past week, there's a major promotion for French wines in newspapers and on radio and in in-store promotions; this on the heels of a huge promotion for Australian wines. I have no presumption that in Canberra or Sacramento or Paris, France, they're watching this argument here today to bring forward some sort of trade dispute, but if they care, my God, they worship the LCBO as heroes. The biggest seller of French, Australian and Californian wines in the entire world is the LCBO itself.

Second, Canada and the EU recently negotiated changes to an agreement dealing with wineries and wine sales. In short, as part of that agreement, there are no restrictions on off-site stores in that agreement. Third, VQA wine stores exist already in British Columbia. With the review of the beverage alcohol system taking place today, there's no better time for the assembly to pass this bill, to send a strong signal to the government and its review panel to do more for Ontario VQA wineries.

Let me say once more, only 10 out of 49 nominated best Ontario wines are currently available at the LCBO. The wine council will tell you that for every dollar of imported wine sales, there's only a 50-cent spinoff for the local economy, but for VQA sales, there's a \$4 spinoff on the activities. It's good for jobs, it's good for agriculture and it's good for tourism. I hope fellow members will support this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Kormos: My colleague Mr. Prue from Beaches-East York will be addressing this private member's bill as well.

First, I want to applaud the member from Erie-Lincoln for his enthusiastic advocacy for VQA wine producers in Niagara and elsewhere in the province. I want to reinforce his observations and comments about the growth of these small boutique wineries—labour intensive—understanding, of course, that VQA means that you're buying wine made of 100% Ontario grape, unlike how this government rolled over to the big-bottle wineries when they insisted on being able to include as little as 30%—and in some exceptional circumstances, as little as 10%—of Ontario grape and grape juice in wine that's labelled Ontario wine. That is a fraud on consumers.

Just as an aside, I want to indicate that New Democrats are adamant that wines labelled Ontario wines have to be 100% Ontario grape. Quite frankly, I don't think you'll find a grape grower in Niagara or elsewhere in the province that would dispute that. Once consumers are aware of the fraud being perpetrated on them—they're buying cheap plonk imported from South America, amongst other places, and it's being bottled and sold masquerading as Ontario wine. That is a shame, and it is an insult to incredibly hard-working grape growers in this province, many of whom have farmed their land and displayed incredible stewardship of land in that unique microclimate down in Niagara—at great cost, because quite frankly, there isn't a whole lot of money yet to be made in growing grapes or any other crop or produce.

So we applaud the enthusiasm of Mr. Hudak and share his concern about the lack of exposure that small wineries, small vintners, get on LCBO shelves, understanding, of course, that LCBO is doing exactly what LCBO is supposed to do in the context of its stores. LCBO is the largest single purchaser of wine, spirits and alcohol, and quite frankly has demonstrated an incredible level of skill. Every day, we're confronted with amazing new projects being undertaken by LCBO and its staff that have revolutionized, I say to you, the sale and distribution of spirits, wine and other alcoholic beverages. And they do it in a socially responsible way.

Now, I want to have members of this chamber understand some of the history of privatization of spirit alcohol sales in this province. Mr. McGuinty is a collaborator and a party to the attack on publicly controlled and owned distribution and sale of alcohol and spirits. I spoke with John Coones, of course, from the Ontario Liquor Board Employees' Union. Mr. Coones, whom I know well, explained to me that Mr. McGuinty promised—Mr. McGuinty promised—in the course of campaigning during the last provincial election that he, Mr. McGuinty, and the Liberals, if elected—and they were—would put a halt to the franchise stores south of Highway 17. Mr. Coones tells me that Mr. McGuinty promised, and I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of Mr. Coones's recollection of that promise.

Rather than putting a freeze on growth of private liquor stores south of Highway 17—look, nobody has any quarrel with the franchise stores north of Highway 17; they're historic and they serve a legitimate purpose. But the creeping backdoor privatization has proliferated since the Liberals were elected here to Queen's Park. I tell you, yet another broken promise by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals.

I tell you that I cannot support a proposition which would ride the Liberal current of enhanced privatization. I am prepared to acknowledge that the LCBO should receive a mandate—in fact, New Democrats are encouraging this chamber to give the LCBO a clear mandate—to set up, quite frankly, another stream of marketing, another stream of retailing, and it should be in direct response to the proposition being put forward by Mr. Hudak today. I think it is time in this province that the

LCBO—and it's done a splendid job. You go up to the old Summerhill station on Yonge Street and there you see what a big spirits, wine and liquor store ought to have been: a far cry from Mr. McNeely's early days, when you had to sort of pull your hat down over your eyes and fill out a little slip of coarse newsprint with your X mark and slide it under the cage—

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Brown bags.

Mr. Kormos: That's right. You'd have some fellow scurry to the back and deliver it to you sort of under the counter in a brown bag. That was for just a bottle of rye, never mind anything particularly exotic. They didn't even carry tequila in those days, and the only wine you got was the wine in the big four-gallon jugs—

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): The 571(b).

Mr. Kormos: Well, 571(b), Mr. Yakabuski tells me; he remembers it well.

Mr. Yakabuski: Oh, yes.

1020

Mr. Kormos: Which older brother's ID were you using, Mr. Yakabuski?

But look, I want to be very clear: We support the principle of setting up specific retail outlets that are designed to market Ontario VQA wines, especially in high-traffic and tourist areas. I am amazed that this hasn't been done already in places like casinos—and Mr. Bradley may want to speak to that, because I know Mr. Bradley, as Minister of Tourism and Recreation, has had occasion to cut casino-opening ribbons. He will have another occasion down in Windsor to cut yet another ribbon as Minister of Tourism and Recreation. I suspect that Mr. Bradley may well, in his capacity as minister, attempt to persuade his counterpart Mr. Watson to do something about specific marketing of VQA wines in those high-traffic tourist areas. You're right, Mr. Hudak. Places in Niagara, Toronto, northern Ontario and, quite frankly, airports—what an ideal place for the LCBO to be operating specialty boutique VQA outlets. I believe that we don't have to continue to pursue the privatization of the sale-and-distribution-of-alcohol road to achieve the end sought by Mr. Hudak in this private member's bill.

I will not be able to stand to support this bill. I hope, quite frankly, that the bill gets passed, because it then gives the legislative committee an opportunity to examine LCBO-based alternatives to the private alternative being proposed by Mr. Hudak. I'm not going to be lending my support to the bill. I encourage others to ensure that, if they do support the bill, it's conditional upon this bill being amended so that the sale and the retailing proposal inherent in the bill is undergone and undertaken by LCBO and OLBEU employees. That, quite frankly, is the deal-breaker for me at the moment in terms of this particular piece of legislation. But I don't want my lack of support specifically for the bill to indicate in any way my lack of enthusiasm about seeking out creative ways of doing specific marketing and retailing of VQA wines, especially from small vintners like those in Niagara region. It's imperative for me that it be done through a

publicly owned sale process and that the actual hands-on retailing of it be done by OLBEU employees, who have demonstrated expertise and responsibility in marketing wine, not only from the point of view of creating profits for the LCBO and the people of Ontario, but also from the point of view of ensuring responsible distribution of wine and spirits.

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): Last week, this assembly passed the important greenbelt legislation to preserve the farmlands of Ontario. In my riding, the farmlands are primarily the finest grape and tender fruit lands in North America. With the greenbelt legislation, our government made an important first step to preserve the land, but now we have to take another step to preserve the farmer; for what good is one without the other?

The member from Erie–Lincoln has had many opportunities, as a minister in the previous government, to help our grape growers. He failed to do so. However, I do want to applaud his initiative to move forward today.

During the greenbelt hearings, I became absolutely convinced that our Ontario grape growers must sell more Ontario grapes at a better price right here in Ontario. I'm not sure that VQA stores are the best answer, but I do know that selling more VQA wines is a must. I'm absolutely positive that part of the solution is to have more VQA shelf space across Ontario. Frankly, I don't care how we get there. The number one challenge for small wineries is not just producing the wine, but attracting customers. We already produce world-class wines, but our Ontario grape growers face special homegrown obstacles, one of which is the archaic and self-destructive rules we have in Ontario to sell our wines. Most wine regions of the world celebrate their locally grown products. They do not promote the competition. Ontario restricts nearly all of its VQA estate wineries to selling through a single on-site wine store, while it spends massive amounts of money to promote New Zealand, Australian or Chilean wines. To top it off, the five biggest wineries control 98% of the off-site wine stores. This is just not right.

The small winery doesn't have a snowball's chance in heck of growing strong. To most of them, the LCBO is not a friendly partner, because its listings and merchandising practices are not helpful. They set minimum volume requirements, but most small wineries can't meet them, and at margins too low to be profitable. The larger wineries have clogged the LCBO's Ontario wine sections with 70% imported wines from Chile and elsewhere.

You may not know this: If your bottle of Ontario wine does not have a VQA label on it, it could contain as much as 70% imported wine in it. This practice does nothing to help our growers and preserve our farms. This practice takes up space that can showcase our best Ontario VQA wines, and this is really stupid. We must promote Ontario VQA wines. Our government can certainly help by opening new retail channels. This does not necessarily mean VQA stores only, because a few VQA stores will not allow the industry to achieve the mass market that it needs in order to succeed.

So here is what I'm suggesting. We need to help the wine industry by making real changes in the LCBO practices to: allow VQA-only wineries working as co-ops to have the ability to sell wines off-site; allow grocery stores to sell VQA-only wines; allow Ontario wines that have at least 75% content to be sold on the LCBO Ontario wine shelves; change the LCBO merchandising policy to sell primarily VQA wines.

Current policies and regulations from previous governments discriminated against Ontario grape growers. Current content regulations encourage wineries to import foreign wines instead of using the Ontario grapes. Labelling rules permit foreign products to be passed off as "wines of Ontario." Wineries that sell mostly 70% blended products have the exclusive rights to 95% of the off-site retail locations. VQA-only wineries have fewer incentives and privileges than wineries that blend Ontario grapes with 70% imported product. This is just nuts.

The current support for Ontario wines needs changes. Unfortunately, VQA-only stores as proposed in Bill 7 are only the window dressing on a much larger problem. We can do better. Let's start helping our farmers today. Let's have a comprehensive, Ontario-first VQA policy that helps our growers. Let's really enjoy the best of Niagara and what it has to offer: a great VQA wine in a prosperous greenbelt.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 7, the VQA Wine Store Act, introduced by my colleague from Erie–Lincoln, who first introduced the bill on Thursday, November 27, 2003.

I just want to respond to the member from Niagara Falls. When the member from Erie–Lincoln was the minister, we had the largest increase in Ontario history for Ontario wine sales in the LCBO, in partnership with the wine council, creating over 1.1 kilometres of new shelf space for Ontario wines and overseeing a 20% growth in Ontario wine sales during his tenure. I just want to put on the record that when we were in government we had a good record. I want to thank the former minister for his work.

We're in support of this bill today. It's a good bill. It would allow the promotion of and increased sale of more VQA wines. Ontario has a wine industry that we can certainly be proud of. We produce world-class wines, and I'm certain that Ontarians would welcome the opportunity to try a larger selection of these wines than they are able to get through the LCBO.

The member opposite has given me a couple of recommendations for Ontario VQA wines he tried this week, so that's good.

1030

VQA wines are made entirely of Ontario grapes. This is distinct from Ontario wines, which contain as little as 30% Ontario grapes. Ontario VQA wines do not enjoy special status at the LCBO, and for every litre of VQA wine sold, the LCBO sells 14 litres of imported wine. So the LCBO has become an easier place to obtain Ontario wines in recent years, thanks to the increase in shelf

space that we mentioned before, but it's not enough space to provide Ontarians with access to some very fine Ontario wines. Recently, there was an article written in the *National Post* about the number of top Ontario wines that are not available for sale through the LCBO. It's a shame that only 10 of the top 49 wines in Ontario are available through the LCBO.

Wine sales take place in three different ways in Ontario: the LCBO being one, the on-site winery retailers being another, and the third being direct delivery from a winery to the consumer and the restaurant. I know that shelf space is at a premium and that not every wine can be available for sale there, but this is why the bill is a good compromise. It's good for the wineries and it's good for the consumer.

My colleague has indicated that the goal of his bill is to uncork Ontario VQA wine stores and to allow wineries to sell more than one brand of wine. Cabinet would have the authority to license groups of wineries to sell a variety of VQA wines.

I just want to put a statistic in here about the experience in BC. They created VQA stores in 1995. There were originally 12 outlets; in 2003, BC authorized the creation of nine more. Eight have opened, and the last one is almost ready. BC has not yet had any difficulties on the international trade issue. It is worthwhile. It shows off our home-grown industry.

This is what we want to do. Small and medium-sized wineries have difficulty cracking such a market. It's good for jobs, investment in agriculture, tourism and the grape and wine industry, and it gives these wineries access to a broader market. I'm pleased to see the wide range of support that this bill has. The Minister of Agriculture likes it; the papers are reporting that he is impressed by the bill.

I want to take a few moments to read into the record the names of several municipal politicians, wineries and grape growers who have lent their support to the bill: Len Troup, chairman of the tender fruit growers; Robin Brock, mayor of the city of Thorold; Peter Kocsis, owner of Crown Bench Estates Winery; Doug Whitty of the Niagara Peninsula Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association; Linda Franklin, executive director of the Wine Council of Ontario; Fraser Mowat, president of Harbour Estates Winery Limited; Albert Witteveen of the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture; Katie Trombetta, mayor of West Lincoln.

Despite the high quality of the VQA wines, there has been a recent trend of slowing sales of these wines. Since 2002, sales growth has slowed from approximately 20% in 2002-03 to 7% in 2003-04 to a projected negative growth in 2004-05. As of the 2004 VQA annual report, there were 71 VQA Ontario members. It's time to give this industry a boost.

I want to take a couple of minutes to let members of the House know that Niagara is not the only area in the province that is home to wineries. I discovered myself, in my own riding, two new wineries that have set up. I know that's pretty hard to believe in Haliburton—

Victoria-Brock, but yes, it's true. Kawartha Country Wines is located in the heart of the Kawarthas, in Buckhorn, close to the member from Peterborough's riding.

For those of you who would like to try maple syrup wine, some of my constituents are looking at producing that product as well. Maple syrup wines are produced in other provinces—again, this is new to me—and it's time to look at allowing them here in Ontario. They do not fit into any existing winery category, but I think that this would be an opportunity to develop unique qualities of wine to complement the existing wine industry. Maple syrup, as of course you all know, is one of the oldest crops in Ontario. For many years, maple syrup has been harvested each spring in the province, and it has gone beyond its traditional use, which I'm happy to hear. Maple Moon is the name of the company that is trying to produce the maple syrup wine, and Eric and Carol Thompson in Haliburton are pushing this forward. I know they've been in touch with the minister. Hopefully, they will get this recognized, and there will be maple syrup wine available here in Ontario.

Sorry I've gotten a little off topic there, but I think that the member from Erie-Lincoln has put a lot of work into crafting this bill. It has broad support. I'm pleased to support it, and I agree with him that it's time to uncork the VQA wines in Ontario. Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is a privilege and a pleasure to speak to this particular bill.

In Ontario, it wasn't all that many years ago, probably 20 or 25 years ago, when the mere sound of Ontario wine would make people recoil in some kind of horror. It was made largely from labrusca grapes, the native Concord grape variety of North America. It had what one wine writer said was a foul gasoline taste. It was known for being very foxy on the tongue, for those who are wine aficionados. You would know it was something you would not run out to the store and buy. In fact, even when you were a teenager and trying to sneak it, it was not something that you relished going back to.

But those days have changed quite remarkably in very short order in this province. I remember 20 years ago or so reading about the remarkable success of one Don Ziraldo, an Algerian native who had determined that he could make better wine than he was tasting out of some of the old, established wineries that were using non-noble grape varieties. He went down to Niagara and started to grow his own vines, his own grapes, and it was hugely and spectacularly successful as one of the pioneers—certainly he was not alone—in changing how we view Ontario grapes and Ontario wines.

Today, with the replanting of most of Niagara—and I think there's hardly a soul who still grows Concord grapes except for making jam—with the replanting of all of those vines there is a broad range of grape varieties, everything from Cabernet Sauvignon to Merlot to Syrah to Viognier to Riesling to Zinfandel. Everything is grown here in the province of Ontario. In fact, the wines are starting to become, as one speaker has already said, world-class.

I'm going to support this bill, notwithstanding that I agree with my colleague from Niagara Centre that we have to be very mindful and very careful of how this is going to impact the LCBO and its employees.

Having said that, I honestly believe that we need to move forward for the wineries of Ontario. They have become, and are, world-class. They are quite unique. If you travel around the world, to various wine regions as I have done, to South Africa, Chile, Australia, Greece, France or Spain, you will see that the wines are all unique to those regions. The wines of Niagara on the north shore of Lake Erie—and even in the growing and brand new industry of Prince Edward county, the wines and the wineries are unique, the growing climates are unique, and the terroir of the soil is unique. Each one of those produces a unique flavour.

When you come to Ontario, I have to tell you that, whereas years ago you wouldn't have drunk the wine, today you're absolutely delighted to taste the new wines that are coming from this province and how special they are.

My colleague Ms. Scott asked me about some wines just today, and I had an opportunity to taste two very unique wines from Ontario this past week. There was a Château des Charmes Gewürztraminer which was to die for. I don't remember tasting Gewürztraminer from Germany or from Alsace that was quite as good as what was produced right here in Niagara.

I also had an opportunity to taste a Cabernet Sauvignon produced by Marynissen. Now, Marynissen has a small winery and their wine is not available in the LCBO, but a very good Cabernet Sauvignon that was produced by Marynissen was available, of all places—and I commend the place heartily—at the Osgoode Hall Law Society dining room. They have a policy that I hope restaurants across the city and across this province will adopt. They have a policy of discounting the Ontario wines on their menu, a little asterisk beside the wine denoting that these wines are discounted because the Osgoode Hall Law Society believes that Ontarians ought to taste the wines of their own province and that they are discounted by a couple of dollars more than the imports are. So it was an opportunity to drink those wines, to taste them, and for me to say, "Wow, Ontario wines have really come of age." These were two absolutely excellent examples that competed as well as, or in some cases better than, the international competitors.

1040

I believe that we have to do everything to help these wineries. I'm a little bit nervous about the LCBO and the employees of the LCBO, but I'm willing for this to go to second reading and, when it does, I think we can really do something wonderful for Ontario's wineries.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): I too want to applaud the member's enthusiasm. I don't want to spend any time lamenting about what could or couldn't have happened when he was minister. I think that would be unfair. We've got to move forward. So I just want to put that out there.

I think what you uncork is really important. I happen to enjoy Ontario wines. In fact, I purchase quite a bit of Ontario wine and distribute it each Christmas. It makes an ideal gift. But I think we need to watch that we don't do the wrong thing for the right reasons, and that in so doing we end up uncorking trade turmoil that would not be helpful to the industry. Lord knows we've got enough trade turmoil in this country right now. You just have to follow what's been going on with softwood lumber and the BSE situation and what have you.

Under the NAFTA agreement, which I just pause to note was brought in by a Conservative federal government, the off-site wine stores in Ontario and British Columbia were limited to those in existence or under construction or in the process of being licensed as of October 4, 1987. Ontario currently authorizes 290 off-site stores. On January 5, 2004, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade actually wrote to the Ontario government with a reminder that any increase in the number of wine retail stores selling Ontario-only wines risked eliciting a negative reaction from our trade partners, particularly in the European Union. The negotiations we had with the EU were to make available in the EU a selection of Ontario VQA wines, and we need to be careful that we don't put that effort at risk.

We on the government side certainly support ongoing efforts to develop the Ontario grape-based wine industry but believe at this time it's really premature, particularly given the in-depth review that we're undertaking, which has set out five clear principles. The report should be available at the end of the spring of this year. The principles are; to safeguard socially responsible consumption, storage, distribution and sale of beverage alcohol; to enhance convenience, variety and competitive prices for consumers; to maximize the value to taxpayers; to ensure responsible reuse and recycling practices; and fifth, and very important, to promote Ontario's products.

My colleague from Niagara Falls mentioned a number of options which I thought were quite enlightened and useful. With the review taking place, this would appear patently premature. I think it's sad that only 10 of 49 of Ontario's finest wines are on the shelf; I share that. I happen to agree with the member from Welland that there ought to be a broader and more discernible mandate for the LCBO, and I noticed as recently as last week that even the member who proposed the bill was reported to have said in a newspaper story, "Mine is an idea to create greater market access. If the government has other ideas to achieve the same result, I'd certainly be supportive." I think that's insightful.

We are supportive of the general thrust of getting more Ontario wines on greater shelf space throughout Ontario, but we don't want to do it in a way that actually puts the industry at risk. Therefore, notwithstanding my enthusiasm for the enthusiasm of the member opposite, I won't support this bill.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): It's our jobs as legislators to help, wherever possible, our constituents, local industries and businesses. Ontario's VQA wines,

unlike any other type of wine, are made from 100% Ontario grapes. No other wine can make this claim. Quite obviously, it's our job and our responsibility to do whatever is possible within our powers to support, encourage and help grow Ontario VQA wineries.

At present, an Ontario VQA winery is allowed to sell and carry only wines of their own production. Ontario VQA wineries are not allowed to carry wines from other wineries that also have the VQA brand. This needless government regulation prevents Ontario wineries from gaining the shelf space needed to be successful against their competitors from around the world.

Ontarians are presently able to purchase their VQA wines through three methods: the LCBO store, on-site winery retailers and direct delivery. While this may seem well and good, there are some problems. Direct delivery is often costly and it is increasingly hard to discover which wineries would offer this service. On-site retailers are certainly good, but obviously, as I said, they only sell one type of wine, made by one company, and how would I know which one to go to to get it? The LCBO is a creature of our own government and of course it's revenue-driven. Policies and procedures to promote domestic products quite obviously take a back seat to the non-Ontario wines and the profit they can make. The LCBO must stock products that will bring in the most money and make the most profit for the government, not to support our farming community.

Ontario wineries find it difficult to compete against big wineries from around the world. These foreign wineries can deliver an almost endless supply of wine for minimal cost. Ontario's VQA wines are part of a fledgling industry, and it is our job as legislators to support the tender fruit farmers who grow our grapes and the different wineries that employ our citizens. These smaller wineries are potential employers, taxpayers, consumers and producers. The time is now for the Ontario government to step in and take an active role in supporting our Ontario tender fruit farmers and Ontario VQA wines.

Yesterday, I saw many Ontario tender fruit growers on the front lawn of the Legislature. Just like our cash crop, grain, oilseed, tobacco and beef farmers, the tender fruit farmers are also struggling with the rising Canadian dollar, increased costs of doing business and lack of government support.

The LCBO is the only multi-location outlet for Ontario wine. It only makes sense that we should better promote Ontario VQA wine over other countries and regions. Passing this bill will allow Ontario VQA wineries to potentially open their own VQA retail outlets. Passing this bill will allow increased shelf space and competition among Ontario VQA wineries. Passing this bill supports our farmers. Clearly, it is our job as legislators to promote and support Ontario VQA wines. Passing this bill into law will do just that.

Why don't we give Ontario's VQA wines a chance to compete? This bill will support our tender fruit farmers. This bill will encourage growth and development and

investment in Ontario. This bill is good for jobs. This bill opens up a broader market for our wineries, potentially increasing revenues for the wineries and the province. Why should we do anything else but support this bill?

I support the Ontario tender fruit farmers, which is why I support Mr. Hudak's bill.

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): It's a privilege to speak to this bill. Mr. Hudak has identified a very real problem in this province. I don't know how LCBO operates—I'm not sure anyone knows how LCBO operates—but here is what I do know: In my riding, in Prince Edward county, we now have eight wineries. Six years ago, we had none—a significant difference. These wineries exist because individuals chose to take a gamble. Knowing them, it is more than a business; it is in fact a passion on their part that they chose to invest in this wine industry.

Their investment has brought tremendous benefits to all of our community, to other businesses and to the community itself. They make wine that I believe is world-class. They win awards. That doesn't seem to matter to LCBO, but they win awards, and they make their wine with grapes grown in our county—an absolutely first-rate product.

The problem is, how do they sell it? How do they get LCBO shelf space? How do they market their product? The rules seem extremely complex. In fact, we struggle to determine why LCBO gives the majority of shelf space to other countries. I don't understand that. No other country would do it.

1050

The LCBO itself makes life very difficult. We have a very unique producer in our community that makes fruit wines, and there's no encouragement. Here's a wonderful, unique product that the individual owning it has struggled to sell. He makes a great product, but the selling is difficult. The current system is not even neutral, but works against my local wineries. I believe this bill, if nothing else, will flag that we need to do something differently.

I certainly support the current LCBO system. But I know in Prince Edward county we are attracting tourists from afar who now come there as a destination. They may not have the opportunity to visit every one of the eight wineries. It is certainly worth looking at whether there is a possibility or if it's feasible to allow one winery to carry the products of the others so that they could purchase Prince Edward county wines at any of the wineries. The wineries themselves may not want that, but at least the option should be considered and reviewed.

I'm certainly going to support this bill, because I think it will precipitate some questions.

We need to do more for Ontario products. I'm proud that our government is committed to putting \$2 million a year into the marketing of what is a fine product. Wouldn't it be nice if the LCBO came on board with us? We in Ontario shouldn't have to lobby LCBO to carry our wines. They should want to come forward and increase the shelf space.

I can say that all of my wineries located in Prince Edward county need support and encouragement. They need to be able to sell what is absolutely a world-class product. Hopefully, this bill will start us on the road to giving credit and support to our own industry here in Ontario.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I'm extremely pleased to support this bill that has been put forward by my colleague Tim Hudak. Of course, he had put this bill forward when he was Minister of Consumer and Business Services through the rural red tape reduction bill. As has been stated, this particular bill will amend the Liquor Control Act to give Ontario's VQA wine industry the ability to partner together, cross-sell each other's brands and of course further promote VQA wines.

I want to congratulate my colleague Mr. Hudak. He has been one of the most outstanding supporters and advocates of Ontario wines. He has done everything he possibly could do on behalf of the agricultural and wine industries to make sure that people in this province have access to Ontario wines.

In fact, I was quite concerned when I read the National Post story which indicated that only 10 of the top 49 wines in Ontario are for sale through the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, so obviously people in this province don't have access to the fine wines that have come on the market, particularly in recent years. We need to make sure, first of all, that we do everything we can to promote the tender fruit growers, the wine industry, and provide increased access to the outstanding wines that are available in our province. In fact, I think the wine industry is now pretty well everywhere in the province. I'm always surprised when I travel to different parts of the province to find out that another small winery has started operation.

This particular bill, if passed, would certainly allow our excellent wines to be further exposed and available not only to people in Ontario and all Canadians but to our tourists as well. I think it would be a great boost for the grape and wine industry, a great boost for tourism and agriculture.

These types of VQA wine stores already exist in British Columbia. If you take a look south of the border, we have California and New York, which also have wine stores dedicated to promoting the local industry. I think it is extremely important that we open up our industry as well and ensure that there are more opportunities than ever before.

I'd like to quote Linda Franklin, the executive director of the Wine Council of Ontario who says, "This is an important initiative to improve access to the marketplace for 100% Ontario VQA wines." She goes on to say that "Tim Hudak has been an outstanding advocate of Ontario wines, both in government and now in opposition." Of course, I said that at the outset, how supportive Tim has been of that industry and the promotion of Ontario wines and improving access to them.

The chairman of the tender fruit growers' association, Len Troup, also said, "It just makes common sense. We

live in Ontario, and we should be promoting Ontario wines. To do anything less makes no sense." Then, of course, we have the owner of Crown Bench Estates Winery, Peter Kocsis, who says, "Tim Hudak's bill will give the Ontario consumer an opportunity to be exposed to Niagara premium—world-class—wines. It would also help to level the marketplace for the fledgling Ontario wine industry." He goes on to say, "It's a win-win solution."

I can tell you that I certainly will be supporting this bill, and I would encourage all members of the House to support our wine and grape industry.

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): I want to start by saying that it certainly is our government's position to support the ongoing development of Ontario's grape-based wine industry and VQA wines in a big way.

Shortly after I was elected in October 2003 and after I had been appointed as PA to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, I was approached by many Ontario wineries. They said, "Tony, we're so glad that you have been appointed to this ministry and you can now help us crack the Chinese market, because we know that wines are getting very popular in China." They are right. But I do want to echo the comments of the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, that supporting this bill at this time would violate Canada and Ontario's international trade obligations and would be premature, given the current beverage alcohol sector review.

In the May 2004 budget, our government committed additional funding of \$2 million per year for five years, beginning this year, 2005. A key focus of this funding is increased marketing for VQA wines.

I know that my time is running out, but I do want to share with members here that we are confident that Ontario's award-winning wines can compete with the world's best. About three days ago, I hosted a dinner on behalf of our government to the delegation from our sister province, Jiangsu of China. Guess what we served them. Ontario VQA wines—they loved it. We are confident that we can compete anywhere in the world.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? There are about 50 seconds left.

Mr. Yakabuski: It's hard to say everything we want to say in less than a minute, but we'll try to be brief. I want to point out the great record that Tim Hudak had while he was the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, I guess, at that point, and how much work he did for the wineries and how much he continues to do for them as a member of the opposition.

I do want to say that last night my wife and I shared a bottle of Château des Charmes Sauvignon Blanc, and I've got to tell you, it was delicious. I'm fully supportive of Ontario wineries and I'm fully supportive of Tim Hudak and this bill. I hope that the House joins me in supporting that this morning.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Hudak, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Hudak: I appreciate the comments of various members on this legislation. I do appreciate the attend-

ance of my Niagara colleagues here today. Thanks very much for the comments of the member from Prince Edward county, who clearly stood in his place and said he would be supporting this bill in favour of the wineries in his riding. I know the gentleman from Essex—he was in the Speaker's chair today—is a strong advocate of VQA wineries as well.

But I say to my colleague from Niagara Falls, we do need to stand together as Niagara members, and Stoney Creek and St. Catharines as well. Private members' bills are often more about the symbolism through second reading, supporting a concept. If you support the concept of doing more for VQA wineries, then send it to committee. If you have some concerns about particular language in the bill or certain parts of the approach, send it to committee, and let's go over those details. But I do say to my colleagues, "Stand in your place and serve it." You don't always have to read these too-eagerly partisan treatises from staff that say the previous government did nothing. It seems to be the first thing they always say.

1100

We stand proudly on our record of a record increase in VQA wine sales; the biggest promotion of Ontario wine in the history of the LCBO; 1.1 kilometres of new shelf space. I could go on and on. I thank the LCBO for that support and I thank the folks at MCBS for that support. But there are more steps to go.

To my colleague on the trade issue, this bill is about cross-selling, it's not about the number of licences. Cabinet retains that number. We don't have anything in this bill dealing with the number of licences, but we do talk about cross-selling of brands. I find it regrettable that the parliamentary assistant for MCBS takes the position that our policy for the LCBO should be dictated in the halls of Canberra or Paris or Sacramento. In fact, they worship the LCBO as heroes there because they are the biggest sellers of Australian, French, Italian and California wines in the entire world. Andy Brandt, who has done a lot for the wine industry, was recently hailed by the French wine industry for the work he has done for imported French wines. I do hope we'll have our colleagues' support. Send this to committee and let's do the right thing for Ontario VQA wineries.

BETTER BUILDINGS PARTNERSHIP

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa—Orléans): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should further its energy conservation and emission-reduction agenda by taking steps to encourage and support province-wide development of robust Better Buildings Partnership programs, as exemplified by the city of Toronto's highly successful and world-renowned Better Buildings Partnership program.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. McNeely has moved ballot item number 54. Pursuant to standing order 96, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. McNeely: I'm pleased to use this time to talk about an issue that I believe is very important to the

future of this province. That issue is conservation—environmental conservation and energy conservation—and how Better Buildings Partnership programs can contribute to conservation in Ontario.

One of our government's main priorities is ensuring that future generations of Ontarians can enjoy a clean and green Ontario. I am proud that we are taking proactive steps toward this goal. I applaud the efforts of my colleagues, the Minister of Energy and his parliamentary assistant, the honourable member for Etobicoke Centre, in widely promoting the conservation message around Ontario. I especially applaud some of the courageous decisions that have been made to cut back on harmful greenhouse gas emissions to improve air quality in our cities and to hopefully slow the climate change process that is an imminent global threat.

In Toronto a few weeks back, a smog advisory was issued. It was a mild day with no wind and the pollution hung over the city like a cloud. You couldn't even see the top of the CN Tower. One windless winter day, and Toronto's entire skyline was hidden behind a screen of pollutants. A smog day in Toronto, our nation's biggest and most populated city; "Well, that's one thing," you might say. But think about this: Last summer, a smog advisory was called for Algonquin Park, one of our province's environmental treasures. To me, that's a clear sign that we must start turning the tide.

The closing of our coal-fired plants by 2007 is a very meaningful move toward cleaner energy for our province. I think it's great that we're looking to more environmentally friendly resources like wind, biomass, water and ethanol to produce the power we all depend on. Our commitment to cleaner energy also strikes a strong contrast to the direction other nations are taking. According to Robert Kennedy Jr.'s recent book on US federal environmental policies, *Crimes Against Nature*, our neighbours to the south have 100 to 200 new coal-fired plants on the drawing board. By closing our plants, we are planning for the future because we know that a cleaner Ontario will be a healthier Ontario and a more prosperous Ontario for years to come. Meanwhile, asthma attacks are doubling every five years in the US. According to Kennedy, emissions from coal-fired plants containing poisonous mercury could represent the cause of permanent IQ loss, as well as birth defects and even autism in children who are exposed while still in the womb. This is dangerous stuff, folks, and the US federal plan seems to keep adding to the problem.

Personally, I firmly disagree with people who say that just because the US isn't working toward conservation, or because it hasn't signed on to Kyoto, we should just throw in the towel too. There are many strong environmental voices in the US, and we should supporting those voices by standing up for our principles and doing something about air quality and climate change here.

I believe we have an opportunity to continue to show leadership. In fact, I believe we have a responsibility to show that leadership, to show our neighbours and our friends around the world that environmental responsi-

bility is in everyone's best interests and that it does not have to come at the expense of urban development or economic growth.

When I was a city councillor in Ottawa and vice-chair of the city's environmental committee, I was attached to a program that had the potential to demonstrate that kind of leadership, a Better Buildings Partnership program. I believe, and the records show, that Better Buildings Partnerships are excellent investments in conservation.

A recent report by the National Round Table on the Economy and the Environment looked at energy use and emissions by end use. According to the report, residential, commercial and industrial buildings represent 69% of energy use in Canada and contribute 63% of our greenhouse gas emissions, and at least half of those percentages are for heating and cooling.

By means of renovations to improve the energy efficiency of residential and commercial buildings, these programs reduce demand on the energy system, reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and also contribute to economic activity and, more importantly, even job creation. They are in fact one of the best value-for-money investments that we have for energy conservation.

Unfortunately, the city of Ottawa Better Buildings Partnership program never got off ground, thanks to the actions of senior bureaucrats following municipal amalgamation. Without warning, explanation or fanfare, the program was scrapped and its great staff was given their walking papers. I was extremely disappointed that Ottawa was giving up on such a positive initiative.

The city of Toronto, on the other hand, recognized the value of implementing a Better Buildings Partnership program. They went ahead and haven't looked back.

I want to take a moment to introduce Richard Morris, who is with us today.

Applause.

Mr. McNeely: Richard, as some of you know, is the manager of the city of Toronto's energy efficiency office and one of the world's experts in developing Better Buildings Partnership programs and making them a success. He will be leaving for England on the 19th of this month where the city of Toronto is helping the city of London to set up a Better Buildings Partnership program.

The city of Toronto's Better Buildings Partnership program is an innovative program that has had a great deal of success since it was started in 1996. The principle of the program is simple. The city of Toronto made a one-time investment of \$8 million in what is called a revolving fund. The money came from the Canada-Ontario infrastructure program. Seed funds were also provided to hire staff to manage the program. The \$8 million in the revolving fund is loaned out, interest-free, to the private and non-private sectors to help finance improvements to existing buildings, making them more energy efficient.

City experts and partners from local distribution companies, such as Enbridge and Toronto Hydro, advise and assist owners in developing retrofit or renovation strategies to improve efficiency. By making these renovations

to buildings so that less energy is used, owners can realize huge savings in terms of energy costs. And because less demand is placed on the energy system, emission levels go down as well.

The beauty of the program is that the money invested by the city in the program is loaned; it's not given. When the project starts to generate significant energy cost savings, the owners repay the loan to the city, and it goes out again to finance another project. The original investment, therefore, sustains the program well into the future. The same original dollars fund new projects. It's kind of like the gift that keeps on giving.

There are economic gifts, too. According to the city of Toronto's experience, the program only needs to lend 10% to 30% of the dollars necessary to fund individual projects. So the project can generate economic activity up to 10 times the value of the original government investment.

And with this economic activity comes jobs. The city of Toronto's results since 1996 speak for themselves: 440 buildings have been retrofitted; almost \$20 million is now saved annually in energy costs; CO₂ emissions have been reduced by 173,000 tonnes per year; economic activity has been generated in the amount of \$131 million; and over 3,900 person-years of employment have been generated.

Not only does the city retain its original \$8-million investment—Torontonians are very frugal—but over time it has actually grown to \$9 million.

1110

I want to suggest that the province could adopt the model put forward very successfully by the city of Toronto. If we were to make a significant investment, say \$20 million per year for five years, we could see impressive numbers. Assuming an average repayment term of 10 years, and assuming that the \$100-million investment could be leveraged by a further \$200 million from the private and non-profit sectors, we could retrofit 1,000 buildings across the province in the first five years of implementation. By year five, we could be eliminating up to 400,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions every year. By year five, operating costs for buildings—the energy costs—could be reduced by \$50 million annually and, over five years, we could generate \$300 million in economic activity and nearly 10,000 person-years of employment. These are modest estimates of what we could do and the kinds of benefits a province-wide Better Buildings Partnership program could have.

As someone who cares about the environment, who believes the science clearly shows we are in great peril from global warming and who is concerned about the kind of province our children and grandchildren will inherit from our generation, it is with a feeling of hope that I stand in this House today to promote a province-wide Better Buildings Partnership program. We have a successful model in the city of Toronto's world-renowned program and excellent resources with its experts. If we follow their example, Ontario will realize many benefits, many times over, for many years to come.

I urge this House again to support this resolution and I request that our government take a closer look at how a province-wide Better Buildings Partnership could contribute to our conservation efforts and help cement our province's status as a leader on environmental issues.

I wish to thank all those on both sides of the House who have volunteered to speak to this motion. I look forward to their contributions.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

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

I am very pleased to join in the debate in terms of the member's motion. Certainly it's good to see the Minister of Energy in here today. I know he's very interested in what is happening in this area. I expect him to speak on this and maybe provide a little bit more flesh to the bone since he has come here today. I look forward to the Minister of Energy speaking on this motion.

Also, I want to say that certainly everybody in the House, without exception, would have support for energy conservation and emission reduction. That's very important. It looks like what the member is trying to propose here is a program—it's my understanding from my friend from Beaches–East York, who is a former mayor of East York—that was put in place by the city of Toronto in 1996 and was essentially dealing with the retrofit of commercial-industrial properties, an interest-free loan, and was run by the municipality. I would imagine that what he is looking at here, and I stand to be corrected, is for this to be put forth across municipalities in this province in terms of the industrial-commercial sector, which certainly makes sense. I don't know whether it applied to the institutional sector or if that's something that he is envisioning, because certainly the institutional sector that should be leading the way. The Minister of Energy will probably comment on that.

We've seen great initiatives not only in the industrial-commercial sector but also recently in the low-rise residential sector in terms of builders making their houses much more energy-efficient. I think that's a tremendous marketing tool. I was at an opening a few months ago in my riding for a builder by the name of Mason Homes, which has become part of the green program in terms of how they design their houses, making sure that energy conservation is the focus of the house.

I know that may not sit well with the deputy House leader, who is a big proponent of high-rise density—and I have nothing against that if he comes forth with respect to high-rise programs in the downtown areas. I know he has been to the city of Barrie and he knows that the high-rise is an area that obviously has to be looked at in terms of revitalizing our downtowns. Certainly the city of Barrie is looking forward to that. I know Minister Caplan will be coming forth and putting some meat on the bones in terms of what his initiatives are. The city of Barrie was designated as a growth area and would be looking for Minister Caplan to come forth and provide some information in terms of how much money will be coming out of the infrastructure program that should be coming down. I know they are expecting municipalities to change

their official plans to conform with Minister Caplan's vision of the great province of Ontario in terms of downtown revitalization. I think that's something that should be encouraged.

I know his initial 25 areas didn't include the city of Windsor. The Minister of Energy and the Minister of Children and Youth Services would certainly be looking to work with city of Windsor officials to make sure that downtown Windsor—it's a great downtown but it needs to be looked at as a whole in terms of high-rise and different developments that we need to revitalize our downtowns.

I know Minister Caplan is in conversation with the Minister of Energy. They are going to be discussing that at length, making sure that we come forth with fair funding across the province with respect to downtown revitalization, because Minister Caplan is a big proponent of high-rise development. And that's fine, because that's something we should be looking at in terms of energy conservation.

I'm getting lots of letters from condominium owners saying, "My taxes are going through the roof. Why aren't we fairly treated?" I forward those to Minister Sorbara, because I know he is looking at that area, especially from an assessment point of view. I know Minister Sorbara has a good handle on how to deal with land development and other property issues. But energy conservation is a big issue in terms of condominium owners.

Mr. McNeely certainly has my support with respect to an energy conservation program. I look forward to listening to the Minister of Energy, because he is probably very interested, and I'm pleased to see that he's attending the House today for this motion.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I am just so happy to have an opportunity to speak to this motion this morning. Do you want to know why? It gives me an opportunity to talk about energy policies in northeastern and northwestern Ontario.

I have to say, I support this particular bill. I've got no problem. It goes in the right direction. In fact, you would know that Marilyn Churley has done a lot of work in this particular area, and the city of Toronto specifically has done a lot of work. I agree with the member that this is something we should move forward on in regard to trying to figure out how we can deal with some of this across the province within a public context. I wanted to say that right way.

The other thing is, I want to come back to my first point: I am so happy to be here. The Minister of Energy is in the House. He is here and he wants to hear what I have to say. I know he is keenly interested. He had a good night's sleep, he's here and he's ready. I have to say, Minister, there are a whole bunch of hydro utility customers in northern Ontario really angry with you. They are saying, "Listen, the Tories started this whole initiative of privatization and deregulation. As a result, we have hydro rates and extra charges on the hydro bills." Remember before, you used to get a hydro bill that used to be for the kilowatt hours, everything included?

Now they give you a bill and say, "So much for kilowatt hours, and, by the way, here's double again," so that you pay for everything else. People like Falconbridge, Tembec, Abitibi, a whole whack of utility customers that we send hydro bills to, in fact the largest hydro utility customers in the province—

Mr. McNeely: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think this is private members' time. This is normally non-partisan. We're talking about energy conservation. I don't understand what the member is getting at.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll keep my eye on the clock. Thank you to the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford. I'll listen very carefully that we stick to the resolution.

Mr. Bisson: I want to thank the member for—oh, no, you've got to stay, Dwight, or else I'll send you the Hansard. I'm sending you the Hansard, I'm telling you. There you are. Stay.

My point is, there are many employers who are really worried about what all of this energy policy means. Conservation can be part of how companies save money when it comes to being able to afford the high energy bills they're getting and the extra 12% they're going to be socked this spring because of this government's hydro policy. Certainly, if you look at companies like Tembec in Smooth Rock Falls—now, they have their own generating capacity; they don't buy from Hydro. Actually, they sell back to Hydro, as the minister well knows. But one of the things they've done is looked at conservation as one way to reduce the overall amount of hydro they need, lessening their cost, and that's a good thing. That's part of what the member talks about in the bill.

But the basic fact is there is still a whole bunch of employers out there: big companies like Falconbridge, which operates a mine smelter division in Timmins; Tembec, with their TMP plant; the paper mill in Kapuskasing, and list goes across the north. They are huge customers, and there is only so much conservation they can do. You can do as much conservation as you want—and that's a good thing; I encourage the kind of policy the member has brought forward—but the basic fact is that there are still utility customers.

1120

You sit down with these employers and talk to Terry Skiffington at the mill in Kapuskasing, or to Picard, the manager in Timmins at the Kidd Creek Met. site—they're really worried. They're saying, "Listen, a big part of the cost of doing business for us is energy," because of the types of processes they use. For example, in Kapuskasing they have a TMP pulping process. It's very much an energy user as far as the process; rather than grinding the wood into pulp, they're actually going through a TMP, a thermomechanical pulping process, which is a high energy utilization method of doing it but a very efficient way to deal with making pulp for paper.

That's the same story as those of many pulp and paper mills across northern Ontario. If you look at Kidd Creek, they operate a refinery, which is a high-energy utility. There's no way of saying, "We're not going to use the

hydro; we're going to turn the power off," because they just couldn't run their plant. They're saying to me, "We've got a problem. Energy is a big part of the cost of doing business for our plants. As energy prices go up, it is making us less viable as mills that we operate." They are saying, "At one point, we're going to hit the wall. The energy prices are going to be so high that no matter what we do on the efficiency side, we are not going to be able to pay the bill at the end of the day because there is not going to be a profit after we pay our energy prices."

For example, after Kidd Creek Mines in Timmins, on their metallurgical site, got the last set of increases in hydro, they went out and invested a significant amount of money in order to find ways to save energy. They did that in order to offset the investment to offset those increases in electricity. They were somewhat successful, I wouldn't say completely, but they certainly went a long way to deal with what were the last hydro increases. I met with them and they said, "If we get a hydro increase of 20%, we'll have lost all of our investment in energy efficiency, and we are going to be at the point of having to make some decisions about what we do next." I'm telling you, there's a whole bunch of employers out there who are having to make decisions: Can I or can I not afford to run my plant? Why? Because energy prices are going through the roof.

Mr. McNeely is shaking his head. I know that he's shaking his head saying no, but that is what the truth is. We saw in Terrace Bay just this week that one of the plants is closing down up there, and part of the issue is energy. Yes, there are other issues out there. I'm not going to stand here and say it's only electricity, because we know it's partly the low American dollar; it's partly the regulations—for example, some of the regulations around the environment are making it expensive for them to operate. Everybody believes that we need to make sure they are environmentally responsible, but all of these things have costs associated with them.

Basically, what we're creating is a perfect storm for industry to fail. Energy is a big part of creating that perfect storm to fail. I'm just saying to the member across the way that I applaud your initiative to deal with the whole issue of energy efficiency, and I agree with you that we've got to go that way. In fact, we have a number of ideas—Marilyn Churley and Howard Hampton have listed numbers of them, along with members of the Conservative Party, and now yourself with this bill—and we need to go in that direction.

But if you don't get a hold of rates and we don't get a hold of how we deal with hydro policy in the province in a positive way, we are going to be in the position where we lose more employees across northern Ontario and other parts of the province. Since McGuinty has been elected, we've lost 6,000 jobs in northern Ontario, either temporarily or permanently, because of energy prices and other things that have created this perfect storm.

So I say to the members that we've got to get this under control. Yes, we're going to hear the argument, "It can't be done." Well, do you know what? Why is it that

Manitoba, Quebec and other places where they have public utilities are able to do it?

We have to say to ourselves, "Is electricity a basic infrastructure?" I think the answer is yes. And if it's a basic infrastructure, then we've got to operate as we used to without Ontario Hydro, where we basically operate with no profit and we deliver electricity to the consumer at cost. Why? Because it's as important as having a highway or a telephone. You can't do business if you can't travel to the plant, you can't do business if you can't telephone out, and you can't turn on the lights and do the process if you don't have electricity at an affordable price.

I say to the member, hurray for you for having brought forward what I think is a good bill, but shame on your government and shame on your Minister of Energy for continuing down the road of deregulation and privatization that is going to kill jobs across not only northern Ontario but the rest of this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I would encourage members to stick to the subject matter of the resolution before us as best they can.

With that, we will have further debate. The Minister of Energy and member for Windsor—St. Clair.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I want to begin by commending the member for Ottawa—Orléans for bringing forward this resolution to help Ontario become a more energy-efficient province. I will direct my comments to the resolution itself after I respond briefly to a number of the, shall we say, less than fulsome points that were made by my colleague opposite.

First of all, prices aren't going up 12%. That's nonsense. That's number one. Last year, your leader said they were going up 40%, and they didn't. They didn't go up 40%; they went down 19%.

Number two, the member forgets quite conveniently that his government cancelled every conservation program in Ontario when they were in power—every one of them.

Then the member contradicts himself. On the one hand, he says we have to pay the full cost of electricity; on the other hand, he says that welfare people in Toronto ought to subsidize big industry. We say no to that. If you use it, you have to pay for it. We are managing it in such a way that we will have an adequate, reliable, safe supply going forward.

Through the efforts of the member for Ottawa—Orléans, Mr. McNeely, this will help encourage and promote conservation. I would urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this private member's resolution. It is because of members like Mr. McNeely from Ottawa—Orléans looking at these types of projects—this particular one happening in Toronto—and making people around the province aware of them that we can in fact move to a culture of conservation. I see that my parliamentary assistant, the member for Etobicoke Centre, is here. Her efforts have been absolutely outstanding. She led the conservation action group, and I tell you, Mr.

Speaker, that her efforts and the efforts of a number of other members here in the House will become law and will help us move to a culture of innovation and conservation that ultimately will lead to less expensive electricity bills for consumers.

The other thing that I think needs to be said is that in promoting this type of initiative, what individuals like Mr. McNeely are doing is helping Canada meet its emissions reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol. This government believes we ought to reduce CO₂ emissions, because we shouldn't be having smog days in Algonquin Park; we shouldn't be having smog days in Toronto in February. We need to be a leader, not a follower. We need to set the example, not follow the example. Members like Mr. McNeely deserve a lot of credit for helping us address these very specific issues.

This culture of conservation can be built through a number of initiatives similar to what Mr. McNeely talks about. For example, we have announced an ambitious plan to install a smart meter in 800,000 Ontario homes and small businesses by 2007, and in each and every Ontario home and small business by 2010. The Conservatives and the New Democrats oppose that. They want the old way. They want the status quo. They don't want people to be able to manage their bills. They want to perpetrate the myth that they can subsidize electricity prices and do it in a responsible way. The fact is, they can't. The fact is, it is through members like Mr. McNeely pointing out programs of this nature that we get a responsible energy price. That is how we ensure that the constituents of the member for Beaches—East York don't subsidize the price of electricity for large corporations, which I know his leader wants them to do.

So this party's policy and this member talk about the sorts of initiative that can empower people to manage their consumption, to manage their bills, and ultimately to reduce their bills. We hope this Legislature will endorse this. We believe all of you should support it. We certainly support it. I hope we can persuade the Legislature to recognize in a unanimous fashion the work of—and I understand we have leaders like Richard Morris, the manager of the city of Toronto's energy efficiency office, here today, and there is the work of the member for Ottawa—Orléans. We hope you will work with our member on this.

By the way, our new Conservation Bureau will be set up and running fairly soon. It was created under Bill 100. You opposed that. The NDP opposed setting up the conservation office, as did the Conservatives. They opposed it. They voted against it. They're on the record, not once, not twice, but three times. It will be set up, I say to the member for Ottawa—Orléans. This resolution will hopefully have the unanimous consent of the House, and we will give it to the new chief conservation officer. I give you my undertaking, as energy minister, that I will ask the chief conservation officer to make sure we follow up, not only with ideas like this but with the good ideas that are all over the province.

I will be here to vote if there is a vote called on this resolution. I urge members on all sides of the House to support this very progressive and well-informed initiative my colleague has brought forward. I congratulate him. I congratulate those in Toronto who have used this so effectively. I look forward to working with the member for Ottawa–Orléans as we go forward on interesting projects like this and many others. Thanks very much for putting this resolution.

1130

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It's a pleasure for me to be here this morning as well. I want to commend the member for Ottawa–Orléans for bringing forth this initiative. I think it's one that, in general principle, we can all support in this House. Energy conservation is something we all need to pay close attention to as we move forward in the economic future of this province because our rate of growth in the consumption of energy simply can't continue to escalate the way it has in the past number of years, simply because our ability to provide it is certainly compromised.

One of the reasons I want to talk about energy conservation, and also our commitment to the Kyoto accord and all those kinds of things as well—and this kind of initiative is important—is that the ways in which we can reduce those gas emissions, the different ways we can do that, are important for us to achieve those goals both provincially and nationally.

One of the reasons energy conservation is so very important—and I want to commend the city of Toronto for their initiative back in 1996 when they pioneered this program. It has borne great results for businesses in the city and has reduced emissions, but it also has helped a lot of commercial and industrial properties reduce the amount of energy they use, thereby reducing their costs.

Why is energy conservation of such great importance and so urgent right now? Part of it is the policy of this government, poorly thought-out, to shut down our coal plants—boom—in 2007. If they proceed with that without investigating clean coal and some alternatives to shutting them down, we are going to be in one heck of a mess. This spring we're going to shut down Lakeview. That's 500 megawatts. We're talking about 8,000 megawatts that we need to actually close down the coal-fired generating stations. So we're a long way from achieving that goal.

We've talked about an initiative with regard to wind power that is going to produce about 330 megawatts, I believe, and then there's a biomass project that's going to use manure to also produce some energy. Other than that, there's nothing new in the foreseeable future. I think that's something we have to consider very closely before we shut down those coal plants. So this is all about conservation, as you can see.

As to where I believe the province needs to be going, the answer is right in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. We need to be producing for the future needs of the province, and the future energy needs of Ontario must come with the

nuclear source as our primary baseload. AECL in Chalk River, with 1,900 employees, is state-of-the-art, world-class, a world leader. We have to take a really close look at the advanced Candu reactor for solving the energy needs in the province of Ontario. They've got great people working there. They've had great success internationally.

I am concerned. I've actually heard that this government is looking at a French consortium—Framatome, I believe the name of it is—to buy their nuclear reactors to produce nuclear power in Ontario. I caution the minister and I caution this government and I implore them—we have the best nuclear program in the world in AECL right here in Chalk River, in my riding. That is the source of nuclear power. We have to get the power from them as we solve the energy needs in the province of Ontario.

As I said, getting back directly to the bill of my colleague from Ottawa–Orléans, I do want to commend him. We are going to support this bill. It's something that's been successful in the city of Toronto and it certainly can be successful across the province of Ontario. I know the minister didn't make much of a commitment, other than to send it for more study today, but I think the government does need to fess up with some of that money to make this program work.

One thing I'm very disappointed in with this government and this minister is the cancellation of the Energy Star program for energy-efficient appliances. We bought new appliances while that program was on because we wanted to reduce our energy consumption at home and we also wanted to contribute to the energy conservation programs here in the province of Ontario. Without any warning, just holus-bolus, bam, bam, it's all over, the Minister of Energy cancelled that program. I think that was very negative for the people of Ontario, to cancel that without an alternative in place.

So, as I've said, we're supportive of the bill but there are many, many issues in the energy file that need to be addressed that this government simply isn't doing because, quite frankly, they don't have a plan and they don't know how to get there.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I stand in support of this bill. I stand in support of this bill as a person from Toronto; I'm from the Toronto area. I stand in support of this bill because I have seen how well it has worked in our community. Hopefully, this will spread to be used equally well in other parts of the province.

This is an idea that is a little bit older than people actually understand or realize. It was started by the Toronto energy efficiency office, which was set up as an independent group with the city of Toronto a number of years ago. Its first CEO, its first person in charge, was none other than our own Marilyn Churley. That's really where she got her start, around all of the issues of the environment.

It morphed and it changed in 1996 into the Better Buildings Partnership. The city of Toronto did a very novel thing with infrastructure funds in that year. Whereas many municipalities, including my own municipality of East York, spent money redoing our community centre

and paving some sidewalks and spending money in standard municipal ways, the city of Toronto took \$8 million of the money they got from the federal/provincial partnership and they spent it for a revolving fund, and that revolving fund is the partnership itself: \$8 million, which was given out largely to commercial and industrial establishments. People would make their buildings energy efficient and they would draw from the fund, usually between 10% and 30% of the cost of making the building energy efficient, and then, with the monies that were saved—and it was easy to calculate that because you could see how much your electricity and gas bills and other bills went down—they would reimburse the city of Toronto and the fund back that same amount of money. It took anywhere, on average, from five to eight years for the fund to be replenished. Then that same fund is loaned out to new people who want to make their buildings energy efficient.

I'm not sure where this bill is going with this because the motion is kind of open and I acknowledge that it needs to be open. It doesn't say whether we intend that all municipalities do this in Ontario. If we do so on a per capita basis, that's going to cost the province of Ontario and/or the municipality some \$50 million.

Having said that, we think it's a good idea. If it's for the province to adopt and do the same within its mandate, it's going to cost probably considerably more, since the budget of Ontario is certainly larger than the budgets of even all of the municipalities combined.

1140

Having said that, we think much more needs to be done. We applaud the member in what he is doing, and we will be supporting that. I draw some considerable experience and some considerable knowledge here from the Pembina Institute. I'd like to quote them; it's not that long a quote. According to the Pembina Institute:

"...other jurisdictions in North America are implementing the types of program that will be needed in Ontario to reduce energy dependency. California, for example, has reduced peak power demand by 20%, or 10,000 megawatts, over the past 20 years, with a combination of utility demand-side management programs and building and appliance standards. The study concludes that with an appropriate regulatory foundation in the form of minimum energy efficiency standards and labelling, Ontario Energy Board incentive mechanisms for utilities and improved grid access for cogenerators, major reductions in electricity consumption can be achieved without excessive cost to government or energy consumers or by penalizing low-income members of Ontario society."

The Pembina Institute, the city of Toronto—everyone who is interested in conservation has given us a guideline. This bill will ensure that the city of Toronto's success reaches out and goes to other municipalities and to other governments. We believe this is a good start, but we think there is much more that needs to be done. I am going to send the minister a copy of my speech, perhaps; I hope he will read it.

Even more important than building new energy-producing vehicles such as coal plants, as suggested by the member from Renfrew, or building nuclear devices, as also suggested by him, we believe that the greatest thing this government can do is to exercise energy efficiency, to make things efficient so that we as Ontarians use less electricity. If we can reduce the peak demand by 10%, that's 10% of extra power that we don't have to produce. It's as simple as that: Reduce the demand and you don't have to build the coal-fired generating plants, or you could shut them down. You don't have to rely on nuclear; we can use other forms and safe forms.

The Pembina Institute has listed 20 policies that will get us there. In a few seconds, I'd just like to outline some of those: Energy Star appliances by the year 2010; R2000 in all buildings by the year 2010; energy efficiency requirements under the Planning Act so that municipalities are required in all new buildings to do that; incentives and grants for energy efficiency, for retrofits of buildings; sales rebates on Energy Star appliances; tax credits to industrial energy-efficient equipment; and protection of low-income consumers.

With that, we surely can go on the road to that kind of energy efficiency which will make sure that we will not have brownouts in this province and that the costs will remain low and affordable for industry and consumers alike.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I am pleased to have the opportunity to get a few words on the record to support my colleague from Ottawa—Orléans's Better Buildings Partnership programs. This is an important resolution this morning. I know my colleague from Ottawa—Orléans played a significant role in the development of conservation programs for the city of Ottawa.

When you look at the history of municipalities in Ontario, they have been at the forefront of designing energy conservation programs for their local buildings, because for the longest period of time, municipalities have had the opportunity to have a longer payback when they make investments into energy conservation programs than the private sector. Often the private sector, because they have private shareholders, have this need to have a short payback period of three or four years, whereas municipalities have the luxury of extending that, perhaps to the six- and seven-year area.

I know, in my own municipality of Peterborough, we've had the Peterborough Green-Up going for quite a long period of time. My colleague the member from Etobicoke Centre had an opportunity to visit with the Peterborough Green-Up folks a short time ago and had an appreciation of the energy conservation members, that they've had a place to encourage residents of the Peterborough riding to conserve energy. This can be a program as simple as encouraging people to do energy audits in their own homes, which often come up with some very simple solutions. For example, small loans to encourage the weather-stripping of doors and windows and the acquisition of new doors and windows often can have a dramatic impact on the amount of energy saved. I think it

is important that we push this resolution forward this morning for the sake of Ontario's energy conservation programs.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I appreciate this opportunity to speak in support of the resolution brought forward by the member for Ottawa–Orléans. His resolution states: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should further its energy conservation and emission reduction agenda by taking steps to encourage and support province-wide development of robust better buildings partnership programs, as exemplified by the city of Toronto's highly successful and world-renowned better buildings partnership program."

I am pleased to speak in support of this resolution today on behalf of my constituents in Waterloo–Wellington. I want to first take a moment to speak about the member for Ottawa–Orléans himself. It seems appropriate that this member has chosen to propose the expansion of a partnership program developed here in Toronto, Ontario's largest municipality, to the rest of the province. I understand that the member for Ottawa–Orléans entered the Legislature after a term as city councillor in the amalgamated city of Ottawa, so he enters this place with some degree of municipal experience, which I am sure assists him in his day-to-day responsibilities as an MPP.

I am aware that the member is by profession a civil engineer. This resolution that he's put forward today certainly has an aspect which involves his professional expertise. I haven't yet had the opportunity to get to know the member well. I understand that he and his wife are the proud parents of three sons; we have that in common. I also recall quite vividly his work while serving on council to advocate for assistance for western farmers, with the idea for a program that came to be known as Hay West. For that, he deserves acknowledgment and credit.

I expect that this is the member's first private member's ballot item. I would say that I believe that private members' business is a very important part of our legislative week, because it gives us an opportunity to raise issues that might not otherwise be on the legislative agenda. In my own work as the MPP for Waterloo–Wellington, I have three private member's bills currently before the House.

Bill 52, the Volunteer Firefighters Employment Protection Act, is intended to ensure the highest possible standards of emergency protection and response in our rural communities, and to ensure that double-hatter firefighters have the right to volunteer in their home communities on their own free time. I continue to raise this issue in the Legislature from time to time, and I commend to the members an article in this month's *Municipal World* magazine on that particular subject.

Bill 77, the Retail Sales Tax Amendment Act, if passed, would give families a tax break on the purchase of children's booster seats. The bill would correct an inconsistency in the government's tax policy. Currently, car seats for infants and smaller children are exempt from the 8% provincial sales tax, while no exemption is avail-

able for the booster seats for older children that are now being made mandatory by this government. Bill 77 would extend that PST exemption to all seats. This is a modest proposal that will help young families at very little cost to the treasury. I will ask again that the finance minister include this idea in the 2005 provincial budget. These seats are not cheap, and I believe parents, especially those with those with three or more, would benefit from this policy.

Bill 95, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, would prevent the government from establishing any new gaming premises or expanding any existing ones until it appoints a commission under the Public Inquiries Act to study the negative social impacts of excessive gambling and gambling addictions. I am disappointed that the government has sidestepped my bill with its recent announcement to expend \$400 million, a massive amount of money, to entice more gamblers to go to the Windsor Casino. This questionable expenditure—when hospitals need money, when farmers need money, when our post-secondary institutions, our colleges and universities all need money—is very hard for the government to defend. So far, their attempts have been feeble.

All of these issues are important to the people of Waterloo–Wellington, and I'm privileged to voice them today in this House. To return to the specifics of the member's resolution, I would say that there's merit in exploring how we might expand the successful program province-wide, as long as it does not represent down-loading to our local levels of government.

1150

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): I am pleased to stand in support of the member from Ottawa–Orléans's resolution in the House.

Obviously, the issue of conservation is critical as an integral part of a strategy for energy for this province, but I think there's a broader issue here as well. The Better Buildings Partnership program was actually started to deal with and focus on CO₂ emissions. It's had great success, and you have to ask yourself why.

It's interesting; greenhouse gas emissions from about 13 million households will be about 72 megatonnes for the year 2004. Space heating accounts for 50% of those emissions and, interestingly enough, hot water heating for 28%. The average home emits about 50% more than an average apartment or condominium. To put that into perspective, along with 46 smog alert days in this province last year, you realize that we really have to do something about CO₂ emissions.

When I was doing some research, one of the most fascinating things I found is that the province that has the highest gross national product is Alberta, and yet farmers from the have-not provinces are actually donating feed to those farmers in Alberta because of their drought situations. The impact and effect of climate change on our economy is significant. In BC, because it's been warmer longer, the beetle is taking a terrible ravage on the forests.

Here in Ontario, we are suffering the same in terms of the number of days of smog and smog-related respiratory disease. When you look at the issue of burning fossil fuels and deforestation and the impact it's having as a whole, then you know you have to look to those solutions.

One of the solutions that has come forward is the Better Buildings initiative because it can be replicated throughout the province, depending on the size of the small town, the city or the municipality that would like to undertake it. The fact is, it generates money and jobs and, at the same time, saves money for institutions, as well as for individual buildings.

I'll give you a couple of examples. The YMCA of Greater Toronto was a \$2-million project. They have \$172,000 a year in savings and their CO₂ reductions were 5,755 tonnes per year. Flip to another side: Toronto Housing Co., \$176,000 in annual savings and a CO₂ reduction of 2,013 tonnes per year. City buildings right across the city: \$570,000 in annual savings.

You can see how that \$132 million so far hasn't been that difficult, and it's anticipated that there will actually be \$3 billion in savings as they follow out in the years to come.

I'd like to just quickly leave you with a quote that comes from Dr. David Suzuki. In essence, Dr. Suzuki has indicated, "The BBP demonstrates the art of the possible—the positive and practical link between the economy and the environment. It's a cause to celebrate, a situation where everybody wins."

I'd like to acknowledge as well Mr. Morris for the work he has done in the city and in being a world leader. I think he gets to travel the world talking to people about his initiatives and what they're doing. Hopefully, that expertise will be translated into the Conservation Bureau and we can move forward with this kind of positive change.

I acknowledge my colleague for bringing this forward, because he knows it can work, from his municipal experience and also from the practical as an engineer. I thank the others for ensuring that this is the type of initiative we will all bring forward.

On the quick side, 394 megawatts of new renewable energy has been put into this province—\$700 million into this economy. This is a whole new world out here, a place where we can save and, at the same time, be prosperous.

I would be delighted to sit down with some of the members who are not really aware of the number of initiatives that we have out there and help them to understand what is actually happening in this province.

Mr. Mike Colle (Eglinton–Lawrence): I just want to echo the comments of the member from Waterloo–Wellington, how important private members' business is, especially when some of us get maybe two minutes every two weeks to speak. So I'll try and use my two minutes wisely here. There has got to be something wrong with a system that does that. I think we should fix that.

I just want to say that the member from Ottawa–Orléans has a pretty simple and straight winner economically and environmentally. What it means is that there is a revolving fund set up whereby monies that are put in the revolving fund can be used by small business, large buildings, by non-profits or by governments that want to use some of that money to retrofit their buildings to make them more energy-efficient so they save money. With the money they save, they repay that fund. That's the essence of it and that's why in Toronto's fund, they've actually increased the value of the fund by \$1 million, up to \$9 million.

I think what the member from Orléans is saying is that we should do this on a province-wide basis. It is something that has to be done, not only for the environmental reasons, but I think there are all kinds of opportunities to make our buildings more energy-smart. It will also create employment opportunities for all kinds of energy-saving industries and conservation industries, which I think are the new cutting edge for employment in the future in all of Ontario.

It is a very astute proposal that the member puts forward, and I think, as the Minister of Energy said, these are the kinds of proposals we need to look at seriously. I think from the Minister of Finance's perspective, it's something we are taking a good, hard look at because anything that essentially improves the financial climate and can save some money at the same time, that doesn't really cost any money out of the budget, makes economic and environmental sense. I applaud the member from Orléans for this intelligent initiative.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. McNeely, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. McNeely: I want to start by thanking the honourable members who spoke to this resolution.

To the member for Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford, I'd just like to say that MUSH has been done pretty well. The municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals—that's been done. Those are the groups that have looked at this. I think that with oil at \$50 a barrel, they'd have to go back and look at it again.

I'll ignore the member from Timmins–James Bay.

I want to thank the Minister of Energy for supporting me so well and for correcting the record that was put in a very non-partisan way at this time.

The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke was supportive, and I thank him for that.

The member for Beaches–East York knows probably more about this issue than I do, and certainly I thank you for your words. But I would like to correct part of the statement that the city of Toronto spends about \$700,000 on its program now. That's what it costs the city, I believe. That saves \$20 million in energy and creates all those jobs. So the city has taken that on in a responsible fashion. And the federal government has identified \$225 million in the five-year budget that just came out for retrofitting buildings. So, hopefully, that money doesn't have to come from our cities and our municipalities but

will come from the two senior levels of government. It is a loan, in a way.

I want to thank the member for Waterloo–Wellington for his kind words, the member for Etobicoke Centre for all the work she's been doing in energy conservation in this province—I thank you for that—and the member for Eglinton–Lawrence, who mentioned that this is going to be considered in the budget—that's very important to me—that it's going to be considered by finance. So I thank everyone for their kind words.

I'd just like to read one thing here. It's from Robert Kennedy's book: "A one-mile-per-gallon improvement in gas mileage would yield double the oil that could ever be extracted from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge," and would do it without destroying the country's last great wilderness. So I think that's a good way to end this today. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The time allowed for private members' public business has now expired.

VQA WINE STORES ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 SUR LES MAGASINS DE VINS DE LA VINTNERS QUALITY ALLIANCE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will deal first with ballot item number 53, standing in the name of Mr. Hudak. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I move that the bill be sent to the general government committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall the bill be sent to the standing committee on general government? Agreed.

BETTER BUILDINGS PARTNERSHIP

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 54, standing in the name of Mr. McNeely.

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

All matters relating to private members' public business having now been dealt with, I do leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1200 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

KEMPTVILLE DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition): With great pride, I wish to share with the House an announcement made earlier this week by the Lean on Me fundraising campaign for the expansion of the Kemptville District Hospital. In less than nine months, the good people of North Grenville, one of the fastest-growing communities in Ontario, have contributed over \$4 million.

The efforts of the fundraising committee and the support of the community for this outstanding small hospital are nothing short of phenomenal. On Monday, Ken Mews, chair of the hospital board, said that a \$1.36-million pledge by the municipality of North Grenville had pushed the total raised to over \$4 million, close to 50% of the total cost.

The expansion will produce modern emergency, outpatient and diagnostic units from 12,000 square feet of new space and 15,000 square feet of renovated area. Last year, there were more than 30,000 ER and outpatient visits to the hospital—a demand that has increased by about 65% in three years. The current emergency department is cramped and split up, and utilizes halls as treatment areas, yet the hospital under its terrific administrator, Lynne Budgell, continues to receive high praise for both patient care and financial efficiency.

The citizens of North Grenville have shown their commitment. Now it's time for the Minister of Health to approve the plans languishing at the ministry and allocate the funding for this desperately needed expansion. Get on with the job.

TECHNOLOGY DAY IN MISSISSAUGA

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I rise to recognize Technology Day in the city of Mississauga. This Friday, March 4, the city of Mississauga will celebrate 30 years of technology excellence by showcasing its leading-edge information technology initiatives at Tech Day 2005. City of Mississauga staff will demonstrate more than two dozen projects, each one supporting Mississauga's service delivery needs and benefiting the city's 680,000 residents.

By the end of the year, or earlier, Mississauga residents will be able to use the new Connect 2 Rec system to register for courses and activities on-line—24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Recruiting Web software will help the city of Mississauga attract the best applicants for career opportunities. The event will also showcase Mississauga eStore. This initiative allows the purchase of souvenirs, transit passes, business directories and the download of tax and compliance certificates on-line.

These are only a few of the many technology-based initiatives that will soon provide Mississauga residents with better access to the information they need, whenever and wherever they need it.

The city's existing municipal Web site is one of the best of its kind. As a former Web developer and still a weekend dot-net code hack, I appreciate not only its intuitive functionality but the clean design and its good writing.

I congratulate the city of Mississauga and join them in celebrating 30 years of technology excellence in Ontario's best-managed city.

McMASTER UNIVERSITY

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): Another step was recently taken on the road to Hamilton's economic vision of success. McMaster President Peter George, named today as the winner of this year's CH-Hamilton Safe Communities Spirit of the Community Award, demonstrated leadership and innovation by finalizing a purchase of an old appliance manufacturing site in west Hamilton known locally as the Camco site.

In 1912, George Westinghouse turned electrical manufacturing into Hamilton's second-largest industry. Today, the strategic and visible location will be the dynamic new research park where Mamdouh Shoukri, McMaster's vice-president of research, said that the park complements the university's wide-ranging research by creating the opportunity to collaborate with government and industry: "The possibilities of expanding the intellectual and financial capital for Hamilton are absolutely endless."

The future is Hamilton's. We are building it together. McMaster University was named Canada's Research University of the Year by RESEARCH Infosource and has world-renowned faculty and state-of-the-art research facilities. McMaster's culture of innovation fosters a commitment to discovery and learning in teaching, research and scholarship. We are immensely proud of the leadership demonstrated by McMaster University.

GENERAL MOTORS OF CANADA

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): It's with great pleasure that I rise today to congratulate General Motors, its workers and its partners on reinvesting \$2.5 billion in the Canadian auto sector. This announcement includes agreements with the provincial and federal governments and will strengthen automotive engineering, research and development, and manufacturing capabilities in Ontario and Canada. This project will include new vehicle programs, enhanced vehicle engineering activities, flex manufacturing, environmental leadership, employment and skills training, and a new Canadian automotive innovation network.

This government's financial commitment builds on the commitment the previous government made to the auto sector in our province, and will enhance the skilled workforce in Oshawa and other GM cities in Ontario. Yesterday's reinvestment from General Motors will bring more high-tech engineering jobs to Ontario and, of course, my riding of Oshawa.

Today General Motors of Canada makes more automotive supply purchases than any other automotive manufacturer in Canada. Together with Ontario and the federal government, the company will create a new automotive centre of excellence at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology to better link participating automotive companies, suppliers, universities, researchers and students in the area of automotive innovation and technology.

I would like to thank General Motors and the hard work of the CAW and the other partners for their continued commitment and confidence in our local community in the province of Ontario.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I have been intrigued by the provincial Liberal government's attack against the federal Liberals for not getting the kind of money and support they want. I recall that in 1990, when the NDP was in government, I couldn't remember Brother McGuinty at the time or other brother Liberals saying to the NDP and Bob Rae, "We're right behind you, Bob. We need to go after the federal Liberals because they've slashed our support for welfare programs and for post-secondary education."

I certainly didn't expect Brother Harris to be on my side, but where were the sisters and brothers, Lyn McLeod and Dalton McGuinty, at a time when the federal Tories and Liberals slashed our support, at a time when the economy was not doing very well? We were in a recession, and what we had from Harris and Brother McGuinty and Sister Lyn McLeod was something to the effect of, "NDPers do not have a revenue problem, they've got a spending problem," they used to say.

I don't remember Brother Harris or Brother McGuinty saying, "We need to help you, NDP." Now they've adopted a different approach. Now, with a good economy, they refuse to use the tools they have at their disposal to get the money they need to fund post-secondary, social programs and our health care system. They're whining and whimpering like little children saying, "The federal Liberal government is not giving us money." Their response is, "We're going to be robust and muscular in attacking the federal Liberals, and if they don't give us what we want, we're going to whine and whine and whimper and whimper," and on and on.

HOURS OF WORK

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): I'm pleased today to speak about our government's commitment to fair labour practices in Ontario. The Employment Standards Amendment Act, which came into effect on Tuesday, ends the Conservatives' 60-hour workweek. In the recent past, governments have skewed labour legislation in favour of one side or the other. I'm proud to be part of a government that has made it a point to find a balance in labour legislation.

The act balances employees' rights and employer concerns. It will let employees choose whether to work more hours or to spend that time finding a balance between work and their personal lives. For businesses, it ensures they have the flexibility necessary to compete in today's global economy. The act protects employees by allowing them to decide without undue pressure whether or not to work extra hours. At the same time, it recognizes the

need for longer hours of work in some workplaces. It also makes sure employees know their rights and that their employer understands their obligations. Finally, there is going to be tougher enforcement against those who refuse to operate responsibly, preying on workers and undermining competitors.

The end of the 60-hour workweek is another step our government has taken to strengthen Ontario's greatest competitive advantage, our people, and I want to commend Minister Bentley for his leadership on this issue.

1340

ACQUIRED DEAF-BLINDNESS

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I rise on behalf of Ontarians with acquired deaf-blindness who are being discriminated against by this Liberal government, which is denying them funding for their needed intervener and interpreter services.

In December of last year, the Ministry of Community and Social Services received a report from Cathexis Consulting, which conducted a review of these services in our province. The report found that while those Ontarians who are born with deaf-blindness have their services fully funded, many others, such as seniors who acquire deaf-blindness during their lifetime, receive no funding at all. The December report urges the Ministry of Community and Social Services to engage the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in the development of a fair and equitable intervener service system that takes into account the increasing number of acquired deaf-blind individuals in an aging population, with their changing needs.

The rights of deaf persons to access services are already recognized in the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001, and the Human Rights Code. I call on the McGuinty Liberals to end this insensitive discrimination against Ontarians with acquired deaf-blindness, ensure their accessibility rights as already mandated in the ODA, and act immediately on the recommendations of their own report to create an equitable system with adequate funding for those with acquired deaf-blindness in Ontario.

EPILEPSY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): March is Epilepsy Awareness Month. Epilepsy is a neurological disorder. It's a physical condition which causes sudden bursts of electrical energy in the brain. These electrical discharges produce sudden, brief seizures which vary from one person to another in frequency.

Epilepsy is not a disease, it is not a psychological disorder, and it's not contagious. My constituency assistant, Nancy Clark, has epilepsy. She can remember having her first grand mal seizure in high school and the feelings of uncertainty in not knowing when another seizure might occur. At that time, epilepsy was an unspoken subject. Nancy's parents referred to her seizures as fainting spells. She is currently seizure-free, and has

been for many years. She is extremely grateful for the milestones she has experienced.

More research and education have to be done. Epilepsy Ontario is a registered non-profit organization that is dedicated to promoting information, awareness, support services, advocacy, education and research. As March is Epilepsy Awareness Month, Epilepsy Ontario has launched the lavender ribbon campaign. I hope Ontarians can learn more about epilepsy during this month and learn to break down the number of myths and misconceptions that surround the disorder.

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would seek unanimous consent for the wearing of lavender ribbons in this House during the month of March.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent to wear the ribbon in March? Agreed.

Mr. Flynn: If I might just note that these will be available from the staff in the government House leader's office.

GROWTH PLANNING

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about this government's growth strategy: Bill 136, Places to Grow. Our government is dedicated to ensuring that Ontario grows in a positive way, ensuring prosperous, healthy and diverse communities in all parts of the province.

Guelph is one of the targeted areas. If Guelph continues to grow as we have in the past, we will consume an area nearly twice the size of present-day Toronto over the next 30 years. Gridlock will intensify, commuting times will increase, we will experience a loss of economically valuable prime agricultural lands, and higher levels of greenhouse gas emissions will result.

This is why the McGuinty government has introduced Places to Grow. We understand our responsibility to Ontarians. Ontarians deserve well-planned communities where they can live, work and play. I know that people in Guelph are as excited about the plan as I am—people like Guelph Councillor David Birtwistle, head of the municipality's key planning, environment and transportation committee. He told the Guelph Mercury: "I certainly agree with it. It's a step in the right direction." Councillor Maggie Laidlaw said, "This is certainly going the way we're supposed to be going."

Even the opposition thinks we are doing a good job. Here is what Tim Hudak said yesterday: "I think the minister has been careful in his thinking about the growth plan in this legislation." On this occasion, I agree with Mr. Hudak.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CONSUMER REPORTING
AMENDMENT ACT, 2005LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR
LES RENSEIGNEMENTS CONCERNANT
LE CONSOMMATEUR

Mr. Ruprecht moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 174, An Act to amend the Consumer Reporting Act / Projet de loi 174, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements concernant le consommateur.

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

Mr. Ruprecht?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Hardly a day goes by without learning of a sad story of someone being charged exorbitant car or home insurance fees, of someone not getting employment because of their lowered score, of someone not getting an emergency loan or of someone being denied a mortgage. This bill deals with this issue plus that of identity theft, of what to do when an identity theft has occurred.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT
(NO CONVEYING OF PASSENGERS FOR
COMPENSATION), 2005LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LE CODE
DE LA ROUTE (AUCUN TRANSPORT
DE PASSAGERS MOYENNANT
RÉMUNÉRATION)

Mr. Jackson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to restrict the conveyance of passengers for compensation / Projet de loi 175, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour restreindre le transport de passagers moyennant rémunération.

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

Mr. Jackson?

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): This bill makes it a provincial offence under the Highway Traffic Act to convey passengers anywhere in Ontario in a motor vehicle for compensation, or to pick up passengers anywhere in Ontario for the purposes of conveying them somewhere in a motor vehicle for compensation, unless the driver of the motor vehicle and its owner or lessee are licensed under the municipal bylaw passed under section 150 of the Municipal Act, 2001.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I'm honoured to rise in the House today to share great news with the people of Ontario. It is very clear that our government is implementing a new approach to create a strong Ontario economy for today and for tomorrow. It's an approach that builds on partnership and collaboration to create the world's best workforce, a workforce that is highly skilled, highly flexible and highly innovative, a workforce that will attract more good jobs for the people of this great province.

Look at our auto industry, for instance. When we first took office, we heard doom-and-gloom predictions about the future of the industry. We heard that there wouldn't be any growth or any investment. Over the last year, we have proven that wrong. Our government got creative, and we started thinking outside the box and established the Ontario automotive investment strategy. Since its launch less than a year ago, over 20,000 jobs in the automotive sector have been sustained and over \$3.6 billion of new investment has come to Ontario's automotive sector. With innovation, collaboration and partnership, Ford of Canada took Ontario's \$100-million investment and turned it into the \$1-billion Project Centennial in Oakville. It's a plan that means thousands of high-value jobs are here to stay.

1350

And yesterday we built on that success. In partnership with General Motors of Canada and the federal government, the Premier announced Ontario's investment in the \$2.5-billion Beacon project. This is Canada's single largest automotive investment in the history of the automotive sector. It is an investment in our greatest natural resource, our people. Through Beacon, we will train the next generation of automotive workers. Three Ontario universities and three Ontario colleges are part of this innovative education plan.

We know that the only way we're going to stay competitive and reach our economic potential is by working together. Thanks to creative thinking, our ability to collaborate and a commitment to innovation in auto manufacturing, GM's community of highly skilled workers will continue building vehicles for today and for years to come. Our investment will support expansions and vehicle design manufacturing capabilities at GM plants right across this province: in Oshawa, in Ingersoll, in St. Catharines. This is great news for the thousands of workers and their families who will benefit from new and secure jobs at General Motors. It's great news for all of us, because a strong auto industry means a strong Ontario economy. It means that people can take pride in their work and be optimistic about the future. This is the

Ontario that this government believes in. This is the Ontario that we are working hard to create.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): As you know, the McGuinty government remains committed to replacing coal-fired generation in our province with cleaner sources of energy. We're setting the pace as the only jurisdiction in North America that is committed to replacing coal-fired generation. We are doing this because we are committed to protecting the best interests of Ontarians by reducing harmful emissions and cleaning up the air we breathe.

As we move to cleaner sources of power to replace coal-fired generation, we will eliminate up to 35 million tonnes of harmful greenhouse gas emissions, which will go a long way to helping Ontario and Canada meet our commitments under the Kyoto accord. There's no doubt that this is an extremely challenging goal. But when there's challenge, there's opportunity, and we believe we have an opportunity to find long-term solutions that will not only keep our lights on but also reduce the environmental footprint we leave for future generations.

I believe that as we move forward toward bringing on newer and cleaner electricity supply, we must leverage every opportunity we can to power our province with clean hydroelectric power, such as the power that's been generated at Niagara Falls since 1922. At one point in our history, the Falls met the majority of Ontario's needs. But today it represents only a fraction of what we will need to meet the looming gap between supply and demand in the province.

The good news, as we contemplate our electricity supply challenges, is that there is an abundance of clean, untapped hydroelectric potential in our country to help us meet our long-term needs. Manitoba and Quebec both have tremendous hydroelectric resources that could be developed if the appropriate infrastructure were in place. There is also a very sizable project at the lower Churchill River that the government of Newfoundland and Labrador has been contemplating. Even here in Ontario, our northern rivers and streams hold tremendous potential, according to studies dating back almost 30 years. That's why this government is interested in building an east-west grid with our neighbours and our Canadian brothers and sisters. We want to work together with them to share the bountiful resources we have with one another, so that we can lessen the need to import energy from coal from our US neighbours. In the information age we find ourselves in, we believe that a transmission infrastructure that runs from east to west can be the railway of the 21st century.

The McGuinty government has already taken the lead on the concept of an east-west power grid by initiating discussions with Manitoba, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador about reinforcing and expanding our interconnections with each other. Through these interconnections, we estimate that we would be able to tap

into as much as 3,000 megawatts of additional power when it's needed.

In fact, we are actively studying a proposed hydroelectric power project in northern Manitoba and a transmission line that would bring clean hydroelectric power to our province. The project represents a sustainable power supply arrangement known as the clean energy transfer initiative, perhaps more commonly known as Conawapa. Clean energy from Manitoba has the potential to provide Ontarians with 1,500 megawatts of hydroelectric power, which would fuel over one million homes and go a long way to helping us solve some of our long-term supply issues. This \$5.5-billion project would also contribute tremendous employment and economic opportunities in Ontario and Manitoba, particularly in northern and First Nation communities, where economic development is needed most.

However, in order to make Conawapa a reality, we're going to need to see a significant contribution from the federal government to help bridge the long distances from where the power is generated in northern Manitoba to where it's needed in communities and industries across Ontario. Our government is encouraged to see that the federal government is taking a great interest in the long-term potential of an east-west grid. In the recent federal budget, Minister Goodale referenced the east-west power grid as a possible project under a new \$1-billion Clean Fund that has been created. He has also announced a new \$250-million partnership fund, created to underpin the federal government's commitment to work with provinces and territories to meet climate change objectives. The federal government has also indicated that this could grow to up to \$2.3 billion over 10 years. I've written to Minister Goodale to express our government's interest in meeting with him to discuss projects such as the clean energy transfer initiative and to discuss other ways that the federal government can help our province to meet Canada's commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and clean up our air.

Our Premier firmly believes that the development of an east-west grid would enhance our energy security, help clean up our environment, stimulate economic development in our north and provide a renewable, reliable and affordable supply of electricity for all Canadians for generations to come. The McGuinty government will continue to play a lead role in this exciting new development, and we look forward to working with the federal government and our neighbours to the east and west to make this vision a reality.

Cleaner power, less expensive power, economic development for our First Nations: This is the kind of initiative that all of us in this country can benefit from, and we're proud to lead the way on the east-west grid.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I am delighted to rise in the House to speak about a priority of our government:

helping our young people acquire the skills and experience they will need for the future. Today, I am pleased to announce that the McGuinty government will invest over \$50 million in the Ontario summer jobs program to help more than 57,000 students find work this summer. The program provides a range of services, along with a \$2-per-hour wage support for businesses and community organizations to hire young people so they can gain valuable work experience.

It is challenging for students to make decisions about careers and further education and training. It is also challenging for students to get their first job. The Ontario summer jobs program helps students with their job searches and provides support to improve their marketing skills. It also provides high school, college and university students with an opportunity to find rewarding and productive summer work.

1400

Students who are just beginning their job searches can access services through community-based colleges and youth employment agencies in more than 100 sites in 80 communities across the province. They can call the toll-free JobGrow hotline at 1-888-JOB-GROW to find the location of the organization closest to them for help in finding a job or even starting a career.

Creating summer businesses is also an important part of the Ontario summer jobs program. Students might wish to start their own summer business through the Summer Company, a component of the program which is offered by my colleague the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. This initiative provides hands-on business coaching and mentoring by local community business leaders. It is a great opportunity for enterprising young people to experience what it would be like to start and run their own business.

Starting a business or learning from others in the workplace are important experiences for young people. That is why the Ontario summer jobs program provides students with a wide range of employment opportunities. Through the summer experience component of the program, for example, students can work as Ontario Rangers, an initiative that is offered by my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources. The rangers work in wilderness camps, maintaining trails, parks and camp buildings, as well as helping in fish and wildlife projects.

All of these programs help students learn about the job market, explore potential careers and expand their job skills. We believe that our youth are the future of our province. By making investments like this one, we are helping students pursue opportunities that could contribute to their future success. Through these opportunities, our young people will have the chance to participate in various aspects of Ontario's economy. In so doing, we can help to ensure that our young people will see Ontario as part of their future and proudly see themselves as having the potential to be strong contributors to Ontario's prosperity.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Responses?

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): Yesterday was another historic day for Oshawa and one of its key partners, General Motors and its dedicated workers. This is very similar to decades ago, when Oshawa council agreed to that first \$50,000 interest-free loan that brought Colonel Sam McLaughlin and General Motors Canada to Oshawa.

Yesterday's \$2.5-billion announcement not only gives worldwide recognition to the quality, hard work and dedication of those GM workers who produce the number one plant in the world, but also moves GM in Oshawa and its workers to the world forefront as leaders in auto design engineering.

Yesterday's announcement includes a \$23-million investment for St. Catharines' new fuel-saving 5.3-litre V8 displacement-on-demand engine that will link assembly to Oshawa, as well as establishing an automotive engineering centre at McMaster, and over \$500 million being invested in Ingersoll, creating over 400 net new jobs there.

To quote Michael Grimaldi, the president of GM Canada, "In total, this represents the largest and most comprehensive automotive investment in Canadian history," including a new virtual reality centre and new investments to support GM's worldwide fuel cell research and development.

Along with McMaster, new automotive centres of excellence are to be established at Oshawa's University of Ontario Institute of Technology, the University of British Columbia, University of Waterloo, Université de Sherbrooke, McGill, École polytechnique de Montréal, Université du Québec, Institut national de la recherche scientifique, and AUTO21. This new auto innovation network will bring all players together in moving Canada's auto innovation even farther ahead.

Again, I want to thank all partners: General Motors, the universities involved, the federal and provincial governments, and of course the hard and dedicated work of the CAW workers who make the difference and are producing the quality necessary to move forward for future generations of quality in the auto sector. Great things continue to happen in Oshawa.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to respond today to the statement by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Summer jobs provide students across the province with the opportunity to learn valuable skills that will help them when they enter the workforce on a full-time basis. I know the province has for many years actively promoted opportunities for youth to gain valuable experience and perhaps to save a little for their post-secondary education. It's important for those students already pursuing their life dreams and for those still in high school who are trying to save for their education.

From 1995 to 2003, under the former government, the number of youth who found placement through Ontario summer jobs soared from about 24,000 to more than 60,000 in 2003. The program was part of the former Tory government's youth opportunities Ontario strategy, which provided more than 175,000 jobs and services to youth in 2002-03.

Over the past several months, the minister has been making a series of announcements detailing a little bit of money here and a little bit of money there, but what is surprising to me is something that the minister hasn't been doing. She hasn't been telling the people of Ontario what her government's plans are regarding the implementation and recommendations coming out of the Rae review. Since the results of the review were made public, there has been a deafening silence, not just from the minister but in fact from the entire government. This is a report they asked for. They were regularly briefed while the review was under way and yet, since it has been released, they've done their best to ignore it.

As the report made clear, we have to have a well-educated population in order to ensure the continued prosperity of our province. Post-secondary education is critical to our future. The Premier said he is the education Premier, and yet nothing has been done or said in response to the report except that the Premier has confirmed that tuition will rise. I notice he didn't make any reference to the caveats Mr. Rae placed on what changes had to accompany any rise in tuition.

I guess we'll have to wait for the provincial budget to get a sense of how committed this government is to responding to the recommendations in the report. We don't know what direction the government is going to go in. Colleges and universities don't know what the government will do with this report, and students don't know how this government will respond to the issue of tuition and all the other things that are important to their obtaining a quality education that will prepare them for the future.

I think it is a good thing that the government is continuing to support the work of past governments in providing opportunities to help students prepare themselves for the workforce and to save to further their education. But I also think it is important that the government tell us just exactly what they're planning to do with the Rae report.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to get up and respond to the statement by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade on the auto sector. I have to say that we in this party certainly believe that helping the auto sector is absolutely the right thing to do. What the NDP has advocated for, quite frankly, for many years is exactly this kind of thing announced today.

We say it's about time that the federal and provincial governments stepped up to the plate when it comes to

these kinds of investments. Hats off to GM for this significant investment and congratulations to Oshawa for being the top efficiency plant in North America. It's great that there's going to be a net gain of 500 jobs and major investments in plant retooling and modernization. All those things are absolutely wonderful. Two new vehicles are to be assembled in Oshawa. New Democrats are certainly not going to be raining on this parade.

When the auto sector does well, we all know that the economy does well. As Rosario was talking about in his statement, the NDP led in the early 1990s with a comprehensive auto strategy. That major investment kept the economy ticking during the dark days of the early 1990s. It kick-started the economy back into a recovery that led Ontario out of its recession.

We're really pleased to see that this key sector of Ontario's economy is getting the assistance it is. We commend the Canadian Auto Workers for driving this strategy over a period of years and benefiting their members. Auto is responsible for one in six jobs in our province, and naturally we support sustaining this crucial industry.

I have to tell you, though, that as the member for Hamilton East, I have to ask for an expansion of this type of proactive approach to the unveiling of an Ontario steel investment strategy. Right now, of course, steel is the very raw product that feeds the auto industry. Steel feeds auto and auto needs steel.

As you know, there have been some serious concerns in my own community around a major steel manufacturer. It has been under bankruptcy protection and just the other day rejected all the suitors that came making offers. The workers are still very uncertain about their futures and their pensions. The company still owes more than \$1 billion to its pension plan. There is a continuation of high market prices for steel right now, but who knows how long that's going to last? Quite frankly, right now, 14 months after going into CCAA protection, we're back to square one, really, in terms of the restructuring of the steel plant in Hamilton. And this is only one plant. Many smaller steel plants have already been closed in Ontario. Why? Because there is no steel strategy offered by this government. The McGuinty Liberals are missing in action when it comes to a steel strategy. There is no sector strategy to help the modernization of our steel plants and there really should be. A strong Ontario economy is an integrated one, where we make the steel that we use to build the cars.

1410

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to respond to the Minister of Energy today. I wonder why the Minister of Energy gave a lengthy statement when the only thing that is really important in the statement is that he is going to write a letter to the federal Minister of Finance to talk to him about federal money.

This is a government that announces—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): I'd like to hear the leader of the third party's response and I started to hear some heckling. Order.

Mr. Hampton: This is a government that keeps announcing its interest in an east-west transmission line for hydroelectricity—announcing it, reannouncing it, reannouncing it—but nothing seems to be happening, except the minister uses today to say that he is going to write a letter to the minister in Ottawa.

It's amazing how many positions the McGuinty government can have. I want to read for you something from Hansard: "We now know it's cheaper to produce this electricity in the province than it is to buy it from Manitoba. We now know that if we produce it here"—meaning Ontario—"we're going to create some 19,791 jobs. In addition, we now know that if we cancel the deal today, it's going to cost us \$82 million, but if we wait until the end of the environmental assessment hearing, it's going to cost us over \$200 million."

This was all said in opposition to an east-west transmission line. Who said that? The Liberal energy critic, on April 30, 1992, Dalton McGuinty.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): The minister announces help for summer students. I think it's a nice thing, but this is what would be better: for her to announce that she will provide the \$1.6 billion that Bob Rae recommended in his post-secondary review. I expect Brother Sorbara and Brother McGuinty to come up with the money to help summer students and all students for the next couple of years to come. I'm anticipating that recommendation to come soon. I thank you, Brother Sorbara.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition): My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Two days ago, the Minister of Finance said he couldn't recall who was at the swanky, high-priced fundraiser at his brother's home or what was discussed. Yesterday, one of the developers at the Sorbara fundraiser went public, confirming Premier McGuinty made promises to developers at the Sorbara home in exchange for \$10,000 donations to the Ontario Liberal Party. Again yesterday, the Minister of Finance said he couldn't recall the details, as he has been to over 150 similar Liberal soirees. Today, however, Mr. Sorbara has changed his story. He is quoted as saying "the greenbelt was not a significant topic of discussion" at this fundraiser.

Minister, given Mr. Sorbara's apparently unreliable memory, can you assure us today that no additional

promises were made by your Premier to developers regarding the greenbelt boundaries?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): What I can tell you is that the greenbelt plan that was put into place earlier this month is based on science developed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture. It's based on good planning. It's based on the official plans of the municipalities involved, and it's something that generations are going to benefit from for many, many years to come.

All I can tell you is that I was not at the particular meeting to which reference has been made. The first that I knew about that was when the letter became public last week. But I can tell you that generations to come will benefit from the greenbelt plan that we put into place earlier this year.

Mr. Runciman: By refusing to answer the question, the minister encourages the sense that it's based on good funding rather than good planning.

I have a copy of the Minister of Finance's disclosure statement made under the Members' Integrity Act. Minister Sorbara's disclosure shows he had interest in several development companies owned and controlled by the Sorbara family. One such company controls Sorbara Holding Corp., Sorbara Services Ltd. and has interests in Beaton Meadows Limited Partnership, to name just a few. The Sorbara family is well known as a large developer. They own major pieces of land around the greenbelt. Minister, my question is straightforward: To the best of your knowledge, how much of the land owned by the Sorbara family companies borders the greenbelt?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: In our campaign platform last year, we promised to put over 600,000 acres into a greenbelt for the protection of future generations, for the protection of good agricultural land and for the protection of sensitive environmental land. The plan we delivered on earlier this week in effect puts a million acres of land, in addition to the 800,000 acres that are already protected under the Oak Ridges moraine and the Niagara Escarpment plan. What we did was for the good of the province of Ontario and was for future generations to come. It was to curb the sprawl and the gridlock that that party did absolutely nothing about during the eight years they were in office.

Mr. Runciman: Again I asked a straightforward question and got the company line. Surely it's no surprise to you to know that development companies controlled by the Sorbara family own and control significant plots of land south of the greenbelt boundaries. This is the same area where you have lifted all restrictions for new development, despite recent assurances from Minister Caplan that this wouldn't happen.

We know that Premier McGuinty and Minister Sorbara were hosted by Ed Sorbara, a developer himself, at this \$10,000-a-person Liberal fundraiser. One developer in attendance has already gone public stating that the Premier was making promises. We also know that Rob MacIsaac, the chair of your Greenbelt Task Force,

said that his group did not draw the lines. He told developers to talk to the Premier's office about boundaries. Minister, can you guarantee that the boundary lines of your greenbelt were not drawn in such a way as to exempt lands owned by the Sorbara family?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: I have no knowledge as to who owns what land where. We drew the lines with respect to the greenbelt based on our campaign promise that set out a certain area in the GTA as the area of the greenbelt that should be protected. Then, following the election in which we were successful, we wanted to implement that plan, and we went to the best science that was available from the Ministry of Natural Resources, from the Ministry of Agriculture, from the planning documentation that each one of the municipalities had, and that's how the greenbelt was established, without any knowledge as to who owned what particular land, either in or out of the greenbelt.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): New question?

Mr. Runciman: The minister talks about science, but unfortunately they've failed to release any scientific basis for the arbitrary greenbelt boundaries. The only evidence we have as to how the lines were drawn are the words of—

The Speaker: To whom are you addressing the question?

Mr. Runciman: To you, Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes, it's a new question.

Mr. Runciman: Minister, the only evidence we have as to how the lines were drawn is the words of a developer who paid \$10,000 to the Ontario Liberal Party. That developer says the Premier made promises and the Premier's office drew the lines. We now know that the Sorbara group of companies has lands outside the greenbelt boundaries. When your government first announced a greenbelt, Minister Caplan said that lands immediately outside would not be allowed to develop unless certain intensification targets were met by municipalities. Now that requirement has mysteriously disappeared. Developers have been given the green light and lands are free to be developed. If you can't explain who drew the lines, can you tell us who changed the rules?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: I'll refer that question to the Minister of Public Infrastructure.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I want to be very clear to this member that what you have suggested is absolutely false. Nothing has fallen off the table. A 40% intensification target, as your own critic indicated in response to Bill 136 debate yesterday, is still very much on the table. We are working with municipalities, we are working with the industry, we are working with environmentalists and we are working with Ontarians in order to develop and grow in a way in which you did not have the courage and the guts to do. So you can take your allegations and you can stuff them, because they are not true, sir.

1420

The Speaker: I think that was quite unparliamentary. I'd like you to stand up and withdraw.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I withdraw.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr. Runciman: In the past, we have accused the government of drawing up their plans on the back of a napkin. Now it appears you're drawing up your plans on the back of a \$10,000 cheque.

We see that lands controlled by the Sorbara family are outside the greenbelt. These same lands were only to be developed if nearby municipalities achieved intensification targets first. Now that the final boundaries are released, we see the exact opposite. Despite your comments, that doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Your ministry says that these lands can now be developed at will, without restriction: free rein. Minister, will you or your colleague now release the science involved, if there is any, to prove why Sorbara family lands were excluded from the greenbelt?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: There is no foundation for the allegations that the member makes. Nothing has dropped off; in fact, it's been strengthened. We have listened through town halls. In fact, we've released four technical papers dealing with intensification as outlined by Urban Strategies, dealing with land supply, population, employment distribution and urban growth centres. I would suggest that the member take a look at the public infrastructure renewal ministry Web site, and he will find the science available there, as it is available to all members of the public. I regret that this member just doesn't want to be confused by the facts.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Pursuing the line of questions to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, there are some very clear facts. We have a developer who is saying that the Premier's office drew the boundaries. The chair of your Greenbelt Task Force, Mayor MacIsaac, says that he didn't draw the boundaries; in fact, he's ducking for cover, and he's pointing his finger squarely at the government.

We have a Minister of Municipal Affairs who refuses to answer very basic questions about the developer in question here today. For weeks, we've been demanding to see the science behind these boundaries, and for weeks our envelopes have remained empty: not a single science report, not a single LEAR report brought forward. It's clear how these decisions were made. We can drag this out day by day by day, or will you agree to release the science finally today and come clean? Release the science, Minister.

The Speaker: Minister of Public and Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: As has already been indicated, the science is readily available on the ministry Web site and it has been for some time. The science is available there.

Getting back to Mayor MacIsaac's comments, it is true—

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: Just listen for a moment. It is true that originally, when our campaign document was put together, obviously lines were drawn as to what area we would want to protect as a greenbelt. After we won the election, we took a look at that area around the GTA and applied the science to that area to see if we could justify everything that was within the greenbelt. It is totally justifiable from both an agricultural and a natural resource viewpoint. There is no question about that. I would advise the member to take a look at our Web site, and he can see the science right there.

The Speaker: New question, the leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is to the Acting Premier. As you are no doubt aware, the Premier and the Minister of Finance were hosts of a small, secret fundraising dinner last May, when the greenbelt boundaries were being determined. Guests, many connected with the development industry, paid \$10,000 each. That huge fee bought them access to the Premier, the finance minister and the minister's brother, Ed Sorbara. On TVOntario's Fourth Reading last Friday, we saw a letter with the names of those guests. One of those guests, developer Silvio DeGasperis, has alleged that at the dinner he secured an agreement to exempt land he owns from the greenbelt and thereby benefit.

Will you confirm today that Neil Rodgers of the developers' lobby, the Urban Development Institute, was also at this secret \$10,000-a-head dinner with the Premier?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I don't have the list of everyone who attended that particular fundraiser. What I can tell you—

Interjection: Was it Eleanor Clitheroe? She gave \$5,000 to the NDP.

The Speaker: Have you completed your answer?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. One second. I'd like to get some order. I'm trying to hear the response.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The developer in question, who has made public comments, is advocating the position he has been advocating for some time, both when we were in opposition and now in government, to have his land excluded from the greenbelt plan. Despite those efforts, the lands are in the greenbelt, because that's where they belong.

We believe strongly that those lands shouldn't be turned into strip malls and subdivisions, that they should be protected for our children. The greenbelt plan was developed based on science. It was based on relevant science. It has been passed by this Legislature, and this party stands for protecting the greenbelt over the objections of the—

The Speaker: Thank you. Order. Questions are addressed to the Speaker, and the responses are addressed to the Speaker. I tell those who turn their back to the Chair that I will go to the next question.

Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: It was a very simple question. I asked if Neil Rodgers, well-known lobbyist for the Urban Development Institute, was there. Of course, you didn't want to answer that question. But this is a bigger issue. This is about the McGuinty government's promises and the McGuinty government's standards. Before the election, Dalton McGuinty promised squeaky-clean—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Member for Eglinton–Lawrence, come to order.

Mr. Hampton: All Ontarians see now is the same greed and backroom dealings that Dalton McGuinty used to rail against. Before the election, Dalton McGuinty said, "You deserve to know who donates to political parties as those donations happen." We agree. We deserve to know who paid \$10,000 to eat with the Premier at a secret dinner.

Will you confirm today that Rebecca MacDonald, chief executive officer of Energy Savings Income Fund and a big-time lobbyist for privatized electricity, was at the secret dinner?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I refer this question to the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I say to the leader of the third party—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, member from Erie–Lincoln and also the member from Whitby–Ajax. Attorney General.

Hon. Mr. Bryant: The leader of the NDP says today that he supports real-time disclosure. Did the leader of the NDP support real-time disclosure when they were in government? No. Did the leader of the NDP answer the challenge of Dalton McGuinty in October of last year when we issued the challenge to all three parties to have real-time disclosure? No.

Yesterday, for the first time, Mr. Hampton didn't whisper to himself in the shower that he supports real-time disclosure, but rather said it out loud. So finally, we've got the NDP and the Progressive Conservatives answering the challenge of Dalton McGuinty, and finally we will get real-time disclosure in the province of Ontario.

1430

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: The question was, was Rebecca MacDonald, a big-time lobbyist for privatized electricity, there?

Once again, the government doesn't want to answer the question of who attends the secret dinners and puts out the \$10,000 to enjoy Dalton McGuinty's ear. The people of Ontario deserve to know this. This is their government. They deserve to know who is paying \$10,000 to the Liberal Party to whisper in Dalton McGuinty's ear, "I don't want my land in the greenbelt." That's what it's about.

You used to rail against selling access to the Premier, but that's exactly what the McGuinty government is

doing: selling access to the Premier—I have to tell you, no one pays \$10,000 for the food. Will you confirm today that Steve Diamond, a development lawyer with McCarthy Tétrault, was at the secret dinner with the Premier?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I know that Mr. Tory, since he has been the leader of the Progressive Conservatives, has also been having a bunch of secret dinners and raising \$2.5 million, or \$15,000 a day. As the member knows, and as Mr. Tory knows, these names are disclosed to the public. There's absolutely nothing secret about who gives to the Ontario Liberal Party or the Progressive Conservative Party or the New Democratic Party.

I wrote to the member today. I said, "Where is your representative? Why are we taking so long to get real-time disclosure happening?" I say to the slow-time leader of the NDP, it's time to get real-time disclosure in the province of Ontario. Join the parade. Say it loud and say it proud. Say yes to real-time disclosure.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question.

Mr. Hampton: Again to the acting Premier: In case the McGuinty government misses it, this is real time. I've asked you the names, real time. Just answer the question.

Again, this is about the McGuinty government's promises and standards. You were the people who said you were not going to sell access to the Premier, you were not going to sell access to the Minister of Finance, you were going to make sure that didn't happen, that that bordered on corruption. What do we find? You're selling access to the Premier, but only if you've got \$10,000 a shot.

What's interesting is there's an ad today in the London Free Press. What does it advertise? That if you've got the money to put in, you can get access tonight to Greg Sorbara, the Minister of Finance and president of the Liberal Party—

The Speaker: I just want to caution: Many members are calling the names of individuals. They are all representatives of constituencies, and I'd rather you use the constituency name—as a matter of fact, you should use the name of the constituency they represent—or their title.

Mr. Hampton: If you have the money, you can attend a party tonight in London and have access to the Minister of Finance and president of the Liberal Party. It will be held at the house of Don Smith, of EllisDon construction fame.

Minister of Finance, can you tell us who is paying the big bucks to buy access to your ear tonight?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: There's the big secret: It's advertised. Let me say this: The fundraising activities of this party, of the official opposition and of the NDP are governed by law in this province. There is full disclosure of amounts given to those parties.

This party—our Premier—undertook real-time disclosure. We offered, by way of a letter today to Mr. Tory and to Mr. Hampton, the opportunity to put together a group to bring on real-time disclosure now. I'd like to see

how many developers contributed to the \$2.5 million that the Tories raised last year. I remember a fundraiser in Windsor in 1994 where the NDP—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: This is about the McGuinty government promise and the McGuinty government standards. You were the folks who were holier than thou, so sanctimonious. You said that this was going to happen. It was Dalton McGuinty who said, "The Harris-Eves government gave big money too much influence and citizens too little." I guess \$10,000 a plate is not big money now to the McGuinty government. It was Dalton McGuinty who said, "We believe that public decisions must be made in the public interest, not in the interests of a few well-financed political supporters." These are all \$10,000-a-plate developers.

Don't you think that the people of Ontario deserve to know who paid \$10,000 to have the Premier's ear? Don't you think that they deserve to know who is paying big money to have the Minister of Finance's ear tonight?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We certainly do. We comply with the law, and we've offered to both the opposition parties the opportunity to bring real-time disclosure in right away.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, this finance minister had over 510 pre-budget consultations open to the public—to anyone who wanted to meet with him, he was available—more pre-budget consultation than any finance minister in the history of this province.

Our party is committed to real-time disclosure. We've offered today to begin the process to bring it in. We continue to operate under the existing laws, where every dollar contributed will be fully disclosed, as it will be for the opposition. We look forward to making a fulfillment of the commitment we made to bring in real-time disclosure to Ontario as soon as the opposition will agree to sit down and bring it forward.

Mr. Hampton: Again to the Acting Premier: We've said for some time that we have no problem. You're the government: Where is the bill? This is real time today.

I've asked you, was Neil Rodgers, a big spokesman for big developers, at the dinner? You won't answer. I asked you, was Rebecca MacDonald, a big-time lobbyist for private electricity, at the dinner? You won't answer. Yet this is real time. I've asked you, was Steve Diamond, a big-time development lawyer, at the dinner? I'm asking you again. This is real time; this is what you promised. When are you going to live up to your promises?

Don't you think the people of Ontario deserve to know who paid big money, \$10,000 a person, to have access to the Premier to talk about the greenbelt—what land was in, what land was out—at the very time that the greenbelt was being developed?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The attendees at the fundraiser under existing law will be fully disclosed. We have invited both the official opposition and the third party to sit down and negotiate the terms of how we're going to do

real-time disclosure. The Attorney General wrote earlier today to both parties, and we look forward to bringing that in just as quickly as possible.

Mr. Hampton: If I give you 10,000 bucks, will you tell me?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

We've got a new question from the member for Waterloo-Wellington.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is to the Minister of Finance, who is also the chief fundraiser for the Liberal caucus. I return to the issue that's been raised in recent days concerning the odour emanating from the greenbelt developer fundraiser hosted by the minister's brother, where unidentified developers paid \$10,000 to have direct, unfiltered access to the Premier and this minister, while at the same time the government was considering the greenbelt boundaries. The facts, as I understand them, raise serious questions about the integrity of this government. This fundraiser does not pass the smell test, for it appears that the government's favour may have been for sale.

Today, I've asked legislative counsel to begin drafting a bill that I would hope to be able to introduce next week before the House rises, which would compel the established political parties in Ontario to disclose on their Web sites all significant financial contributions they receive the day they cash the cheques. Knowing the minister's expertise in political fundraising, his position on this bill would carry a lot of weight within his caucus.

My question is this: Will he express support for the principle of this kind of real-time disclosure of all significant contributions to our political parties, our riding associations and local candidates?

1440

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'll just say to my friend from Waterloo-Wellington that he is generally a person of integrity in this Legislature, and this question is not worthy of him. But I will say I am strongly in support, I tell my friend, of the notion of real-time disclosure. It was in our campaign literature. It will be the subject of a bill brought forward by the Attorney General in due course. It could be brought forth sooner if there were all-party agreement to do that.

But to my friend from Waterloo-Wellington and his friend from the east, Mr. Runciman, I think your conduct today is shocking.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is also for the Minister of Finance. This offer to agree with the other political parties to do real-time disclosure has never been raised before today. It's the government's problem. They're the ones who have to go ahead and do it.

I was out on the lawn yesterday and spoke to hundreds of farmers, and I couldn't find one of them who was at the \$10,000 soiree; not one. No group of people is more affected by this greenbelt legislation than our farmers, but not one of them could buy a ticket to the \$10,000

influence-for-sale soiree. Yet the government, which is selling influence with the Premier—"How do you want the lines drawn? Send in a \$10,000 cheque with your suggestion on the back."

The Speaker: Order. I just want to examine—the words you are saying and using are very unparliamentary. I'd like you to withdraw that statement.

Mr. Yakabuski: Which words, Speaker? If I've said something unparliamentary, I withdraw.

The Speaker: You withdraw? That's all I want to hear. Go ahead.

Mr. Yakabuski: What I've asked the government—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Yakabuski: Can I not finish my question?

The Speaker: You've used up your time. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I'm delighted that my friend has finally taken some interest in the plight of farmers in this province. I should tell him that as late as this morning, I was meeting with representatives from the oil, corn and grain producers association of Ontario. I can tell him that in virtually every one of my pre-budget consultations I heard very clear and precise concerns from farmers talking about the crisis as a result of the collapse of grain prices and the crisis as a result of BSE and the closure of the Canadian border. I've heard from farmers from every corner of this province, and I just want to tell my friend that his approach in this way to advocacy of the issues of farmers in this Parliament does not help the issue one iota.

The Speaker: New question.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): A question to the Acting Premier: You've been dithering on your promise of real-time donor disclosure for over a year, and today we get this absolutely ridiculous letter offering to meet to discuss it on a volunteer level. During the election campaign, your platform stated: "You deserve to know who donates to political parties as those donations happen. We will make sure contributions are disclosed in real time as they occur."

Yes, we all deserve to know, and that's what we're asking you today. We deserve to know who paid \$10,000 a plate to talk about the greenbelt with the Minister of Finance and the Premier. We deserve to know who paid \$5,000 to chat about energy policy with you. We deserve to know who's paying the big bucks for the dinner tonight.

You found the time to ban pit bulls and chase the Stanley Cup. Why haven't you found the time to keep your campaign promise and introduce a bill with real teeth? Why aren't you doing that, and will you do it today? Introduce a bill that we can discuss and vote on.

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I'm pleased by the new-found interest of the New Democratic Party in real-time disclosure. Look, the people deserve to know in real time, and that's what we want to do. We want to do it now, even before a law is in place. The NDP doesn't want to take yes for an answer. Would you please just make your

party designate known so we can get this going tomorrow?

Ms. Churley: Minister, New Democrats are happy to meet with you any time, any place, any how to get this done. We've said that for over a year and you know it. You are stalling, and the people of Ontario want to know just what it is you're trying to hide here. During the election campaign you said that people had a right to know who funded your party and that you would ensure they would know right away. I am asking you again, will you stop your dithering, will you bring forward a real bill that we can start debating today—a bill with teeth and penalties attached—and will you disclose, in real time, who was at the dinner with the Minister of Finance and the Premier during the time the greenbelt boundaries were being discussed?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I listened carefully when I repeated the challenge that Dalton McGuinty has made time after time since October of last year when I said again, in answer to the member's question yesterday, will you agree to Dalton McGuinty's challenge and engage in voluntary real-time disclosure now, even before the law is in place? She didn't give me an answer. Finally, we got an answer. We finally heard from John Tory and we finally heard from Howard Hampton. They said yes. They will finally join the parade and they will agree to voluntary real-time disclosure.

Of course, parties functionally provide the information. It's the party that provides the information, either to the chief electoral officer or, in this way, it will be the parties that make the information public. We have identified our designate, Deb Matthews, who wants to sit down with the Conservative designate and with the New Democratic designate so we can do this tomorrow. Would you please just tell us who Deb Matthews can call so we can get this going tomorrow?

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Yesterday the Premier and yourself were in Oshawa making a major announcement. I was pleased to be there in support. I saw the announcement on leading newscasts last night and on the front page of today's Toronto Sun. The automotive sector is an integral part of Ontario's economy. In my riding of Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, we have automotive support companies and automotive employees. This is an industry that goes well beyond Oshawa, Oakville or Windsor. It affects many communities in Ontario. Minister, please remind this House about the importance of this announcement to all of Ontario.

Hon. Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I'd like to thank the member for the question, because it is truly important to remind everyone that yesterday was surely a historic day in Ontario and a very proud day. GM's announcement of a \$2.5-billion investment is the single largest auto in-

vestment in Canadian history, something truly to be proud of.

The member is right. The benefits of this investment extend to many communities across the province. They extend to small-town Ontario and a long list of part suppliers that feed GM. This is very important for those communities. It adds, potentially, an enormous number of new spinoff jobs, so this is incredibly important for those communities, as I say. As well, I want to underline that this investment will move us up the value chain in terms of putting innovation at the forefront. There is a big commitment to engineering and design and a big commitment to a highly educated, highly skilled workforce.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I want to start by personally commending the minister on the good news yesterday and for his excellent work in that regard.

I'm glad to hear that this announcement is going to lead to a stronger auto sector in Ontario, an auto sector that drives the Ontario economy. I know it drives the economy in my riding of Perth–Middlesex. We all believe that this will affect all of Ontario because this is truly a province-wide industry, an industry where we lead North America.

But it seems there are some critics of your plan for high-pay, high-value jobs in the province. Yesterday in this House, the member for Erie–Lincoln, Mr. Hudak, said, "The government has a strong predisposition against the automobile," and then he said, "There's an anti-automobile message that comes through quite a bit from the government's pronouncements." Minister, can you remind this House of the importance of your announcement?

Hon. Mr. Cordiano: I was heartened to hear the member for Oshawa say that this was an important announcement, but I can't say the same thing about his leader.

Yesterday, John Tory had this to say about GM's investment: "It's not a priority for this province." I was very disappointed with that viewpoint. I can't understand why John Tory would not support high-value-added jobs, why he would not support the nearly 150,000 auto jobs that exist in this province, why he wouldn't support the spinoffs that are 10 to one from this investment and why he's against growing a strong economy that's thriving and putting innovation at the forefront.

I ask the member for Oshawa, please ask your leader why he's against auto investment and why he doesn't see this as a priority. Go to him and ask him that, would you?

1450

GREENBELT

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): Back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is not here.

Mr. Hudak: Then to the Acting Premier: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said to consult the Web site and all the science behind the greenbelt boundaries would be there. We've gone to the Web site: a meagre number of pages that are vague statements and guidelines at best.

A week or so ago, the minister said that the boundaries and decisions are based on the LEAR studies. They're not on the Web site. In fact, when I specifically asked for those studies, I was given one for Ottawa-Carleton—nowhere near the greenbelt area.

If it's true that this is based on science, why are you hiding the studies? Why won't you produce them for public review?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member from Toronto-Danforth, please stop shouting.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Proceed with your question, member from Erie-Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: In the absence of any real science on the Web site and in the absence of any LEAR studies for the greenbelt area, please answer the question. What are you hiding? Why hasn't the science come forward? Will you please produce the science immediately so that we know who actually made the decisions behind the greenbelt boundaries?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The greenbelt was developed through a combination of technical, scientific and land use planning analysis to identify areas for permanent protection. It is the exact same methodology that the Conservatives used to determine the Oak Ridges moraine plan.

The systems approach used to develop the greenbelt was based on Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Ministry of Natural Resources, municipal and conservation authority data, and builds on the systems of the Niagara Escarpment plan and the Oak Ridges moraine conservation plan. The systems approach includes a natural system, an agricultural system, agricultural land and valuation area review, the so-called LEAR and settlement areas.

On February 3, 2005, 75 respected scientists and environmental professionals, including Dr. David Suzuki, signed their names in support of a strong greenbelt for southern Ontario as an important strategy for controlling urban sprawl, improving air and water quality and protecting endangered species, natural habitats and farmland.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr. Hudak: Back to the Acting Premier: What a bunch of nonsense. You give the impression that these 75 scientists went through your work and endorsed it. That's completely not in keeping with the facts. They support the concept of a greenbelt, but they never saw the science. You never saw the science. I'll bet cabinet never

saw the science, except for the political science behind the greenbelt boundaries.

I have asked in this Legislature and in committee, time and time again, for these LEAR studies that you just mentioned, Acting Premier. Do you know what they are? Ghost studies. They don't exist. They're not on the Web site. They've been knocking the opposition. We had to do an FOI at a \$1,500 charge. There are two options: You pay 1,500 bucks to try to get some paper, or you pay \$10,000 to go to a fundraiser.

I ask the minister again, will he produce the science behind these boundaries immediately, or do we have to go to one of your fundraisers to find out?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The only science that member and that party care about is the science of protecting their developer friends. That's why they opposed us on the greenbelt. Why did you vote against something that 75 scientists signed off on? Why?

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'd like to hear the minister.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This party has consistently stood up in favour of—

Interjection.

The Speaker: I want to warn the member from Erie-Lincoln. As soon as I've sat down, you're shouting again.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This party and our leader have stood day after day in this House to protect the interests of developers over the broader public interest. We look forward to real-time disclosure to find out how many developers have been giving to them in the last year and a half. We don't understand why they voted against protecting—

Interjection.

The Speaker: I want to warn the member from Simcoe North. I don't expect behaviour like that from an individual like yourself, who is also a prominent member in your party.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Day after day, they've stood to defend the interests of developers over the greenbelt. This party brought forward, introduced and passed the most progressive piece of greenbelt legislation imaginable. It was based on science—science that's well known and understood by that member and his party.

The greenbelt is in the best interests of Ontario. We'll stand for the greenbelt. They stand for the developers. The future is this party, not the—

The Speaker: Thank you.

PENSION PLANS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): In the absence of the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, I will be asking this question of the Acting Premier. Yesterday, we learned that after 14 months under CCAA protection, Stelco is essentially back to square one when it comes to securing the jobs of thousands of current employees and the pensions of thousands of other workers. The company has apparently

rejected all suitors and is now seeking a financial deal on Bay Street.

Minister, the New Democratic Party believes that without an active role by government, there's no way a deal can be struck that both solves a serious pension underfunding situation and frees up the \$400 million required for a badly needed modernization of the facilities. In the past 14 months, your government has been missing in action when it comes to this file. That's part of the reason that we are essentially back to square one.

My question is this, Mr. Minister: Will you guarantee to this House that no deal will be approved by your government that doesn't guarantee funds for solving both the pension underfunding and modernization issues? Will you finally step up to the plate or are you once again going to be missing in action?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): The member is relatively new to this House, but I want to remind her of the history around this issue.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): She won't like it.

Hon. Mr. Cordiano: No, she won't like it, because it was her party that gave Stelco and a few other companies a pension holiday that got us into this mess in the first place.

It now is a situation that we have to deal with, with respect to Stelco. It is recovering, but I have to remind the member that Stelco is still under Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act protection; it's still going through the courts. So you have to keep that in mind. Anything that emerges from this we'll have to deal with at that time.

Ms. Horwath: Minister, your government has been invisible since Stelco went into bankruptcy 14 months ago, and the people in my riding and throughout the region do want to see your government finally taking some action here.

Our steel and auto sectors are interdependent. We need both to be healthy and thriving if Ontario is truly to achieve its economic potential. We on this side of the House strongly believe that this province needs a steel sector modernization fund that would work with Stelco and other Ontario steel companies to make sure that badly needed upgrading projects are undertaken. Ontario steel communities simply can't continue to go through the kind of economic turmoil they've seen in recent years. It simply doesn't have to be this way.

Will you finally get it together on the steel file, Minister? Will you immediately introduce a steel sector modernization fund so the jobs and pensions of Ontario steelworkers are secure into the future?

Hon. Mr. Cordiano: This government did take action. We appointed a special adviser, Jim Arnett, to look into this matter, to monitor it, and we continue to monitor. I remind the member that the company is still

under creditors' protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act. So we have to be silent on this until they emerge from that process.

There are a number of considerations to take into account. The steel industry has found itself in some difficulty, facing international competition that was unprecedented. Things have turned around somewhat in terms of steel prices, but we're going to have to wait until this process of going through the courts is completed.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. This week is National Engineering Week, a very important week in Ontario. Each year, Ontario welcomes thousands of internationally trained engineers. A high percentage of highly skilled immigrants coming to Ontario identify themselves as engineers. Our government has done a great deal to help reduce the barriers that internationally trained engineers face in entering Ontario's workforce. By taking advantage of the expertise that these individuals offer our province, we're ensuring that our province will have the skills we need in the years to come. I understand that yesterday's General Motors announcement has added an exciting component to the efforts we have made to assist internationally trained engineers. Could you tell us more about this new initiative?

1500

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'm very pleased to respond to the question from the member from Ottawa-Orléans, whom I also know to be an engineer. Thanks for the great interest.

The GM announcement is exciting on several fronts, not only in terms of what it's doing for the economy and what it's doing for the post-secondary sector, but also for a file that I feel privileged to have the opportunity to chair on behalf of our government, and that is the integration of internationally trained professionals.

The exciting offshoot of the GM announcement is actually an opportunity for some 60 internationally trained individuals to have work opportunities at General Motors as interns. This will be over a three-year period, with each of these opportunities being a year in duration. It's very exciting.

Mr. McNeely: Minister, this is an innovative initiative that is sure to be of great benefit to the internationally trained. It is yet another step that our government is taking to ensure that Ontario reaches its full potential based on the strengths and skills of its people. I know that many of the initiatives our government has undertaken to help the internationally trained have been occupation-specific, to ensure that we are addressing the unique needs and challenges of each profession and trade. This is certainly not the first announcement our government has made with respect to internationally trained engineers. Could you provide some context as to

how this most recent initiative fits in with previous announcements you have made to help internationally trained engineers?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Last year we actually announced another investment in partnership with Professional Engineers Ontario, the regulator for engineers here in Ontario. It was a \$2-million announcement which will have Professional Engineers Ontario create an interactive Web site to provide information to would-be and new immigrants on the processes for licensure here, and also on labour market factors for that profession here in Ontario.

Canadian work experience, however, is really the big issue and that's why the GM announcement is so exciting. As part of the PEO announcement last year, there is a college-level program that will be developed by Professional Engineers Ontario which could actually be an alternative to the one year of Canadian work experience. As we all know, you don't get work experience without having a job, so it's really quite a difficult issue to deal with. I'm excited that GM and Professional Engineers Ontario are on board with this.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is to the Minister of Health. This morning at a press conference, Canada's Association for the Fifty Plus and the Best Medicines Coalition expressed grave concerns that the staff in the Premier's office have confirmed that your government is considering implementing reference-based pricing for Ontario's drug benefit formulary and that a specific class of drugs has been isolated: proton pump inhibitors for the treatment of gastroenteritis and gastrointestinal diseases. It has further come to our attention that your Minister of Finance has confirmed that they have sent a memo to you that you must find cost cutting or savings of \$150 million in the Ontario drug benefit program.

According to CARP today, they have said that it would be ludicrous and dangerous to remove working medications for patients and force them to adapt to a new program. My question to you is this, Minister: Why are you considering endangering seniors' health care with reference-based pricing in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): In the one minute that I have, I will not have time to separate the fact from fiction in that story. But I can confirm for the honourable member that the government is grappling with the challenges of drug costs, which in our health care system are growing at a rate of 15% a year. The honourable member will know about the challenges because he was part of a government that not only had an actual dollar decrease in the Ontario drug benefit of \$34.1 million in 1996-97, but was also the government that introduced copayments for seniors and welfare recipients. We are going to have to explore a variety of mechanisms to manage drug costs in this province. I can confirm that reference-based pricing

is one of those we will take a look at. I can also confirm for all Ontarians that this government has invested a quarter of a billion dollars in new resources in the Ontario drug benefit this year alone.

Mr. Jackson: You would know that we may have budgeted, but we did spend more on this program in each and every year we were in government. But I'm talking to you today about your policy and your inability to manage. This policy will increase out-of-pocket costs for seniors, persons with disabilities and those on social assistance. Today, Lillian Morganthau, the president of CARP, warned our Premier by saying, "Make no mistake. Any policy which forces seniors to stop using a medication that works well for them will be viewed as nothing more than a health care cut." Even the Toronto Star refers to the Liberal government in British Columbia's experience as "treatment failure," and as a result savings were offset with more doctor and hospital visits.

My question again, Minister: Why are the McGuinty Liberals shortchanging seniors on their health care, and why are you doing it in such a cowardly way?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member seeks to take an acknowledgment that there are a variety of options before the government and then pretend that this decision has been taken and implemented; neither has. The honourable member, with all due respect, hasn't been told any of that by the Premier's office. The reality is we acknowledge that this drug budget, which only a few years ago was about \$1 billion, is now \$3 billion. The very sustainability of medicare is a genuine issue. We seek always to expand the degree of coverage we have. The reality is, though, that when the program is running at a 15% increase, one must look at a variety of options to address that so that it can be sustained for future generations. No decisions on these matters have been taken. I candidly acknowledge that we will be having a discussion about it, and I look forward to the ongoing interest of the honourable member and other groups on this subject.

HYDRO GENERATION

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Minister of Energy. Minister, you will soon announce who will be awarded contracts to build new generation in Ontario. OPG has proposed to build a Portlands Energy Centre in my riding. It was originally promoted to the community as a cogeneration plant, but then, weeks before the application deadline, OPG removed cogen from the equation. The city had passed resolutions that called for this plant to only receive consideration if it is cogen. To quote you, "Mayor Miller has expressed concerns about the lack of cogeneration. It's the belief of this government that cogeneration and solar should be part of all projects going forward," so you seem to agree. I ask you now, will your decision around PEC follow what you said earlier in this House?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): With respect to whether or not Portlands is in that particular RFP, I am not aware of that. That is being conducted now by the Ontario Power Authority. I know that the member opposite has expressed concerns. The government is committed to ensuring that Ontario has an adequate supply of electricity in the short and long term. We remain committed to replacing coal-fired generation and will identify the cleanest and most affordable potential sources in Ontario as a replacement for coal.

A PEC spokesman was quoted in fall 2004 media reports saying that the partners would submit a bid under the Ministry of Energy's request for proposals. As this process is underway, I'm really not in a position to discuss the merits of any of the energy supply projects. I have no knowledge of them; it's being conducted by the OPA.

I do want to say to the member that I share her view that cogeneration is an important environmental aspect of any proposal. I can't comment on the specifics of this particular one. She will be aware, for instance, that we have announced the appointment of an industrial cogeneration facilitator because we believe in it. We'll see what comes out of this particular RFP and go from there.

Ms. Churley: Minister, I'm glad you share my views on this. You are the minister, and you have a responsibility and the ability to set the policies around what kind of new generation is built. That is absolutely key for this sustainability of our future. At the start of February, the city passed a second resolution for PEC to be cogen. Adopting the city's resolutions would be a natural choice if you are truly interested in reducing greenhouse gases through energy conservation and efficiency. In this day and age, we can't be building new gas plants unless they are cogen. You need to make that policy and stick to it.

1510

So I'm going to ask you again: Will you put into action your words and assure the people of Toronto that the proposal will not even be considered if cogen is not put back into the proposal?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It does not fall to the minister to make the determinations on the RFP. There is a separate body set up, with a fairness commissioner overseeing it.

I again say to the member opposite that we do share her views about the environment, and we want to replace the Lakeview coal-fired plant. We believe in reducing the environmental footprint associated with energy projects.

I am not aware of whether or not there is an application under the RFP. I can't comment as to the veracity of any of this. What I can tell you is that this government has done a lot more to encourage cogen than any previous government in the history of Ontario.

TRUCKING SAFETY

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. You recently introduced legislation that contained a variety of measures to ease congestion and improve safety on our roads. A lot of people are very supportive of this, certainly in my riding, where we have that kind of a problem.

I know that there have been several recent high-profile incidents on some of our roads, where auto parts have become detached from vehicles and caused fatalities, in some instances, and property damage. So the first part of my question is, can you explain what the details are of this proposal, and how it's to be applied? My second part is, what is the range of the fines that I believe you have in your legislation, and how can we ensure that it's going to be fairly applied?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First, I would like to thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre. The legislation that I recently proposed, if passed, would create an offence for parts falling off a vehicle. The intention of this proposal is to make sure that we can maintain safety on our highways and roads. This proposal will apply to all drivers, vehicle owners or mechanics who fail to maintain their cars and parts fall off their vehicles, not just cars but trucks as well.

The fines that we are proposing are very similar to the fines that are currently in place for cargo enforcement, so these fines range from \$400 to \$20,000 for commercial vehicles and from \$100 to \$2,000 for non-commercial vehicles.

Mr. Patten: Thank you, Minister. Bill 169 has other measures that deal with truck safety. The one I want to ask you about is the daily vehicle inspection. As I understand it, before commercial carriers operate their vehicles, they are required to inspect their vehicles. They'll have to follow a checklist to make sure that their vehicle is safe to operate. Among the many things that they have to look at are checks for flat tires, loose wheel fasteners, emergency brakes that may not be working etc.

I've heard from some truck drivers that they are concerned about some of these changes. Are you able to give them an indication of what these changes might be and when they may be implemented when the bill is passed, if the bill is passed?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: I again want to thank my colleague from Ottawa Centre. The revised standards are built on the result of a successful pilot project conducted by the Ministry of Transportation. It was also supported by both truck drivers and the trucking industry. It creates revised national standards, which I understand will be used throughout the country by the other provinces as well. It in fact simplifies the inspection process to a certain extent, because the inspection process right now is quite complicated, although it increases it a little bit in scope. These regulations are currently being developed for this, and we expect, once the legislation is passed, that it will come into effect in 2006.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here signed by a lot of farmers who were here at Queen's Park yesterday, who signed this petition with grave concerns—their concerns are about agriculture, not about the petition, Mr. Speaker.

“Whereas thousands of Ontario farmers have been forced to take their concerns directly to Queen's Park because of a lack of response from the Dalton McGuinty government to farm issues; and

“Whereas farming in Ontario is in crisis because of the impacts of BSE, unfair subsidies from other jurisdictions, rising costs for energy and a crushing regulatory burden on farmers; and

“Whereas current prices for farm products do not allow for sustainable agriculture in Canada, with a 10.7% decline in the number of Canadian farms reported between 1996 and 2001;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to consult with Ontario's farmers to develop a long-term strategy to ensure the viability of agriculture in our province that protects our rural way of life, and to work in the short term to alleviate the farm income crisis and listen to the concerns of farmers about the greenbelt.”

I affix my signature. I just wanted to add that there are many signatures from constituents in my riding of Oxford who have signed this petition.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): A number of constituents have asked me to table this petition.

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

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities;

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of Huronia Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental

disabilities, open, and to transform them into ‘centres of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I'll be tabling this with the Clerk.

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

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

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities;

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

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, open, and to transform them into ‘centres of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

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

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities;

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of Huronia Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, open, and to transform them into ‘centres of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I'm in agreement and will affix my signature thereto.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to read a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls. This is sent to us by a group of concerned citizens in Niagara Falls, and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition. I'll sign it, and I'm going to have Annieza bring it down for me.

1520

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I too have a petition today to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas thousands of Ontario farmers have been forced to take their concerns directly to Queen's Park because of a lack of response from the Dalton McGuinty government to farm issues; and

"Whereas farming in Ontario is in crisis because of the impacts of BSE, unfair subsidies from other jurisdictions, rising costs for energy and a crushing regulatory burden on farmers; and

"Whereas current prices for farm products do not allow for sustainable agriculture in Canada, with a 10.7% decline in the number of Canadian farms reported between 1996 and 2001;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to consult with Ontario's farmers to develop a long-term strategy to ensure the viability of agriculture in our province that protects our rural way of life, and to work in the short term to alleviate the farm income crisis and listen to the concerns of farmers about the greenbelt."

I agree with this petition, and I'll affix my name to it.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I have a petition here, and it's signed by many people from in and around the Huronia area. It reads as follows:

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

"Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

"Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families"—and I'm one of them—"the developmental services sector and the economies of the local communities;

"Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of Huronia Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies"—and I would point out that my cousin Leonard is a resident there.

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

I know that my aunt Doris would like to have signed this if she'd had the chance.

GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition which is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, the Minister of Public Infrastructure, and the Minister of Transportation. It read as follows:

"Whereas GO Transit is presently planning a tunnel in an area just south of St. Clair Avenue West, making it easier for GO trains to pass a major rail crossing; and

"Whereas the TTC is presently planning a TTC right-of-way along all of St. Clair Avenue West, including the bottleneck caused by the dilapidated St. Clair Avenue and Old Weston Road bridge; and

"Whereas this bridge or this underpass, depending which way it goes, will be (1) too narrow for the planned TTC right-of-way since it will have only one lane of traffic; (2) it is not safe for pedestrians. It's about 50 metres long. It's dark and sloping on both the east and west sides, creating a high bank for 300 metres; and (3) it creates a divide, a no man's land, between Old Weston Road and Keele Street. This was acceptable when the area consisted entirely of slaughterhouses, but now the area has 900 new homes;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that GO Transit extend the tunnel beyond St. Clair Avenue West so that trains will pass under the St. Clair Avenue West bridge, thus eliminating this eyesore with its high banks and blank walls. Instead, it will create a dynamic, revital-

ized community enhanced by a beautiful, continuous cityscape with easy traffic flow.”

Since I agree with this wholeheartedly, I'm delighted to sign my name to it.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): This man's cheating.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): I'd caution the member from Simcoe North that petitions are being spoken to.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's signed by a number of constituents from Centre Wellington and also the communities of Stratford and Rockwood.

REGIONAL CENTRES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I do have another petition, and Aunt Doris's name is on it. It reads as follows:

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

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services has announced plans to close Huronia Regional Centre,”—where my cousin Leonard lives, by the way—“home to people with developmental disabilities, many of whom have multiple diagnoses and severe problems that cannot be met in the community;

“Whereas closing Huronia Regional Centre will have a devastating impact on residents with developmental disabilities, their families, the developmental services sector and economies of the local communities;

“Whereas Ontario could use the professional staff and facilities of Huronia Regional Centre to extend specialized services, support and professional training to many more clients who live in the community, in partnership with families and community agencies;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to keep Huronia Regional Centre, home to people with developmental disabilities, open, and to transform them into ‘centres of excellence’ to provide specialized services and support to Ontarians with developmental needs, no matter where they live.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition and plan on working on behalf of keeping that centre open.

CONTROL OF SMOKING

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I was presented with a number of names in my constituency, and in the best interests of my constituents I read the following:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas 20% of the adult population, or 1.8 million adults in Ontario, continue to smoke; and

“Whereas hospitality concepts like bars, pubs, taverns, nightclubs, Legions, bingo halls, racetracks and casinos are businesses with a high percentage of patrons who smoke; and

“Whereas more than 700 businesses in Ontario have invested tens of thousands of dollars each to construct a designated smoking room to comply with municipal bylaws;

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

“Permit properly ventilated and separated designated smoking rooms in hospitality establishments that regulate and control employee and customer exposure to second-hand smoke.”

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly to protect anaphylactic students—and I'm very supportive of Dave Levac's Bill 3.

“Whereas there are no established Ontario-wide standards to deal with anaphylaxis in Ontario schools; and

“Whereas there is no specific comment regarding anaphylaxis in the Ontario Education Act; and

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

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

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

“Be it therefore resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario support the swift passage of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic students, that requires that every school principal in Ontario establish a school anaphylactic plan.”

I’m pleased to support this petition and affix my name to it.

1530

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L’ÉDUCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 1, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 167, An Act to amend the Education Act / Projet de loi 167, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l’éducation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Further debate, the member from Timmins–James Bay. I knew you were speaking.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): You can try if you want, Speaker, but you can’t shut up the people of Huronia who are living in that centre and want to stay there.

The Acting Speaker: Keep going. You’ve got seven minutes.

Mr. Bisson: The last time we had the opportunity to speak on this bill, I was pointing out to the government that the approach the government has taken when it comes to this bill is kind of interesting. Just so people remember, because you may not have watched the other night when we were talking about this, the government has a bill before the House that will basically change the regime when it comes to when school boards and school board unions are able to negotiate.

We all remember that the former government had decided that negotiations would be, I believe, every three years, and people had to negotiate contracts around three-year time frames. I, as a New Democrat, and other New Democrats, always took the view that it should be up to unions and employers to determine how long a collective agreement should be. You have some agreements that are quite short. I’ve been a negotiator for the United Steelworkers as well as a negotiating committee member within my old local, 4440, and we used to have collective agreements as short as a year. On the other hand, I saw Abitibi’s local energy and paperworkers union negotiate agreements that were as long as seven years.

My point is that it’s up to the local bargaining parties to decide how long a collective agreement should be. If there are economic or other reasons why they think a collective agreement should be for one year, that’s up to the parties to determine, right? Or if it’s seven years, again it’s up to the parties. I just say to the government

that democracy is what’s it is all about. We can’t say that we believe in democracy and then try to stifle people’s rights when it comes to those rights in a democracy.

I will say here on the record—I want to say it before you heckle—that the social contract was the wrong thing to do, absolutely.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): How did you vote?

Mr. Bisson: I voted for it. It was the wrong thing to do to from the collective agreement point of view. I’ve said that publicly a number of times. Our government, quite frankly, was rightfully punished on the part of a number of people in the labour unions because they didn’t agree with what we did. I learned something and our party learned something on that. We’ve moved on and said, “Hey, we’ll never do that again.”

I’m just saying to the government, listen, I’ve been there, and it is not the right thing to do. You don’t monkey around with people’s fundamental rights when it comes to how they operate within a democracy. One of the basic fundamental rights we have in a democracy, as enunciated in the charter, is that we have the right to associate; we have the right to free speech; we have the right to our ability to travel within our communities. A whole bunch of rights are conferred and one of those happens to be extended to labour rights. We’re quite lucky in this country, as in other countries where democracies exist, to have strong trade unions that are able to negotiate decent benefits and working conditions and wages for their employees. I know that a number of members on the opposite side, in the government, believe that as I do.

The only point I make is that, if we now start doing what you’re purporting to do, which is that in opposition you were opposed to setting bargaining limits at three years, and you’ve become the government and now you say it’s two or four, I say to myself, why do we have legislation that goes from three to two or four? It has everything to do with when the bargaining would happen. You’re deathly afraid to have bargaining with teachers in an election year. That’s what this bill is all about, because if the current regime stays in place, as set out under the Conservative Party, there are automatically going to be negotiations, in the summer of 2007 for the most part.

The unions will have demands, and we know that. The employers are going to have demands, and we know that too. Employers, in some situations, may be looking for some form of concession from their bargaining agents, from their employees. I don’t like that, but I recognize they have a right to put that on the table, and employees, being the union, are going to have demands. I’m sure some people will have a problem with some of those demands. That’s what happens in negotiations. The parties sit down and they negotiate.

This government is afraid to be put in the position of having to be in negotiations with teachers barely a couple of months before the fall election of 2007, if they enact that legislation around fixed election dates. That’s

something we haven't done yet, by the way, and I'll remind you that it's something we should be doing. However, there are other parts of that bill we need to deal with and we'll get into that another day.

My point is that that's what this is all about. It's about you saying, "I don't want to have bargaining during 2007 because it's an election year. I'll pass legislation that moves the bargaining to either the year before or the year after." I think that's wrong. Quite frankly, we should leave it up to people to decide how long their collective agreements are going to be when they negotiate. That's one of the basic rights we have to give people. Like them or hate them as far as employers' tactics or union tactics when it comes to negotiation, there's a dynamic that happens in negotiations that we need to respect.

The other thing in this bill—and I spoke to it very briefly the other night—is the whole issue of penalties. This is going down a road that I really believe we don't want to go down as legislators, and that is, we're saying to school boards, "If you negotiate a collective agreement that ends in the year 2007, I'm"—"I" being the province—"going to take away from the school board the dollars we give them for staff development."

Wow. What a dumb thing to do. Every employer out there understands that the way to have productive employees and employees who feel satisfied in their jobs, like teachers, is to give them some professional development, allow them to basically build on the skills they got by way of whatever certificate they came in with when they started the teaching career, whatever it might be, and build on those skills by doing professional development. I can't believe the government would put in jeopardy professional development dollars if the school boards decide not to follow this legislation. I think that's just a really wrong message to send.

We know in our economy of today the thing that's going to give us the kind of competitiveness and the edge we need in the future to compete against many economies in the Pacific Rim and other places that are now emerging. We can't compete in a low-wage economy. We're going to lose that fight. The way we're going to compete is by having very well-trained people who know what they're doing and are able to be excellent at what they do, and that is continued in the workplace by things like professional development.

And who more important than our teachers? You can fight against teachers all you want. You can be on the side of some in this Legislature in the past who like to fight teachers, but the reality is that they are with our kids all the time. They give the kids the start they need in the school system to be able to make choices about their life and where they're going to go. We need to make sure those teachers have the tools necessary to be fresh and current when it comes to their skills to motivate those kids and help them along in making their decisions along with we, the parents, because we have a responsibility as parents. But we need to make sure that our teachers have all the skills and all the current information they need not only to teach well inside the classroom but also to help

kids along in making some of the decisions they make about going to school post-secondary, either college or university.

For the government to say, "If you don't live up to this legislation and there are negotiations in 2007, we're going to penalize you by taking away your money for staff development," I think is absolutely ridiculous.

With the last 10 seconds I've got, on the Huronia Centre, I've got to say that this is a real serious issue and the government's got to give its head a shake because a lot of people are going to get hurt if we go down this road.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I want to speak in support of this particular bill and talk about some of the relationships and having a healthy working relationship with our teachers.

We are coming out of a period when there has been a great deal of antagonism between government and teachers, and we are finally moving toward a working relationship that I think benefits all. We are trying very hard to make sure that our teachers have stability and peace within their environment. That's very important, because they are working with our children. A teacher can influence children just by what's happening to them as a profession in terms of how they relate to children and how well they work in co-operation with those children. We want teachers to feel the stability of long-term contracts, and that's what we are doing.

The previous member mentioned things such as trying to avoid a negotiation during an election year. Quite honestly, I think that if you were to do a negotiation during an election year, you're working on a big-stick theory as opposed to working in a more co-operative way. Negotiations should be taking place during a very neutral time. They need to be done at a neutral time when all parties have an equal opportunity at the table, not when one has an advantage over the other. Negotiations are about working together co-operatively, and that's where we want to go with our teachers. We want to work co-operatively with them to derive the kind of environment our children will benefit from, because our children are, bottom line, the most important of all in this type of thing.

1540

We want our teachers to feel stability. We want them to have peace. They need long-term agreements that mean peace not only for them, but also for the parents. In my own riding, parents are often very concerned about what's going to happen in terms of negotiations and teachers' strikes and that sort of thing. So we need this type of long-term stability, and therefore I support this bill.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's a pleasure to be up this Thursday afternoon to take part in the second reading debate on Bill 167, the Education Act. I guess I wonder why we're even discussing this bill, with all the important issues the government should be addressing. Trying to politicize an election date—

Interjections.

Mr. Dunlop: You know what? I'm hearing a couple of ministers heckle me over there. What's really important is that this piece of legislation is politicizing election dates. It's as simple as that. This government simply does not want to have an election fall on the year contracts expire, the year 2007. We know that. It's clear as a bell. That's what this whole issue has been about. These are the same people who criticized the previous government with their education activities and legislation, and are now bringing forth a piece of legislation that takes away the expiry dates on the year they've called the next election, sometime in 2007.

What they have done, though, is made other announcements on 2007. For example, I read with interest about the new casino money, the hotel complex in Windsor. I understand it will be open in 2007. I wonder, and I've said this before in this House, if the official opening will be before or after October 7, 2007, when John Tory is the new Premier of this province. I think it's very simple. We know right now that it will be before, because Minister Duncan and Minister Papatello have to have something to brag about. There certainly isn't anything from their performance here in this House. So what we'll see is an election date, and a ribbon-cutting before October 7, 2007.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): It is always a privilege and a pleasure to comment on my good friend from Timmins–James Bay and his eloquence in this House. I must comment. I'm not going to speak so much about what he had to say, although I have some notes, but I was quite intrigued after a number of days of debate on this issue—and I have witnessed it both here in this House and on the television in my office downstairs—to finally hear from the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who actually said it honestly and succinctly in this House in her two minutes, that this is about bringing negotiations and labour peace at a time other than when we're going into an election. When I read the bill, I couldn't understand what it was about except for that. I've heard lots of speeches about lots of things, but no one has succinctly put it that this is about buying labour peace in advance of the election so that the government can sort of sidestep this issue.

But I have to tell you, it's not just about buying labour peace for this Legislature. What you are doing by way of this bill is not buying labour peace for the boards. In two years, that's exactly when the boards are going to be coming forward for their particular election. You're going to see the boards of education, the municipalities and the others, instead of having labour peace, which they would have had under the old act, now in some kind of turmoil under this proposal.

So it's all well and good to buy it for yourselves, it's all well and good to buy it for this Liberal government, but you're not doing any favours to the boards that have to sit down and do the hard negotiations. I want the members to think: It's all well and good to do things that are going to help you, and help you to get re-elected, but

you're not working with your partners in the municipal sector and the boards of education who are going to have to do the real hard jobs here, and who are going to be held accountable for it by way of the legislation as well if they step over your line.

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): There is no question in my mind that this is about a genuine relationship between the educational community, the government and parents. The key word is "genuine." Just to be fair, my colleague the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex referred to peace, but of course she was referring to peace for everybody, not just labour peace.

What is important is that we want to make sure that students can learn in an atmosphere of peace and stability. That is why this bill aims to create a longer-term contract with the boards, and that is why we are planning on guaranteeing multi-year funding for boards that enter into two- or four-year agreements. Of course, we emphasize four-year agreements much more than the two-year ones.

The member from Timmins–James Bay spoke about rights under the charter. I agree with that—certainly, as good Canadians. But what about the right of students to learn, which is not in the charter? This is extremely important, especially for new immigrants. Yes, I know them well and I know many of them. There are many new immigrants in my riding of Markham, and I can tell you that disruption is so devastating to them because they just want their kids to be able to learn in a peaceful and stable environment. It's bad enough for students to have come from a different community, to have come from a different culture, and to suffer the disruptions that many of them did before the election. To be quite honest with you, the parents don't really care why the negotiations fail; they just don't want to have the disruption. Don't explain to them why there are disruptions and why it's good for whomever. I think they are entitled to have their kids educated in a peaceful and stable manner.

I think stability is of the essence, and this bill is vital to the very future of Ontario's publicly funded system.

The Acting Speaker: In response, the Chair recognizes the member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Bisson: Mr. Speaker, the cat's out of the bag. I wasn't me. I said it in my speech, but it was only little ol' me, Gilles Bisson, member of the NDP from Timmins–James Bay in the third party opposition.

I was saying to the government, you're only doing this because you're trying to get away from having negotiations in an election year. People heckled me the other day—they heckled me somewhat today, but not as much, and I thank you for that—saying no, that wasn't the case at all. But the two Liberal members who got up to respond to my speech have basically said, "We need labour peace in 2007." If that doesn't mean to say that we are pushing this off an election year, I don't know what it means, Speaker.

The cat's out of the bag, so why don't you guys just—like, the first step in being able to deal with a problem is admitting that you have one. I say this is a good start. My

good friend from—I don't remember the riding. I have great respect for these two members, because they are honest individuals who have said, "I am prepared to take the first step and to admit that I've got a problem. And, yes, I don't want to have negotiations in 2007 because it's an election year and it's going to be tough enough as it is. I don't need those pesky teachers bugging me." I say that's a good first step. I have to congratulate the two members from the Liberal Party for being courageous and standing and saying it the way it is.

Now I encourage the rest of you in the Liberal caucus. As I look into the eyes of my friends across the way, I say, be bold. Step forward. Admit that you're doing this because there's an election in 2007. If we can get to that, we can deal with the issue. I understand what your issue is: You want to be popular next election. We have all kinds of ideas here in the opposition to help you out with that. Listen to the opposition. You might do a lot better next election.

1550

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): I think that if anybody in this House thinks there is going to be labour peace in this world, they are smoking something strange.

I think there needs to be some honesty around the issue of dealing with what happens in bargaining. To suggest that two parties come together in the school board sector and sit down and bargain and then go away because it's done within a short period of time—again, they believe in never-never land.

The fact of the matter is that I've been in some bargaining situations where the bargaining is finished, it's completed within a month, and then you're starting all over again. That's the nature of bargaining. People do not come, sit down, work out their problems, sign a contract and move on. They come for a day, they talk a little and then six weeks later they might meet again. Then another month or two go by and they rattle the sabres; they do all the stuff out in the public and pretend that's bargaining. That's not bargaining. If they were really quite sincere about bargaining on behalf of the students, which is what should be at the centre of their thinking, then they would sit at the table and find some solutions to the problems. But that's not what they do.

The union comes out and bargains on behalf of their members, not the children, and I think we need to remember that. School boards bargain because they're within a particular parameter that they need to deal with, and typically it's their money. At the end of the day they trade bodies for bucks. It has been ever thus in the years that I was involved.

So I think some honesty is due to the people who are watching this. What happened with the previous government when they amalgamated the school boards was that all collective agreements came due on the same date. Do you want to talk about how difficult it really is for the school boards to sit down and start bargaining with all of their unions on the same date? You can imagine how it

stretches the resources within some of the boards. Some are larger and can do it; others cannot do it.

At least with two or four years—and I don't think it makes a hill of beans whether there's an election or not—you can start to stagger that so that we don't get whip-sawed back and forth, which is what usually happens when you're all bargaining on the same day. If you think about it now, the Toronto District School Board has all of their unions—they can strike at the same time.

If you don't think that's a bit of bravado on their part in terms of their employees—absolutely. It's not the kids they're thinking about, and when someone turns around and says, "We're doing this in the best interests of the children," I find that unconscionable. In fact, what they should be doing is coming to the table with their challenges on both sides and finding solutions if they believe it's in the best interests of the children.

At least with this bill, it permits the staggering of some of the collective agreements. Do I think they're all going to happen within the next few months? No. It's going to take some time for these to happen. So some of them may in fact be during the election and some may not even be resolved until after the election. What I do think is that we need to find a new way of doing bargaining, period, in terms of how we deal with the children in this province.

I apologize as well, Mr. Speaker. I am going to share my time with my colleague Brad Duguid.

One of the difficulties that we believe—or I believe, anyway—is a challenge in the school board sector with bargaining is that there has been unrest for a long period of time, and there is a lot of suspicion out there. There is the unrest because people have been treated disrespectfully on both sides, and I believe it's time to change that. You're not going to have peace in the valley, which I used to ask for, until you start to re-establish some mutual trust among the people who are at the table, and there's a lot of water under the bridge on that one. It's going to take a long time to get people to come back to thinking whether there is another way we can approach this so we can honestly say it's in the best interests of the children we serve, regardless of whether you're a caretaker or a secretary, who is just as valuable as that teacher in the classroom. They all have a part to play in the role supporting those children through their education.

For me, two things: One is that it provides some relief. The three years was not acceptable. It is just too difficult. It permitted the whipsawing to go back and forth. The other is that it made sure that the provincial bargaining agents were in fact the provincial bargaining bodies of the federation. That changes the dynamics at the local level as well, because it's very difficult to deal with the two.

There's a whole slew of issues that need to be resolved about this, but to stand up and say it's all about election is nonsense. All of you have been in this province long enough to know that the unions are going to strike when the unions are going to strike, regardless. If they can take advantage of a particular situation, they will. They do

that as part of their membership. It's part of their responsibility to do so. Also, in terms of the school board, they're stuck within the parameters because you're dealing with a particular business, if you like, that is 98% or 80% human resources, so you don't have much with which to work. So a little honesty would be helpful.

Thank you for the opportunity to say it's time to move on and support the bill.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): It's always great to follow the member for Etobicoke Centre because she always makes such common sense in what she says. When she speaks about education, she knows what she's talking about, as a former chair of the Toronto District School Board. It is so valuable to a government to have members with such experience in our caucus, assisting us and providing advice to us all on these kinds of issues. She's doing a great job as well as PA to the Minister of Energy.

Our government is committed to improving student achievement and giving students the tools they need to succeed in an increasingly tough workplace environment and an increasingly competitive job market. But disruptions caused by the negotiation process can really disturb and impact the quality of the educational experience for teachers and the quality of their work life, for administration staff and for parents as well, who have to cope with getting their kids to and from school, but most importantly, for our children. Nobody expects the collective bargaining process to be perfect. Nobody expects that a better-managed education system will bring utopia to labour relations, but there's no question that the approach taken by the McGuinty government contrasts greatly with that of the previous government. Frankly, there is no question that the approach the McGuinty government has taken is already bearing fruit.

Let's do a little comparison between the old approach and the new approach. The former government liked to bash teachers. The former government liked to play to that base public opinion, tried to play to that and make teachers feel less appreciated than they really should be. This government, the McGuinty government, respects teachers. We recognize that teachers are an essential part of our society, an essential part of our economic future, one of the most important—if not the most important—professions in our entire community. The previous government set out to create a crisis in education. Their own Minister of Education stated that very thing.

We have taken a different approach. We are working with teachers to improve the quality of the education system. How are we doing that? By adding more teachers to the system—1,100 more teachers added this year; by reducing class sizes in the early grades—1,300 schools across this province have already seen reduced class sizes; by launching a new literacy and numeracy secretariat to improve results in literacy and math. We are providing teachers with mentoring support for up to 2,000 teachers across our system; better training and classroom resources for teachers, a very important initiative; 8,000 lead teachers now in our classrooms across Ontario;

7,500 teachers trained last summer in literacy and math to provide a better opportunity, to give them a better ability to teach our kids. That's going to have a big impact in the classrooms. It's going to have a big impact on the results we are seeking. We have also sent turnaround teams into our struggling schools, to try to help them upgrade the experience for our young people.

Let's look at the role that schools have played in our communities through the years: the community use of schools. The previous government brought in a funding formula that absolutely destroyed the ability of our boards of education to allow schools to be open to community groups: groups like Scouts and Guides, sporting groups, before- and after-school groups, seniors groups, access to schools for community meetings. All of that was destroyed right across this province. But our Minister of Tourism has come forward with new funding for schools, \$20 million being allocated, to return schools to their rightful place in our community as the hub of activity, the place where young people can go after school for after-school programs, recreational programs, Scouts, Guides and all those kinds of things, returning schools to their rightful place in our neighbourhoods.

The previous government allowed schools to deteriorate in terms of their capital use. They allowed schools to deteriorate to the point where some people were comparing some of our schools to Third World schools. I don't know if it was that bad, but they were pretty bad. They needed investment, and our government has come forward with investment: \$2 billion has been set up in a fund to repair our crumbling schools. That's going to make a big difference across the system. As I speak to the teachers I know, they are very much looking forward to seeing their work environments, and the environments that our young people are learning in, upgraded over the next number of years.

The teacher-bashing approach has led to probably the worst record in modern governmental history here in this province when it comes to missing days of school because of labour relations. Under the previous government, there were more days missed in school than under the two previous governments combined.

This government is taking a different approach. We're working toward peace and harmony in our education system, and this legislation is a step in the right direction. Bill 167 continues to build on the atmosphere of peace and stability that our new approach is building throughout our school system. Two- or preferably four-year contracts will contribute to that stability and allow for better long-term planning to focus on student achievement rather than negotiations.

The results are already being felt in our education system. Teachers are already getting onside for this new approach we're taking to education, and we're going to see the results in the coming years, as our students achieve more and more in things like math and literacy and as we build a stronger, better job market and a stronger, more skilled, better-educated workforce for our future.

1600

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): It's interesting to listen to the debate today and to the different sides that are being put forward. The Liberals say there's going to be peace and stability in the school system. I don't see how we're going to have peace and stability when 29 of 31 teachers' unions have voted to go on strike for this. In Kawartha Pine Ridge, one of the districts in my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, 99% of the teachers voted to go on strike. In the Trillium Lakelands District School Board, over 80% voted to go on strike. I stopped into the elementary school office the other day. They're not happy. They don't look peaceful and contented. They say the government's ripping them off. They're in negotiations. What is Minister Kennedy going to do? The only real purpose of this legislation that we're debating today is to save the government the embarrassment of having to deal with the teachers and the contracts in 2007.

It's starting to be a very significant date in our calendars, 2007. Isn't that the next provincial election? That's right, they did keep that one promise—October 4, 2007. That's the year all the ribbons, I think, are going to be cut all over. They're trying to avoid as many potential problems as possible, so it's not a surprise that 2007 is the date that the Liberals—oh, that's right; they're opening that casino, the Papatello palace, over in Windsor. That's going to be open now.

Anyway, some have observed of the provincial government that they'll avoid any labour trouble at any cost. I don't know. There are going to be a lot of pickets out there, and not just from the teachers; look at the hospitals, the nurses and the doctors. They're getting it on all fronts. The Premier's office thinks it's going to be bad politics for trouble to erupt on the education front. The education Premier; that's what he's called. I'm remembering that for when the Rae report comes out. We'll see how many dollars are put in the budget in order to implement the Rae report.

Mr. Prue: I'd like to comment especially about the member from Etobicoke Centre. I listened to both of the Liberal members speak, but the member from Etobicoke Centre said something that I do not believe I can simply allow to stand. She said that teachers and their unions look out for their own best interests and not necessarily for the interests of the children, because that's the role and nature of unions.

I would beg to differ. I have to stand up on behalf of the tens of thousands of teachers in this province. I have never met a single teacher in my life who goes out to look for their own best interests first. They look out for each and every child who's under their authority inside the classroom, they give untold hours of their own time and money to make sure the system works, they take educational upgrading in order to make sure they are current, and I have seen them help poor and injured children. I have seen them do everything in their power to look after those children.

In terms of the unions themselves of which the teachers are members, yes, they have an obligation to look out for their members. This is a type of work where they are in a very stressful environment, some would even say far more stressful than it is in this House on many occasions. They constantly have demands upon them and they deserve to be well paid. They deserve to have good working conditions. That is why they organized and that is why they have the unions.

The teachers' unions especially, all of them, are very different from what the member described. She is describing some kind of Gompertian American system where you're in it for what you can get, but I would tell you that I think the teachers are far beyond that. They have developed a whole system; they know they are part of the solution to the problems there. They work very hard with the school boards, with the province and with everyone else to deliver and be part of what is best for the children.

I don't think the member should be making statements to that effect. Yes, they have a self-interest, but they are as interested in the children of this province every bit as much as are the politicians in this room.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): It gives me pleasure to spend a couple of minutes speaking to Bill 167. We are talking a lot about peace and harmony within the system. I have to tell you that after you have been beaten up on a lot and there is a lot of pain in the process, after eight years of being beaten up on, it takes a long time for people to come to a comfort level. You know that with your own kids. If you were to smack your kids around all the time—no one in this House would do that, but there are people who do—what would you expect from them? You'd expect them to react. If you treat them with a little more gentleness and kindness, over a period of time they will come around to acting and responding in the responsible way that teachers in our system do.

The concerns over timing: Two- and four-year contracts provide a couple of opportunities. One is to provide some stability in the system, because one-year contracts would be like one-year contracts here. It's tough enough to get anything done during a mandate, let alone in a one-year time frame. But the two- and four-year time frames provide opportunity for reasonable negotiations, for reasonable provision of service. It also provides an opportunity that doesn't exist now with three-year mandates and fixed time frames, where all the teachers across the province will be negotiating at the same time. This provides the teachers' groups an opportunity to select based on what's in the best interests of their communities, the best interests of them as members, and also the opportunity over a period of time to do the comparative analysis as to what's happening in other parts of the province. With contracts not all coming up together, at the same time, one can compare and say, "What are the strengths of a contract and the weaknesses of others?"

I think time will prove during the course of this mandate that the relationship we have been building with

teachers will be fruitful and that we will have contracts signed that they will be happy with, as will their students, which is most important, as well as the boards.

Mr. Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise again and speak on Bill 167, another bill that was not needed very badly, except for politically partisan purposes. I can think of more important things we should be discussing. Why wouldn't we spend a little bit of time doing, say, an agricultural bill to help our farmers? How many thousands were out here yesterday complaining? Here we are worried about what time the expiry date of the next contract is going to be. We want to make sure it's not going to happen in 2007. That's what it's all about.

I give the government credit for one purpose: They've stuck to their message pretty well through these first few days of debate. You haven't caved in on that. For some reason you've missed the point on that one.

The bottom line is that there are many more things that are very important to discuss here, and I certainly hope that next week there is a major announcement to help the agricultural community. Over the last few weeks, especially in all the farm meetings we had throughout January, we've seen a sector that's having a very difficult time, a sector that helped build Ontario, and a sector that I believe needs the support of this government now more than ever—not to finger-point at the Americans; not to finger-point at the previous government; not to finger-point at the federal government. We need leadership from Dalton McGuinty. We know the Minister of Agriculture isn't capable of leadership. Dalton McGuinty, the Premier, must support the farmers in our communities. We need that badly.

I don't know how many people we spoke to yesterday—

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): Thousands.

Mr. Dunlop: —thousands of people. There will be thousands more here next week. I hope they can keep coming. I hope they can afford gasoline to get here, because we need to support this very important segment of our society that has been let down by this government.

1610

The Acting Speaker: In response, the Chair recognizes the member from Etobicoke Centre.

Mrs. Cansfield: It's interesting; it's not very often that the member from Beaches–East York has selective hearing. I said that the teachers' union has a job to do. You know, I am one of those people who had for a number of years lived through that social contract and lived through the previous government's analysis, if you like, of how and what a teacher should be. I can tell you that neither of them did anything in terms of supporting teachers in the classroom in either of those two instances. So get the record straight on that one.

I laughed when Haliburton–Victoria—“ripping them off”? Would you like to hear what ripping off is? Ripping off is having someone stand in this House and determine that a teacher is just about the next thing to incarnate evil. That's what happened for a number of years on the other side. And then to turn around and say to those teachers

that you're going to be the ones who are going to fix the system, after you told them that they were the ones who broke it to begin with—there is a lot of work to be done with the teacher in the classroom to repair the damages that have been done for a lot of years.

But certainly this has nothing to do with that; this has to do with union contracts. It has to do with a union that has a job on behalf of the members they serve, of which they must be a member. It has to do with school boards, who sit down at a bargaining table to work out the parameters under which these people continue to work. So I don't think we should be messing things around in terms of teachers and teachers' unions. This is a union issue and a school board issue on how to sit down and do bargaining.

I think that at the end of the day what we really want is the best interests of those kids. If we can find a way to change that bargaining so that it all doesn't occur on the same date, then it's an opportunity where we can do this maybe with some of that peace in the valley that has been missing for a long, long time in this province.

Mr. Hudak: I'm pleased to rise and debate on Bill 167, An Act to amend the Education Act, so that contracts don't come due in election year. As has been pointed out in this assembly by a number of our members, that's probably a more appropriate title. The government, if this legislation were to pass, would simply be shifting the dates of contracts expiry outside of the election year.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): So cynical. We never even thought of that.

Mr. Hudak: You know what? My colleague the Minister of Tourism says I'm being cynical. I hadn't come to this debate with that sort of perception, but I've listened to my colleagues debate—

Hon. Mr. Bradley: You're listening to Garfield.

Mr. Hudak: Well, Simcoe North will always give me good advice, but I also heard it from Beaches–East York, I believe, who talked about it as well, and he had paraphrased the member for Lambton–Middlesex. So I have been convinced by the debate of my colleagues that this bill is probably more appropriately called “an act to amend the Education Act so that contracts expire well after the next election.” I don't mean to be cynical about it, but I've been convinced. I try to enter these debates with an open mind, and unless I hear a convincing argument to the opposite, I am convinced that this is really more so politically driven—

Hon. Mr. Bradley: In your first term, you were not cynical like this.

Mr. Hudak: Honestly, I had not thought of that line until I sat down here in debate and listened to my esteemed colleagues, who have now convinced me that this bill, at its core, is to postpone the expiration of teachers' contracts until politically safely after the next election. I don't see a compelling—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I know Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge has been up in the two minutes; maybe he'll be up to speak a

bit more about it. Help me understand how the current system of the three-year contracts, passed under the previous government—we brought forward that bill—differs from four years, how the one extra year buys any additional so-called stability, other than getting you past the 2007 election?

I don't blame you. I understand behind the scenes why Don Guy—I'm trying to think of the other ones. McLaughlin—what the heck is his name?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Guy Giorno.

Mr. Hudak: No, that's the other one. But there is an irony, right?

Interjections.

Mr. Hudak: I had these all figured out, too, because I used to sit in the Minister of Tourism's old seat, and these things would pop up. There was a Don Guy; there was—it's a Scottish name. David—

Mr. Dunlop: MacNaughton.

Mr. Hudak: MacNaughton. They're shrugging their shoulders. "Never heard of him," they're saying over there. He doesn't sit in their caucus meetings. "I don't know who this MacNaughton fellow is."

So Don Guy—and Gerald Butts. That's the other one. The Butts, MacNaughton and Guy axis of politics has decided that it's appropriate—

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): Axis of evil.

Mr. Hudak: I didn't say that. There is some heckling. Axis of politics.

The MacNaughton, Butts and Guy triumvirate has determined it is an appropriate use of the Legislature's time to delay the renewal of the teachers' contracts until after the next election. If I had to put myself in their place, in those three big stuffed chairs in the Premier's office where they're making all these decisions, I can understand why, because there is a great deal of—

Ms. Churley: Would you have done the same thing?

Mr. Hudak: I don't remember such chairs. I think they're new and they're red and they're plush leather—in my imagination, anyway.

No wonder they're trying to do that. It's because of the considerable dissatisfaction with the leadership and lack of planning by the McGuinty government—and health care. There are a few things that they clearly campaigned on. One was to keep their promises. Not to beat a pit bull when it's down, but they've broken over 40-some promises to date. So this notion that Dalton McGuinty would be a new-style politician who would keep his promises and such, well, that went out the window along with their campaign platform as soon as he got the keys to the Premier's limousine.

The other aspect you would expect them to focus on would be improving health care. You certainly hear the rhetoric from the health minister saying that they're improving health care. In fact, they increased taxes substantially, at a punishing level to working families in Ontario. My colleague here beside me will talk about the opposite of progressivity, whatever that is, in this taxation, where a working mother of modest income with

children would pay a substantially higher increase in her percentage of taxes as a result of the Dalton McGuinty health tax, while a millionaire would probably pay less than a 1% increase in taxes as a result. A dual working family, a typical family in any of our ridings, together, if both spouses are working, would pay more in health tax than somebody making \$4 million. They would pay \$900 in health tax, whereas the \$4-million wage earner would pay \$900—and they would pay more than that.

So there doesn't seem to be—maybe people will correct me if I'm wrong—any comprehension whatsoever of improvements in the health care system. I would say that if you ask the average person on the street, that individual would say that we're paying more and getting less in services.

If they're not making any progress on the health care front—in fact, they're going backwards—and if Premier McGuinty has lost any credibility in doing what he said he was going to do—in fact, people expect the opposite—it might be a wise strategy for Dalton McGuinty to promise things he's not going to do, because then you know he'll do something different if he gets back into office. A bit of reverse psychology might be an interesting part of the next platform.

Since health care is going to pot in Ontario and the Premier's credibility has been shot, I guess they wanted to concentrate on education and try to quiet things down in the education sector. But I still don't really understand why a four-year contract is that much different from a three-year contract in terms of the stability the government purports to be after. My colleague from Oak Ridges has brought forward his own private member's bill, which I think was 172—

Mr. Dunlop: Bill 172, and that makes sense.

Mr. Hudak: It's Bill 172, which my colleague from Simcoe North says makes a lot of sense. If I understand the bill correctly, it would allow for three-year contracts, which has been the request, I believe, of OECTA. The Catholic teachers' association has suggested that a three-year contract is most appropriate. My colleague, in response to that request, has brought forward a private member's bill, which I guess would give a range of a two-year, a three-year or a four-year contract.

If this bill were truly aimed at developing stability in the education system, certainly it has been belied by the headlines we saw when this act was introduced back in December 2004. I'll give you a headline from the Woodstock Sentinel-Review on Thursday, December 9: "New Offer Won't Bring Peace, Stability: Teachers." They say quite the opposite. In fact, the article says, "... the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation provincial executive rebuffed the offer, saying Kennedy"—that's the education minister—"went over their heads in making the offer to local district executive members throughout the province."

1620

OSSTF president Rhonda Kimberley-Young said in a release, "In doing so, he is working against local bargaining." So if this bill is truly supposed to get at

stability and better relations with the teachers' unions, I'm actually shocked at the ineptness of how it was introduced, because obviously OSSTF, OECTA and others have responded very negatively to this legislation and the way it was introduced by the education minister over their heads, to paraphrase what was in that article.

It goes on to say, "The OSSTF feels that local bargaining is the best for local needs ... the one-size-fits-all funding formula doesn't work, and neither does one-size-fits-all provincial bargaining." That's what OSSTF says in a very angry response to the tactics of the education minister in the McGuinty Liberal government.

The St. Catharines Standard, always one of my favourite journals, Thursday, December 16, 2004, on page A11 has a headline with respect to this Bill 167: "Minister Interfered with Bargaining: Teachers." The first line of that report says, "The union representing Ontario secondary school teachers has filed a complaint." Not only have they done a release and communicated directly to the minister—they're upset, Mr. Speaker—but they also went so far as to file "a complaint against the provincial education minister, accusing him of interfering in the bargaining process."

Fun with headlines continues. The National Post, also one of my favourite journals, on Wednesday, December 8, by Lee Greenberg, a very hard-working journalist—

Ms. Churley: He's a good journalist.

Mr. Hudak: He is. My colleague says he's a good journalist; I agree. He's very hard-working, young and energetic. Lee Greenberg, in a story, says, "Teachers to be Offered Choice of Two- to Four-Year Contracts: Kennedy Proposing Pay Hikes of 2% to 3%." When Greenberg asked the teachers' federation what they said, Emily Noble, the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, was quoted as saying, "Mr. Kennedy's offer of 2% was 'on the low side,'" and that teachers would be asking for raises between 3% and 3.5% per annum.

I won't dwell much longer on the headlines following the minister's release of his letter, later followed up by Bill 167, but suffice it to say that the teachers' unions have reacted very negatively to this legislation. So you wonder that a bill that's supposed to create stability in the system would get off to such a rough start and get such a rough ride.

I know my colleague from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, a very hard-working member, is fighting to make sure that Tim Hortons does open in Beaverton, Ontario. It's always un-Canadian to stand against a Tim Hortons, with this greenbotch bill it's unpatriotic to try to stop a Tim Hortons from coming to small-town Ontario, but in this greenbotch mess created by the McGuinty Liberal government, a Tim Hortons may be stopped as it's trying to land in Beaverton, Ontario. I hope it ain't so but I fear it may be so.

Maybe Tim Hortons should have gone to the \$10,000-a-plate fundraiser. Maybe that big, inflatable Tim Hortons coffee mug could have gone there. They could have brought along a \$10,000 box of Timbits. Maybe that

would have greased the wheels a little bit and we might have had a different answer on boundaries in Beaverton, but I fear the local owner of the Tim Hortons—

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: With respect to my colleague from Erie–Lincoln, standing order 23(b)(i) suggests that perhaps he may wish to address the topic under discussion.

The Acting Speaker: I'll make that decision, thank you. The Chair recognizes the member from Erie–Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was saying that when the leaders of the local federations of education—teachers—are meeting in Beaverton, they'd probably enjoy going to this Tim Hortons if it had been built, but in fact the greenbotch legislation has prevented that Tim Hortons from ever being constructed.

I don't want to tease my colleague from Mississauga West. I don't know if he was a tattle-tale when he was in school, but I do appreciate that he was listening closely to my remarks.

Ms. Churley: You were getting under his skin.

Mr. Hudak: I didn't mean to.

Ms. Churley: You were getting too close to the truth.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from Toronto–Danforth suggests I was getting too close to the truth, and that's why we had their rebuttal. But very real questions have been raised in the Legislature in question period these last few days, and have dominated the media coverage of debate in this place with respect to a \$10,000-per-person fundraiser and the impact that may have had on greenbelt boundaries. Certainly, the government's unwillingness to bring forward the science behind that plan gives credence to that question, that these boundaries are based more on political science than real science.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Erie–Lincoln, we're dealing with the Education Act.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you. Sometimes you get worked up about what happened in question period a couple of hours ago and it's hard to let go. You're right; I will get back. But you do wonder.

Let me go on about the purported stability in education, as my colleague—that's how I got on the topic. I was talking about how my colleague from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock had referenced the number of teachers' federations and boards that are currently in strike positions. They're planning for strikes. Twenty-nine of 31 boards, I understand, are in a strike position. A number of others are beginning on Monday, I believe—here in the city of Toronto, in the capital of the province of Ontario—a work-to-rule campaign, both the teachers and the support staff.

Maybe they don't know enough about Bill 167. Maybe if the Minister of Education made a lot of photocopies of Bill 167 and took it down to the federation headquarters, they would change their mind and realize that this is all about peace in the classroom. I think they would have some suggestions about what to do with that paper. The minister used some particular language in question period. They would probably say the same

thing, or even stronger, to the Minister of Education if he made that suggestion.

I wonder too—I know my colleague from Simcoe North spoke about this earlier on. When we were debating Bill 167, the act to amend the Education Act so contracts expire after the next provincial election, he talked about the curiosity about why we are debating this particular bill when there are real and growing concerns, whether it's about the greenbelt and how the boundaries were decided, the plight of farmers in the province of Ontario or health care in the province.

I remember when this so-called special session of the Legislature was called to meet in February and into March, which, while not rare, is not common. The government, in its spin—I remember watching CP24 and seeing the spin about the government's intentions in the new session, which were going to concentrate on pit bull bans and the film classification system in the province of Ontario.

I'm glad to be here. I'm glad to be here in the Legislature. I'm glad to be bringing the issues of concern with Bill 167, the concerns of the good people of Erie-Lincoln in the province of Ontario. But I bet if you asked a hundred of those residents in Erie-Lincoln what they thought the priorities for the session should be, very few—in fact, none—would have said the film classification system and modernizing that in the province of Ontario. And I think only those who have pit bulls or dogs like them, that are part of their families, who are not happy with what this legislation is going to do, would probably highlight the pit bull legislation, hoping it would be defeated. Otherwise, I don't think, back home, when they knew we were coming in for a so-called special session of the Legislature, they would have expected us to be debating film classification, pit bull bans or Bill 167, the act to amend the Education Act so contracts expire after the next election.

There's plenty of time until after the next election, so why do these bills have priority over issues like addressing investments in health care, recruiting doctors to underserved areas or helping our farmers in facing the lowest prices for grain and oilseeds in 25 years? Many are affected by the greenbelt legislation. Why those wouldn't be the priorities instead is beyond me.

Even in education, we've had a couple of ideas brought forward by the Minister of Education. One is to make sure the contracts go after the next provincial election. Whether that was Minister Kennedy's idea or part of the Butts-MacNaughton-Guy triumvirate, I'm not sure. It could have been a coalition of those forces that is now compelling us to debate this particular bill today.

The Minister of Education has also talked about one of his first priorities as Minister of Education: banning gummi bears, hunting down every last gummi bear from the halls of the schools of the province; a spring bear hunt on gummi bears, making sure parents would pat down their kids so they wouldn't be sneaking a Snickers bar into the classroom as they went off to school. Sure, it's important to encourage good eating habits in young

people and adults. Certainly, I could do better at that, as I pull my jacket tighter around my waist.

1630

Ms. Churley: They can have fresh sushi now.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague does point out that now they can have fresh sushi in the schools. But the emphasis on this window dressing or these distractions, like banning junk food as the highest priority of the Minister of Education—I thought he would have brought other initiatives forward first. I thought he would have done more things to improve the quality of education rather than changing a three-year contract to a four-year contract. I'm not entirely sure why that's a priority.

I would have been much more impressed by a Minister of Education who looked at the quality of education in the classroom; in fact, it has been the opposite. We've seen the Minister of Education, who introduced Bill 167, also concentrate on watering down literacy standards in Ontario so that students will no longer have to pass both components of the literacy test.

We've also heard the minister talk about watering down the College of Teachers. The College of Teachers is there to ensure there are high standards in the classroom, in the profession. The minister has talked about watering down the role of colleges and also lowering the requirements of standardized testing and abolishing teacher testing in the province.

I think he at one time talked about, instead of Bill 167, bringing forward at least some alternative to the teacher-testing system that was already before the province, but instead he eliminated that but has brought nothing in return, no replacement.

So teacher testing, making sure we have high standards for the college, high standards of testing in the classroom and the literacy test—all watered down under this Minister of Education. He will triumph with stability, but at the same time sacrificing quality in the classroom, which I find highly regrettable.

My last point: I'll look forward to the budget—I think a lot of us will—to see what the McGuinty deficit is actually going to be for this year. But to see if they can actually pay for this program is another topic entirely, which I can't fully address in 10 seconds, but I do understand the cost to the system is well over \$2.5 billion under Bill 167.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The Chair recognizes the member from Toronto-Danforth.

Ms. Churley: It's my pleasure to respond to—I was testing you to see if you could remember my riding, Mr. Speaker, and you did. Thank you.

I wanted to comment for a couple of minutes in response to the member for Erie-Lincoln. We seem to be working together a lot these days.

Mr. Hudak: Good team.

Ms. Churley: We are; we don't agree on every point. I have to say to the public and to the government that I supported the government in their efforts to ban junk food from schools because—

Mr. Hudak: It's not a priority.

Ms. Churley: Well, you know, it could be done very quickly, in fact, because it's something I think we all support. For me, it would be a priority that shouldn't have to take very long.

But I was extremely amused when the member for Mississauga West, I think, stood up on a point of order to try to shut you down, member from Erie–Lincoln, when you started to talk about—and I'm going to submit, Speaker, that there is a connection. When the member started to speak about this legislation and talk about what happened in question period today on democratic renewal—this is all about democratic renewal, or lack thereof, because we well know that what this bill is all about is avoiding any problems with the teachers and their unions during the election date that the government has cherry-picked. Out of everything they had to say about moving forward on a new democratic renewal agenda, all they've done so far—and they still haven't brought forward legislation—is pick a date, October 4, 2007, for the next election. They haven't come forward yet with what they promised, and that is real-time disclosure.

Today, we have a bill that's connected to all of this. Talk about transparency today. This is one of the most transparent bills I've ever seen, because what is so transparent is that the government is bringing forward a bill that's very important to them to make sure that they have peace and stability, no bargaining going on in an election year. A couple of the members from the Liberals even admitted it. So in fact the member was right on when he connected the two.

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): I'm amazed to hear some of the comments from the opposition members with respect to our education agenda, given the incredible lengths to which our education minister has shown leadership on the education file, out there rebuilding trust among our teachers, parents, students, boards, administrators—the list goes on and on. I think when we compare historically what has taken place in the education sector with the past two governments, the comparison is strikingly obvious. We had the NDP government, who ripped up the collective agreements of thousands of teachers. I can say that first-hand, as one of those teachers who had my contract ripped up, thank you very much. We had the Conservative government, whose education minister set out to create a crisis in education. That is certainly not our idea of rebuilding trust in the education sector. We had the private tax credit sucking \$500 million out of the public education system. We had them taking over boards of education like Ottawa, Hamilton and Toronto.

I'm so pleased that there is a breath of fresh air with our government's policies in the education sector and the work that we are doing to rebuild the trust and the positive relationship with our teachers and education workers. Bill 167 puts into place an option for education workers and our boards to agree to longer contracts, four-year contracts. Teachers, parents and students want greater stability in the education system.

Ms. Churley: We have no choice.

Mr. Oraziotti: I hear some of our opposition members. Perhaps they don't want greater stability in the education sector, but we certainly do, and we're proud of our investments: \$1.1 billion of new money into the education system to date; \$280 million leveraging \$4 billion in school infrastructure renewal funding; smaller class sizes; 1,100 new teachers; literacy and numeracy specialty training. Our government is doing a very remarkable job, I believe, in renewing the relationship with our education workers.

Ms. Scott: I rise to comment on the remarks by my colleague the member for Erie–Lincoln and the agenda that the Liberals have.

The Minister of Education, by doing this—this is not a choice, as the member opposite has said. A choice? There is no choice. As he said, the Minister of Education is letting down the teachers, he's letting down the unions, he's letting down the parents.

This is a very short bill but it has been a big controversy. It is not going to bring peace and stability. My colleague from Oak Ridges rose on that point of privilege when we first came back and asked the Speaker to find the Minister of Education in contempt of the Legislature. He did it because the Minister of Education wrote a letter on November 29 of last year to the school boards and the directors instructing them to negotiate four-year contracts with teachers. There wasn't a choice in there; there wasn't the three-year. He said a four-year contract with teachers. On the same day, he wrote to the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation local bargaining unit, asking them, or instructing them, to do the same. This all happened before the minister had the legislative authority to do so. He was instructing them to ignore the legislation that exists on the three-year contracts that was in place when he wrote that letter. Now, the Speaker has ruled that it is not in fact a situation where a contempt of the Legislature took place, but I think it is certainly something that should give all of us legislators pause. He also made it known how much money he thinks should be spent on teachers' contracts. I think that's taking flexibility away from the school boards and the unions. It is not treating them with respect at all.

So we will see what happens with this bill. I'm happy to see that the Chair of Management Board is reading the Rae report over there, and I'm hoping he is planning to transfer some money, as was promised and as the education Premier said. We haven't quite got his attention yet, but we are trying, so I hope that he does read the Rae review and put the money into post-secondary education that was promised.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, there were people who objected to the member for Erie–Lincoln wandering from the topic. I'm happy he did, because I have a chance now to speak

about some of the things he spoke about when he was in there.

What I can't figure out is this: His new leader—I know he didn't vote for him; he fought hard against John Tory. He fought very hard against him. I think he was in Mr. Flaherty's camp at that time. Sorry to use their names, but they were running for office. John Tory always likes to portray himself as an environmentalist, and I heard the member mention the word "greenbelt," so this opened it right up. But I remember he was an environmentalist, and he would go to the Pollution Probe dinners and be nice to the environmentalists around Toronto, particularly. And when he had a chance to make a choice in Ontario for a greenbelt, something that's for the future of this province, he decided he would get sidetracked by the right-wing rump of the Conservative Party. I'm not going to mention any names, but the right-wing rump has obviously taken over. That's not you, Mr. Speaker.

1640

So John Tory, who wants to portray himself as a moderate to the people, whether it is to the teachers out there or whether it is to the people who believe in protecting the environment—he just doesn't do it, because he gets sidetracked constantly. I know the member for Kitchener–Waterloo probably tries to get some moderate words in his ear, and he doesn't seem to listen to her, unfortunately. He's trapped by the right-wing caucus that he's stuck with at the present time. That's most unfortunate. I don't know who is influencing him to be against this greenbelt legislation, based largely, if I look at it, on the old official plans that came out of the Conservative government back in 1979 and 1980. But John Tory, who wants to be the moderate, has been hijacked by the extreme right wing of the Conservative Party.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr. Hudak: Thank you to all my colleagues. The member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock did talk to the member for Sault Ste. Marie's point that they have a choice in contracts. Well, sure, you have a choice of a four-year contract or two two-year contracts that add up to four years, and if you make the wrong choice, the minister, under the bill, can deem it into a four-year contract. So please don't tell me about choice in this bill—quite the opposite.

My colleague from St. Catharines, I know, would want to back a greenbelt that would be successful for generations to come. I know my colleague was a strong supporter of the Progressive Conservative government under Mike Harris that brought in Ontario's Living Legacy, the biggest expansion of parks and protected areas in the history of the province. I would expect, if I looked at the voting record, that the member from St. Catharines supported the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, which was recognized by the Environmental Commissioner as a leading piece of legislation that should be modelled. I know my colleague as well is a big champion of the Niagara Escarpment Protection Act, which was also done, not in my time, but under a

Progressive Conservative government. I think Dalton McGuinty really has green envy. He put out his greenbelt greenbotch—or maybe even, with all these allegations of donations, greenbought—because he wanted to try to measure up to our record.

But I'll tell you, when Progressive Conservatives do preservation initiatives, we do them right. We make sure it's based on real environmental science and a plan to make sure it's successful so it lasts the tests of time, as the Oak Ridges conservation act will, the Niagara Escarpment plan has and the Living Legacy will. I do fear—and the OPPI is on my side, the professional planners, who say that the greenbelt as a land use policy alone will not be successful. I argue it will unravel unless you have a real support plan for farmers in the greenbelt, unless it's based truly on science.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I think if David Suzuki actually looked at the science, he'd be the first, because nobody has seen the science behind the greenbelt legislation.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to give the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, March 7, in the afternoon, we will be debating Bill 136. In the evening, we'll be debating Bill 167.

On Tuesday, March 8, in the afternoon, Bill 136; in the evening, the interim supply bill.

On Wednesday, March 9, in the afternoon, Bill 158.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

(continued)

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION

(suite)

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The Chair recognizes the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Ms. Churley: I got nervous for a minute. I was counting the members of the opposition in here right now and thinking—oh, you stood up, Mr. Speaker. When you stand up, I'm supposed to sit down.

I was frightened when the minister got up, because I was counting opposition and thinking, "Oh, my heavens"—I shouldn't tell them, should I?—"somebody get in here. We haven't got five people to stand up here."

Hon. Mr. Bradley: That's Thursday afternoon for you.

Ms. Churley: That's Thursday afternoon for you; that's right. And I have a very important event to go to in my riding, which I think Minister Smitherman is at: the Brickworks. The Brickworks is something that, when the NDP was in government, we funded despite the recession. We funded the first stage of that. Gary Malkowski, who was our member from East York at the time, did a

tremendous job in bringing that forward. I'm looking forward to joining Minister Smitherman and Michael Prue and others there as soon as I finish my speech here today, but I did want to have this opportunity.

I spoke earlier in the two-minute response. The guy who raised the point of order is in the chair now so I don't have to—well, maybe I do have to worry. He's in the chair. He can stand up any time. But you know I will stay on topic, as the member for St. Catharines says. I always stay on topic.

I'm going to make the connection I made earlier, because there is a connection to what we were talking about in question period today. This is really part of democratic renewal, in that this bill is not really about education or fixing the problems in education, for which the government has no plans whatsoever. So what are we doing here today? We're dealing with a bill that is actually making sure that the problems around negotiations and contracts don't happen in the year of the election, which has been picked—no legislation yet. I suppose there could be a crisis that could prevent that from happening if times are particularly tough.

What this is all about is that the government has cherry-picked, out of its so-called democratic renewal agenda, an election date without any of the other pieces brought forward yet. We still haven't seen anything around the committee the minister responsible set up, but they've picked a date. Then they started looking at that date and realized, "Oh, some problems could happen on that date in 2007. We've got teachers' contracts coming up. We all know how divisive and difficult those can be, and we don't want that happening in an election year. So we're going to have to fix that." That is exactly what this bill is all about. Because the Liberals have no plan to fix the problems in education, here we are trying to hide the problems by delaying negotiations until after the next election.

It is not just us saying this. Two of my favourite members from the Liberal Party—I've had an opportunity to work with both of them, and in particular the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex. She is a really wonderful, friendly, honest human being and I quite enjoy working with her. She had to carry the greenbelt bill for the minister through the committee hearings. She was very sympathetic to many of my amendments. I'm coming back to that—

Interjection.

Ms. Churley: Well, everybody seems to be talking about the greenbelt. She did a great job and she was sympathetic to my amendments, but unfortunately orders came down from on high, from the minister's office, and she wasn't able to support them. She stood up today and admitted, along with the member from Markham, that this is about an election year. They came right out and said it. At least they are honest about it, saying that, honestly, in their view, "It's a good thing because we want to have peace and stability in the election year." They said it. So now that you have members from your own caucus admitting it, why not just admit it? It's so

transparent that it's funny. I think it's the most transparent bill we've ever seen in this place in terms of what you're trying to achieve.

There is all kinds of important legislation that we're waiting to have introduced in this House, waiting to debate. I bring it back to the question we were asking today and I've asked many times in this Legislature, and that is, where is the government bill on real-time disclosure of political donations? Instead of debating that today, we're standing here debating a bill that simply allows the government to get itself out of difficult contract negotiations in an election year.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Like the social contract, Marilyn?

Ms. Churley: If you want to talk about the social contract, that certainly wasn't buying us out of trouble, like this bill is. We walked deeply right in the middle of it, didn't we? You guys are just trying to walk away from trouble. Maybe it's smart. I'm not saying it's not smart politically to do, but I remember what Liberals said when they were the official opposition and the Tories were across there doing similar things. Let's see. What was it that Gerard Kennedy said, who was then the critic for education? He slammed the Tories for doing the same thing: for trying to put off any potential teachers' strike until after the election.

1650

Here's what he said in a debate in 2001: "Today, they'll say, 'We demand there be a three-year contract. We demand that that happen so there are no untoward activities around the time of the next election.'" That's what Gerard Kennedy said then. But of course this is now.

Let's see what else Gerard Kennedy, the education minister, who was then the critic, said back then. Before the election, he said that dictating the length of contracts was heavy-handed. Again I quote Gerard Kennedy, education minister, when he was in opposition: "You think you're going to fix problems in education, many of them of your own making, by ordering people around. You're going to boss them, you're going to make them do things and, in this case, you're going to get three-year contracts just because you say so." That's what Gerard Kennedy, the education minister, who was then the critic, said then. But of course this is now.

As has been mentioned, a member from the Conservatives has already filed a complaint with the Speaker because Mr. Kennedy, the education minister, had been telling boards and teachers to negotiate two- and four-year deals even before it became law. Talk about bossing the teachers around to their own advantage. The bargaining has now been thrown into chaos because boards and teachers don't know whether to follow the current law or Kennedy's bill.

What we should be debating here today are the chaos and the problems in the schools. When the Liberals were in opposition, talk about beating up on the Conservatives at the time. I see Elizabeth Witmer is in the House. Weren't you the education minister? She was the education minister for a while and took the brunt of the vicious

attacks coming from the then critic for education. Sometimes he would make it up. It was incredible. He would make up numbers and facts. I remember; it was just incredible.

I am not going to let Ms. Witmer and the Tories off the hook. I think they made a terrible mess of the education system in this province. But the Liberals aren't doing, as they promised, any better. We're starting to have chaos in the system as we speak. We're going to have a work-to-rule here in Toronto, starting next week.

When the Tories were in power, I'm sure Cathy Dandy from the Toronto Parent Network was a thorn in their side. Now she's a thorn in the Liberals' side, because she is there for the kids and for our schools. She doesn't care who is in government, who her friends are, she's got a job to do, and that is to work with the parents and the teachers to make sure that our schools are in the best of shape. I heard Cathy Dandy on the radio this morning, talking about the fact that the Liberals aren't doing what they said they were going to do and fulfilling their obligations and promises from the Rozanski report, and that the schools are still very underfunded. The Toronto Parent Network and others are demanding that the government keep their promise, put their money where their mouth is and help pay back some of the money that—

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Oh, money, money.

Ms. Churley: The member for St. Catharines says, "Oh, money, money." Man, when they were in government—I've got to tell you, how the world turns when an opposition party goes on the other side.

Let me tell you about some of the problems, because they haven't fulfilled their promises to fully refund the money that the Tories took out on the Rozanski benchmarks that are still underfunded. In their 2004 tracking report, People for Education—that's Annie Kidder and many others; again, a thorn in the side of any government in power that is letting the kids down, our schools down and the teachers down—notes that school board requirements for salaries and benefits are 10% higher than the funding formula presently provides. Again, when they were in opposition they were screaming at the government then, telling them that the funding formula was flawed and they needed to fix it. Now that they have the opportunity to do that, they are not doing it; instead, what we have is this bill before us today to try to cover up these problems, to try to make sure there isn't chaos during an election year.

In his letter, the Minister of Education claims that future increases will take the real cost of paying teachers into account, but he makes absolutely no commitment on the current underfunding of the base. The \$10 million that the minister set aside is a fraction of the money recommended by the Rosanski report on education funding.

As we all know, a very respected economist, Hugh Mackenzie, did a lot of hard work and research and updated the Rosanski benchmarks. These are the conclusions he came to: that areas are still very underfunded—

in particular, foundation teacher salaries, \$396.1 million underfunded; foundation non-teacher salaries, \$100.6 million underfunded; foundation benefits, \$196.8 million underfunded; and salaries and benefits underfunding totals \$693.5 million.

We recently had a report about underfunding of small schools. Despite Liberal promises to save small schools, they keep closing. On January 26—I was at a press conference recently about this—the Lakehead District School Board in Thunder Bay announced plans to close 14 schools in the next two years.

The Minister of Education knows full well, from when he was in opposition, that the funding formula—and he said it over and over again—has to change to protect small schools. In fact, on January 27, the education minister promised that he would reveal a plan to save small schools "next week" that would include "substantial changes" to the funding formula. Now, nearly a month later, Kennedy—I should say, "the Minister of Education"—and the Premier revealed a plan that had—guess what?—no changes to the funding formula and, in fact, once again was a reannouncement of a capital funding scheme introduced last May. Not a single penny of that money has flowed to school boards since it was first announced.

So members from the backbench, as they've been doing today, can get up and brag about all the great things the present government has done, but in fact, when you look at the promises that were made and what has really happened, you will see that the Liberals have fulfilled very little of substance in terms of the promises they made and what we know our schools need in order to be viable again.

They also promised to reinvest in transportation, but no, we're not talking about that today. We're not talking about fixing the funding formula; we're not talking about the chaos that's already starting in our schools; we're not talking about the broken promise on reinvesting in transportation. We all know that since 1997, since the funding formula came in place, it was not sufficiently funded. The Liberals have proposed changes in a document called Equitable Allocation Through a New Funding Model for Student Transportation in Ontario, a fancy title, but we all know—we've spoken about this—that we should be debating these things today. The result is not equitable. Thirty-one school boards will have an allocation for 2005-06 that is less than the amount—

Interjection: That's on topic?

Ms. Churley: We're talking about education; yes, we are. But I could give you some education on what you—
Interjection.

Ms. Churley: Well, that means you're not listening, are you? You should be listening, because you're not properly funding the education system, and that's what I'm talking about now.

The member from Sault Ste. Marie, Mr. Speaker, is really—he has no sense of humour. He's always whining and complaining and standing up and mouthing the government lines. But he's always surly and unpleasant.

Anyway, I would say to him that as a result, more than 30 boards of education will lose funds for buses, beginning in 2005-06.

1700

I've got a couple of minutes left, and I just want to talk about the fact that the boards simply will not have the money to cover the cost of salaries. That's what we should be talking about today. This government is starting to micromanage, making them make detailed reports. The Minister of Education is again hoping to shift the blame away—exactly what the Tories did; you did—from the Liberal government and on to school boards.

Interjection.

Ms. Churley: You were upfront about it, put it that way. The Tories were upfront about it. The Liberals, as always, are trying to have it both ways.

Interjection.

Ms. Churley: I've already mentioned that they admitted what's going on here today. But before the election, the Liberals claimed this sort of micromanagement was bad. They said, "The Harris-Eves government tries to run 5,000 schools from Queen's Park.... We will ensure that" school boards "have the resources and the flexibility in spending those resources to respond to local needs." That was in the Liberal plan for education.

Now, I'm very disappointed to say that what we have here today is a situation where the Liberals are engaged in the same tactics as the Conservatives, creating time-consuming accountability measures that do little for students but shift political blame away from the government.

I want to say as well that I was concerned to hear the member for Etobicoke Centre and her analysis in this House of teachers and teachers' unions.

Mr. Oraziotti: I thought it was excellent.

Ms. Churley: The member for Sault Ste. Marie thought it was excellent, so he supports union bashing, because that's what the member for Etobicoke Centre was saying and now we know that the member for Sault Ste. Marie supports her. This is getting better every minute.

Who else? Liberals, put up your hands. Do you support the member for Etobicoke Centre in her views on unions? Put up your hands. We have one more.

Mr. Oraziotti: She wasn't union bashing.

Ms. Churley: She certainly was. She was talking in very negative terms about teachers and the unions and certainly left the impression that they didn't care about the students, that they were just out for the union and out to get the very best deal they could for teachers at the expense of kids. That's what she was saying.

Now, after the member for Beaches—East York, my colleague, got up and I think very politely—he's more polite than I am; I admit that. I don't know how he does it sometimes, though. But he stood up—

Mrs. Cansfield: He used to be the mayor.

Ms. Churley: Oh, yes, he's used to being the mayor—and said very politely that the teachers he knows—and I

would say the same thing. Of course, we all want to do the very best in our own personal lives, but I've never seen in any profession more dedicated people than teachers, who see the kids every day in the classroom and are aware of the problems that they bring to the classroom in terms of their home lives, their abilities, their disabilities, their problems. What they need to get ahead in life is what they're concerned about. For a number of years, they've had a very stressful and difficult time doing that. There's no other profession as dedicated as teachers. I can't think of any.

I think it was really unfortunate today that the member for Etobicoke Centre, who should know better, as a former school trustee, said such negative things like that about the teachers and their unions in this province.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes for questions and comments the member from Mississauga East.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I am so excited with the McGuinty government and Minister Kennedy and what I'm feeling in the schools. We have a climate of partnership, one that we've never seen before, one of mutual respect and fairness. We see development with teachers in the schools.

Over the last few months, I've had a chance to tour a number of schools. I was in one last week, at Canadian Martyrs. I first met with the principal and the administration. They said they have never felt such a great sense of passion for learning, a climate of respect, one where teachers feel there is a government behind them. My excitement is that we are going to produce some of the greatest Ontarians that we've ever seen because of what we are doing today. We should all be very proud of that.

There is a sense of stability within the schools. I got a chance to tour many of the classrooms, and all I hear from the teachers is, "We are feeling respected. We are feeling proud about our profession. We know that you're listening and working with us to make schools a better place, a community place for better learning." They really have not seen this type of dialogue with a government in, well, let's just say in at least eight or nine years, because we know that the previous government was very antagonistic with the teachers and with the school boards. We're making sure there is a partnership where we all will benefit, and especially our kids and our youth will benefit, for the future of Ontario.

Mr. Dunlop: I'm pleased to make a few comments on the member from Toronto—Danforth's speech. I guess what I want to start out by saying, as we discuss Bill 167, is that, very simply, the bill means only one thing: The government did not want contracts expiring in the year 2007, because they had made the previous commitment to have a provincial election in October of that year, and they didn't need the contracts expiring on August 30. They didn't need any labour disruptions or any problems. We already know that there are a number of collective bargaining units around the province that have voted for a strike action. We know that there is a work-to-rule campaign around the province as well; I believe it's right

here in one of the Metro boards. And with that, we know that the government is already feeling some pressure for some of the promises they made, and they probably won't be able to deliver. I think that's the key thing we have to put across. I know that the government has got another message, as we heard previously, but it's all about that.

There was no other reason for this legislation. There is peace and stability in the system; we don't need to have a wasted bylaw like this. It's something like bring-your-own-wine. That was a huge failure. I think there are only a dozen restaurants in the province that have opened—what have we got, thousands of restaurants, and only a dozen have decided to go with this idiotic bill? We know that the pit bull ban is a failure, and that will come back to haunt the government. We are debating this bill here today on a Thursday afternoon, when I think we should be out trying to do some legislation that would help our rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, thanks again for this opportunity to make a few comments on Ms. Churley's bill, Bill 167.

Mr. Prue: Again, it is always a pleasure to comment on my colleagues here in the Legislature and on their speeches. I listened intently from my office on the television. I think that most of the members in fact look much better on television. You all have very good television personas and personalities. I watched my colleague from Toronto–Danforth as she outlined some of the problems that she saw with this bill.

Ms. Churley: Did I look good?

Mr. Prue: Yes, you looked very good. As you say, you looked “hot.” You're one of those “hot” television personalities.

She looked very good, and she talked about what the real problems are. In fact, this bill is about the problems that the government is experiencing, the problems that they are experiencing and what they anticipate experiencing in the leadup to the next election. These are not difficulties that I think the minister is trying to make for himself. It is not how the minister reacts with the unions and with the teachers and the school boards, because to many of them who remember the eight previous years prior to him being the minister, this is certainly a much better atmosphere for them, and they will say so. I am not surprised when the member opposite said that he went to a school and they thought it was a little bit better.

But I think the problem is going to come home to roost, because people are expecting so much more. In Hansard, June 18, 2001, then critic for education Gerard Kennedy chided the government of the day, which was trying to institute a three-year policy. He said, “Today, they'll say, ‘We demand there be a three-year contract. We demand that that happen so there are no untoward activities around the time of the next election.’” We heard today that what is proposed in this bill is precisely the same thing that you once chided the other government for. You are afraid of the teachers, you are afraid of the unions and you are afraid of the turmoil that is going to happen in October 2007.

1710

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I wanted to stand up to remind my friend from the NDP that not too long ago, under the Premier of Saskatchewan, Mr. Blakeney, they imposed a bill that did not allow nurses to go on strike.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Just before an election.

Mr. Racco: Now they are complaining: “Can you believe it? Just before an election.” What we're trying to say is let's have some peace and stability in the Liberal movement. Let's make a deal so that teachers will be able to teach our kids.

As you will remember, Mr. Speaker, under your government's leadership, there were millions of hours lost in education because of strikes. Many parents, especially new immigrants, could not go to work because they had to stay home to take care of their kids. Thousands and thousands of hours were lost in wages, only because there were strikes. What Bill 167 is going to do is bring peace and stability in that profession.

There is no need for people like you and me, for people who live in Thornhill and Concord, to lose days of work because some individuals go on strike. There is no reason for our kids not to have a proper education because some adults cannot make a compromise. Bill 167 will in fact minimize, if not eliminate, that possibility.

We will provide stability to the Liberal movement, contrary to the NDP government of Saskatchewan which in fact outlawed the nurses from going on strike.

This is a wise bill. It's a bill that everybody should support, because it's in the best interest of the people of Ontario. Most importantly, it's in the best interest of kids—your kids and my kids. Their education is the most important thing we can do and we should do everything we can to make sure that it's the best one.

Ms. Churley: I want to respond to the member for Simcoe North, the member for Beaches–East York and the member for Thornhill, and to thank them all for their contributions, all of which were very interesting. Of particular interest were the comments from the member for Thornhill.

I guess I could say that what this bill is all about is the best interest of the government. It's not for the kids, not for the teachers, not for the schools, not for the parents; it's in the interest of the government, because they're trying to guarantee that there will be no strikes and no instability in the year 2007, when we're going to have an election.

Two of the Liberal members—it's too late now, the horse is out of the barn—have already admitted that, yes, in fact that's what this bill is attempting to do, to buy peace and stability or force peace and stability in the year 2007, during an election year.

But this is actually a really serious issue. The fact that we're not here debating the problems in the system, to avoid the very thing the government members are talking about, and that is, strikes in the future—we have work-to-rule happening in this city, in my riding, in the riding of Trinity–Spadina and in the riding of Beaches–East York,

and it's because of the non-action of this Liberal government that we're having this happen.

Talk about peace and stability—you have not invested. You are not listening. You get up and brag. You have these wonderful members from the education system who are advising you. They are either giving you bad advice or you're not listening to them. You are not keeping your promises, you're not funding our schools properly, and as a result we are having more strife and more—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Further debate? The Chair recognizes the member from Mississauga West.

Mr. Delaney: Thank you, Speaker. William Shakespeare penned a play—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Mississauga.

Mr. Delaney: Thank you again, Speaker. William Shakespeare penned a play about today's debate, and it's called *Much Ado About Nothing*. In fact, the member for Perth–Middlesex, with whom I'll be sharing my time this afternoon, would be glad to inform members whether or not this play can be seen in the 2005 Stratford Festival, which is truly one of the great theatrical experiences, not merely in Ontario but all the way across Canada.

Bill 167 is a brief bill. It's barely more than a single page. The Minister of Education's explanation of the bill on December 16, 2004, was a mercifully brief 89 words. The operative words in the minister's explanation were, and I quote him exactly, "It is technical in nature." The essence of Bill 167 is to require collective agreements between teachers and school boards that will be either two years or four years in duration.

In 1997 the Harris government in Ontario made a decision to restrict the scope of collective bargaining by imposing a one-size-fits-all contract duration of three years in its Bill 160. History will record that once the Tory Bill 160 was implemented, the number of days lost to labour disputes jumped dramatically. We hope to continue to work with our colleagues in education in an atmosphere that has changed dramatically since the election of this government.

What Bill 167 does is restore flexibility to collective bargaining between the federations that represent Ontario's teachers and the school boards that employ them. Bill 167 gives the parties the option of signing collective agreements that may be either two years or four years in duration, with an encouragement for four-year contracts. The duration of contracts cannot be changed with a stroke of a regulatory pen, and hence the need for Bill 167, which as previously stated is technical in nature.

Speaking to the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, Education Minister Gerard Kennedy said, "The best way for a government to ensure peace and stability in Ontario schools is to stop meddling in collective bargaining, and allow local teachers and trustees to address local issues with as much versatility as possible." It's hard to summarize the benefits of Bill 167 in a more elegant way than that.

Donna Marie Kennedy, president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, concurs. Her statement of February 22 on Bill 167 said the effect of Bill 167 would be, and I use her words, "to permit local negotiators to craft innovative answers to local learning and working conditions that are raised during negotiations, including terms of various lengths."

Now some of my colleagues across the aisle seem to feel that Bill 167 has something to do with the date of October 4, 2007, which is the date of the next election. I remind members opposite that any two-year contract signed in 2005 will come due in 2007.

This government respects teachers and the challenges they face every day in the classroom. So I'll accept the challenge put forth earlier this afternoon by my colleague from Timmins–James Bay and be bold. The government feels that if a board and its teachers sign a two-year agreement in 2005 that expires in 2007, which is an election year, then we'll respect that.

1720

Two- or four-year contracts allow for an environment conducive to fair collective bargaining. That always makes for a strong publicly funded education system. Neither side in a collective bargaining process would relish finishing one arduous collective agreement only to begin yet another within days or weeks or months. All parties need a framework for constructive, long-term planning and to focus on student achievement rather than negotiation. So Bill 167 is really about stability for students and parents alike, and the framework for a secure negotiation climate for both federations and boards.

The Minister of Education, as is his tendency, has listened his way to a sensible and pragmatic solution to contract terms. He consulted widely, perhaps exhaustively, with teachers, parents and administrators. As a result, Bill 167 is a tight, focused, workable solution to deliver the progress that students need and everyone in Ontario deserves.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I'm proud to follow my friend and colleague the member for Mississauga West. I appreciate the reference from Shakespeare, being of course the member representing the fine city of Stratford and the Stratford Festival. It was quite appropriate. I must say to all members that you will be getting something next week from me, courtesy of the Stratford Festival, extending an invitation to all members to come and visit our fine city and our wonderful institution. I know members look for that every year, and 2005 is going to be a great season. It opens at the end of April and runs to the first week of November.

But speaking of course, as I would want to, on Bill 167, I can't resist mentioning my good friend the member from Beaches–East York and his comment about how he thought that, yes, of course the unions would all think the current situation is better than the eight years of the previous government. But I think there is a slight amnesia there. I think if we go beyond eight years and we

look at those dark days of the social contract that were part of the legacy of the party to which you now have—

Interjection.

Mr. Wilkinson: Perhaps the member for Beaches—East York has amnesia, because I think there are a lot of people in education, people I know, who remember that. That's a legacy we have to deal with.

I would also want to commend the Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy. I had an opportunity to be with him in my own riding at an event where I believe there were something like 500 teachers, trustees and school board administrators, and he gave a masterful performance. To have a minister who understands his or her file—that is a challenge for any person who ends up being a minister of the crown in this province. But his performance that day, his understanding of the nuances of that file, his grasp, the fact that he was able to answer questions from the floor—I distinctly remember a teacher, I think it was, who got up and said they just could not believe that there was a Minister of Education willing to come and speak to them and answer their questions without a note, who knew exactly what his vision and the vision of our government is for the future of education in this province, and how critical that is, we think, to the future success of Ontario. I agree with the member from Mississauga East about how our goal is to create the next great generation of Ontarians.

There is much comment in regard to this bill, Bill 167: a very simple bill, but I think an important bill. I recall the words of Martin Luther. I say this with trepidation, as a Catholic, but Martin Luther got a number of things right, and this is one of the things that I thought he was right about, because this is all about peace and stability: "Peace is more important than all justice; and was not made for the sake of justice, but justice for the sake of peace."

We cannot have children in our classrooms learning if there is not peace and justice, if there is not peace and stability. It is up to us as the adults, as the people who are in charge of determining rates of taxation and distributing money across the province, deciding how money is spent—we hope, of course, wisely, but most importantly, invested in our young people, in education. That is our job. I think we have a responsibility to start off our mandate with the stated goal of having peace and stability in education, to turn the page from the situation that we inherited where there was not peace and stability, and I would say there was not justice either. That is what has led to our government being so focused on this.

So I want to commend the Minister of Education for this bill. I can assure you that if there were problems with this bill, the people in the education sector—the teachers, the trustees, the administrators, the parents—would be letting us know about it. But I have never received a single piece of correspondence from anybody in the education sector telling me that we're somehow wrong-headed about this. I think we're on the right course, and I look forward to this bill receiving the support of all

members of the House, for surely we are for peace, we are for justice and stability in our education system.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: It's a pleasure to comment on the remarks of the members for Mississauga West and Perth—Middlesex. I think both make the salient point that the purpose of this bill is to bring peace and stability to our school system. I have a little bit of experience. I was first elected to the North York Board of Education in the Metropolitan Toronto School Board back in the early 1990s, and I can tell you that for about the past dozen years it has been anything but that. I recall when the government of the day, the Rae government, introduced the odious social contract, which threw the entire education system into considerable turmoil.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I hear the former member for Kitchener—Waterloo, the former chair of the board in Waterloo—

Interjection: She's still the member.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: She's still the member, and thank God for that.

That was a time of incredible instability in the school system. I remember how the numbers of teachers were reduced by the hundreds. I remember how young teachers had their grids frozen and in fact were quite seriously disadvantaged. I remember how collective bargaining was suspended for a three-year period of time.

Then, of course, we had the next government come in. The former member from Mississauga West was the education minister, with the specific intent to create a crisis in education. In fact, that's exactly what happened.

So our government has come in, and we have in fact brought that peace and stability. We've increased education funding. We have overturned many of the odious policies of the previous government. We have not only brought a new-found respect to the teachers, but we've restored democracy in boards like the Toronto District School Board, previously under supervision. I commend the Minister of Education for these very progressive moves.

Mr. Hudak: Definitely this discussion has degenerated from a very interesting and compelling question period to a mutual love-in here among Liberal members. I'm getting caught in the crossfire with all this mutual back-patting.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Well, I'm not accustomed to the love.

Let me add another side of the story. I guess we'll see if all these predictions of peace and prosperity and higher quality and such come true. I'm going to be a bit skeptical, because I have not seen a plan to improve the quality in the classroom. In fact, I've seen the opposite. Certainly, while we hear the member's comments about everything being wine and roses in the education sector, I don't think that's actually meeting with the facts in terms of the number of boards now that are in strike positions, the number of work-to-rule campaigns that are probably soon to erupt in the province, including here in the largest

city in Canada, beginning Monday with the teachers as well as the support staff going into a work-to-rule campaign.

It will be interesting to see how the government will try to find an answer to their significant commitments to spending on one hand, and their inability to live up to their commitments on the other hand. The Bob Rae report—I know the Management Board chair was looking at it—is calling for an additional—what?—\$2.5 billion or \$3 billion in investment. Certainly the commitment under this bill in the plan works out to some \$3.5 billion plus. We are a little suspicious about all the smoke and mirrors on the books. It'll be interesting to see if they actually back up their promises. I think you'll see them backpedalling in the upcoming budget.

1730

Mr. Prue: It is always a pleasure in this House to stand up and comment, especially with such erudite members quoting Shakespeare first and then Martin Luther. I have to tell you, it has brought some real class to the debate. I would be amiss if I didn't quote one of my heroes, and that is Socrates, because I think Socrates said it best in one simple line, when listening to the stuff that we've had to listen to here today. Socrates said, "I would gladly be persuaded by you, sirs, but not against my better judgment."

So I've listened—

Mr. Wilkinson: Hemlock for you.

Mr. Prue: OK, hemlock for me. I've just been told I must have hemlock.

In any event, what has been said is that this is all in the interests of peace, this is all in the interests of the teachers and all in the interests of the education system. If that were the case, then I would think this bill would not say two or four years, because there's something missing in the middle; there's three years. What if it said, "Two, three or four years; you can help to determine what you want and perhaps we can work together for peace"? That isn't what's being said. What's being said is two or four, and distinctly not three.

With the greatest of respect to the members, it is quite clear why you don't want three. You have a very honest and courageous member in Mrs. Van Bommel. She has said, and I have to repeat it again, that it is to buy peace in an election year. That's what it is. You might as well say what it is. Don't try to persuade me and the others against our better judgment. Tell it honestly and truthfully for what it is: you don't want to have this hanging over your heads in 2007. If you do want to do something else, simply amend the bill. Say two, three or four, see where the teachers want to go with it, see where the schools and the school boards want to go, and then you'll know.

Mr. Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I guess sometimes we forget that what we do here is not just for us. We're doing it for students, we're doing it for parents, we're doing it for grandparents. I can recall, over the years, a couple of circumstances when there were walkouts by teachers and the impact it had on people's

daily lives, as you've seen. It totally disrupts people. They have to take extraordinary steps to get their children to child care, to babysitting. It really upsets families and children. It's something the minister is essentially very sensitive to. So therefore he's trying to do his best.

Sure, you can look at imperfections in this bill, but it's an attempt, in essence, to bring some kind of positive relationship in the school system, which is massive, which has boards from Wawa to Windsor to Cornwall to Moose Factory. That's what this bill is trying to do. It's trying to do what I think most parents, teachers, students and grandparents want. They don't want their schools disrupted, if at all possible. That's what this has done in good faith, working with teachers, working with school boards, trying to make the system work better so that we won't get parents and the community angry with public education, angry with teachers. We're trying to find solutions, and this is what this bill is about.

I think the minister should be commended for working in this co-operative way to keep in mind the public out there, who don't want schools closed down.

The Acting Speaker: In response, the Chair recognizes the member for Mississauga West.

Mr. Delaney: I'd like to acknowledge the comments of my colleagues the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, the member for Erie-Lincoln, the member for Beaches-East York and the member for Eglinton-Lawrence.

If I can depart for one moment, I'd like to thank the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal for realizing how important it is for all of the residents of Mississauga to get that third track on the Milton GO line, and also for his very helpful comments on Bill 167.

To the member for Erie-Lincoln, I note that he acknowledged that Bill 167 is a part in the mosaic of the plan to improve public education, and I join him in looking forward to having the government of Ontario continue to implement the Rae report.

To the member for Beaches-East York, always eloquent, I congratulate him on Hansard for his post as the new Deputy Chair.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: He's elegant.

Mr. Delaney: Elegant and eloquent.

It is, indeed, not often that the words of Socrates, Martin Luther and William Shakespeare are brought to bear in a single legislative debate. I sincerely hope—and I'm sure I express the hope of all members—that this is a trend that will continue in the future.

To my colleague from Eglinton-Lawrence, he summed this up eloquently. He recognized that Bill 167 is not about politicians, it's about families, parents, students of all ages, as well as teachers and boards. My colleague from Eglinton-Lawrence knows that this restores a positive relationship to the interaction between boards and the federations, and that the bill tries to do what everyone wants it to do: deliver an environment of peace, stability and fairness.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I'm pleased to join second reading debate of Bill 167, the education bill that we're discussing this evening. It's a rather interesting debate, because when I look around the House here, there are many individuals who are now MPPs and cabinet ministers who, in their former life, were either teachers or trustees on school boards. So it's been interesting to listen to their comments as well.

I have some difficulty with the stated intent of this bill. The minister, when he introduced it, said he'd like to see peace and stability and provide for collective agreements of up to four years, or they could be two. I guess if we're really looking for peace and stability, he could have added that there should be two-, three-, and four-year agreements possible.

I would agree with those who have already spoken and said the only intention of this bill is to ensure that during election year 2007 this government doesn't find itself at war with the teachers, because despite the comments that were made by the minister for public infrastructure, if I recall my time as a teacher and a trustee, I can, I think, remember very well that there were strikes and walkouts during the time of the Liberal government, the NDP government and the Conservative government.

The truth is, regardless of the party in power, there has always been labour strife between governments and teachers at some time. So I think we have to be absolutely honest. By not having the opportunity for a three-year collective agreement, this government is trying to ensure that in 2007, when it plans to have the election on October 4, there will not be war with the teacher unions in the province of Ontario.

I heard one of the members in the Liberal caucus say that they wanted to work co-operatively with teachers. Well, you know, if that was the case, the Minister of Education would not have taken the actions that he did, because in doing so, we have the OSSTF president Rhonda Kimberley-Young saying, "Yes, we want to have a positive relationship, but what this minister has done is gone around the union leadership," and she says this does not lend itself to peace and stability.

Now, what did the minister do? This is what OSSTF was so upset about. Again, it doesn't speak to wanting to work in co-operation with unions. What the Minister of Education did was unveil funding for teachers' pay increases over the next four years, and he offered them incentives to sign four-year deals. Well, you know, folks, that's not working in co-operation with teachers and teacher unions in the province of Ontario. Furthermore, the minister should recognize that it's not up to the provincial government to negotiate with teachers in this province. If they want to take away the role of the school boards in the province, then they're going to have to change legislation to do so.

1740

Of course, when he made that offer and unveiled the funding, he actually pledged to give them 2% this year and next year, and then he would give them 2.5% and 3%. I think we gave teachers 3% in the last collective

agreement we had, so this is actually less than we had provided. However, that deal the minister proposed, which was totally inappropriate for a Minister of Education to make, that type of announcement, that type of offer when collective bargaining should be taking place at the local level, certainly has got him into some sort of trouble, because again I quote OSSTF President Rhonda Kimberley Young, "We don't expect any Minister of Education"—she's referring, in this case, to Liberal Minister of Education Kennedy—"to stand up and dictate the percentage increases teachers will get over the next four years. That is micromanaging the system."

Despite what the Liberal government says about wanting to have peace and stability and harmonious relationships with the education community in Ontario, their actions certainly suggest otherwise. It does appear that they're trying to micromanage the system. They're trying to ensure that in 2007 there will be no war between this government and teachers in the province. They're trying to ensure that they do everything possible to make sure that doesn't happen.

I think the government has been less than honest in their introduction of this bill. The Minister of Education has acted very inappropriately to have unveiled funding for teacher increases before he even introduced this legislation. In fact, our critic for education, MPP Frank Klees from Oak Ridges, actually asked Speaker Alvin Curling to find Minister Kennedy in contempt for first notifying teachers of his intentions before the Legislature found out. Mr. Klees said at that time, "Every member in this place should reserve the right, first, to see the legislation, second, to have an opportunity to debate it,"—which is what we're doing right now—"and third, certainly to have an opportunity to vote on it before the minister of the crown issues his directives to bargaining units across this province, to boards of education and to directors of education."

I would agree. This is totally inappropriate. As a chair of a school board and a trustee for 10 years, I would tell you that school boards and teachers do not respond well to this type of directive. It was totally inappropriate. Again, it shows that this government is trying to micromanage the system and also centralize control. As I say, if that's what the government wants to do, then they need to pass legislation and set up provincial bargaining, and not leave the problem up to the local school boards, which, as you know, are finding it pretty hard to make ends meet at the present time.

I guess I also have a lot of problems with the fact that we are debating and even discussing this legislation, which is simply intended to help the Liberals win the 2007 election, and it does nothing more than that. There are so many critical issues in the education sector that should be addressed and we haven't seen this minister bring forward significant pieces of legislation that would actually focus on improving the quality of education for the children in our schools.

We've heard this minister talk about elimination of junk food, and I don't disagree, that that's not important. However, we really should be passing legislation in this House that provides the appropriate level of support for special education. That whole issue of special education, which has been totally mismanaged by this minister, has not yet been resolved. I can tell you that my boards in Waterloo, and particularly the separate school board, are extremely unhappy with the mismanagement of those funds: first giving the funds, then taking the funds back.

This minister doesn't recognize the impact he's having on children. We now see that the Toronto board probably isn't going to have enough money for children in special education and other classes to have some of the teacher assistants that are needed. Those are the issues we should be debating and discussing here, not whether teachers are going to have a two- and four-year agreement to help this government win in 2007.

What about issues like numeracy and literacy? If we don't ensure that all of our students have basic literacy and numeracy skills, we will not be able to ensure that these students are able to move forward into work, into apprenticeships or into post-secondary education. That's where our focus needs to be. We need to be focusing on identifying the problems within the system for our students and putting in place programs that are going to enhance and support and help our young people achieve their full potential. That's what we need to be talking about.

We also need to be making sure that we implement the new transportation model. I have just heard from Tracy Morency in my riding, who had been assured by the minister that they were going to move forward in 2005 with this new transportation model. She now writes to me and says that may not be happening. She said, "Would you please, Mrs. Witmer, get the status? We were committed that this would happen; it appears now it may not happen." These are the issues that the parents and students in this province care about: improving the quality of education, making sure that our students can arrive at school safely and return to their homes safely. It now appears that the whole issue of transportation, which people thought was going to be resolved, might be postponed.

And of course we've got the issue of students who need a little additional help, students who have always dropped out of school. We need to be supporting those young people. We need to make sure that we fully implement the recommendations that Dr. Rozanski brought to our government's attention when I was the Minister of Education, which we had started to implement. We had started to make the funding available. Those are the initiatives that this government needs to be focusing on. These are the programs and the services that are going to help the young people in our midst, and here we are talking about two- and four-year agreements.

The other thing we need to make sure of is that our schools are safe places. We need to continue to take a look at the Safe Schools Act. We need to make sure that

any student or any teacher feels safe in that environment. It's very important that the learning environment be as safe as it can possibly be.

We also need to focus on making sure that our students have appropriate accommodation. So we need to continue to ensure that there is safe space for our students as well.

We need to make sure that we take a look at early education and recognize that our students need to be provided with a quality education. We need to be introducing programs that will give them a head start, because we know that if we introduce programs early in life for children, these children are going to have a better chance of achieving academic success. These students are less likely to have physical problems and are less likely to get into difficulty with the law.

I would encourage this minister and this government to introduce some legislation to make some changes that are actually going to make a difference in the lives of the students in this province. I would just stress that I'm disappointed that we are here debating a bill which the minister purports is to create stability and peace, but which simply is a mechanism to ensure that we don't have strikes in the election year.

1750

I would also say that despite the plan that the minister has brought forward, we are right now seeing labour unrest in the province of Ontario. I've said before that this is not unusual. We've seen it when the Liberals were in office, we've seen it when our government was in office, we've seen it when the NDP were in office and it will happen again, unfortunately, in the future.

The unrest that we see today, which is going to start with the work to rule, is going to have an impact on quality of education for our students, because unfortunately, depending on the work-to-rule situation, some teachers may not be able to complete their report cards. Some teachers may not be able to accompany their students on field trips. We're already hearing about schools that have made plans to cancel trips.

Let's take a look at what Toronto Parent Network spokesperson Cathy Dandy said: "You know, this work to rule is definitely going to have an impact on the kids. It is really sad, and I think parents are going to be very frustrated. The board and the union and the province all have to take some responsibility around this and change it." I would agree.

I would just say to you that the situation that we have here today certainly indicates that despite what the Minister of Education is saying, there is simmering teacher unrest. We're certainly not seeing that all is well in the educational system. I know that in my own community, again, the teachers are looking at work to rule. I think that this government should instead be focusing on making sure they don't make announcements like this minister did prior to the introduction of any legislation.

Mr. Hudak: That was a mistake.

Mrs. Witmer: That was a big, big, big mistake. Unions don't appreciate it and that's why they are

responding as they have. I hope that their job actions are not stepped up further because, regrettably, it will have a very negative impact on the students.

I would just suggest that this government acknowledge this legislation for what it is. Some of the members in the Liberal caucus have acknowledged that it's an attempt to make sure there is not labour strife, labour unrest, strikes, work to rule during the year 2007, when we're going to have the next provincial election.

I really think we should be focusing on special education. Mr. Kennedy promised changes to education funding for special education, he's promised to revamp the system and he's promised that the children are going to receive the funds they need. But I can tell you, after almost a year and a half in office, the situation has deteriorated. It's creating a lot of tension for parents of children with special needs.

For those of you who are not educators, this is the time of year when the children's needs are assessed and school boards start to make decisions about what additional resources these young people are going to need in order to allow them to reach their full potential. In some cases, they're going to need additional teacher assistance in order to help them. I think they're very afraid, as they see this labour unrest and they see the passage of this legislation, that the issues that matter to those students with special needs are going to be neglected.

I think it's important that this government refocuses its priorities and makes sure that in future, when they bring forward legislation, it at least is going to be legislation which recognizes the needs of students, talks about students and makes sure that it allows the students to reach their full potential.

I'm going to conclude my remarks at this point in time. Unfortunately, you know what? Our focus needs to be on students; our focus should not be on making sure that we win the next election. I hope this government focuses on implementing all of the recommendations of the Rozanski report, because there were some outstanding recommendations.

Dr. Rozanski is an educator who did a thorough evaluation and met with very knowledgeable, respected people in the province: teachers, educators and parents. He put in place some recommendations that are going to help our students in the educational environment. I think this government could take a page from Dr. Rozanski's recommendations. Again, they need to focus on the students.

The Acting Speaker: It being approximately 6 p.m. of the clock, at this stage in the debate it's an appropriate time to adjourn till Monday at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1756.

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Continued from overleaf

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Jeudi 3 mars 2005

AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉS

**Loi de 2005 sur les magasins de vins
de la Vintners Quality Alliance,
projet de loi 7, *M. Hudak*
Adoptée 5570**

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

**Loi de 2005 modifiant la Loi
sur les renseignements
concernant le consommateur,
projet de loi 174, *M. Ruprecht*
Adoptée 5573**

**Loi de 2005 modifiant le Code
de la route (aucun transport
de passagers moyennant
rémunération), projet de loi 175,
M. Jackson
Adoptée 5573**

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

**Loi de 2005 modifiant la Loi sur
l'éducation, projet de loi 167,
M. Kennedy
Débat présumé ajourné..... 5611**

CONTENTS

Thursday 3 March 2005

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

VQA Wine Stores Act, 2005, Bill 7, <i>Mr. Hudak</i>	
Mr. Hudak	5553, 5560
Mr. Kormos	5553
Mr. Craitor	5556
Ms. Scott	5556
Mr. Prue	5557
Mr. McMeekin	5558
Mr. Hardeman	5558
Mr. Parsons	5559
Mrs. Witmer	5560
Mr. Wong	5560
Mr. Yakabuski	5560
Agreed to	5570
Better Buildings Partnership Mr. McNeely	5561, 5569
Mr. Tascona	5563
Mr. Bisson	5563
Mr. Duncan	5565
Mr. Yakabuski	5566
Mr. Prue	5566
Mr. Leal	5567
Mr. Arnott	5568
Mrs. Cansfield	5568
Mr. Colle	5569
Agreed to	5570

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Kemptville District Hospital Mr. Runciman	5570
Technology Day in Mississauga Mr. Delaney	5570
McMaster University Ms. Marsales	5571
General Motors of Canada Mr. Ouellette	5571
Federal-provincial fiscal policies Mr. Marchese	5571
Hours of work Mr. Oraziotti	5571
Acquired deaf-blindness Mr. Jackson	5572
Epilepsy Mr. Flynn	5572
Growth planning Mrs. Sandals	5572

FIRST READINGS

Consumer Reporting Amendment Act, 2005, Bill 174, Mr. Ruprecht Agreed to	5573
Mr. Ruprecht	5573

Highway Traffic Amendment Act (No Conveying of Passengers for Compensation), 2005, Bill 175, Mr. Jackson

Agreed to	5573
Mr. Jackson	5573

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Automotive industry

Mr. Cordiano	5573
Mr. Ouellette	5575
Ms. Horwath	5576

Electricity supply

Mr. Duncan	5574
Mr. Hampton	5576

Youth employment

Ms. Chambers	5574
Ms. Scott	5575
Mr. Marchese	5577

ORAL QUESTIONS

Political contributions

Mr. Runciman	5577
Mr. Gerretsen	5577, 5578
Mr. Caplan	5578
Mr. Hudak	5578
Mr. Hampton	5579
Mr. Duncan	5579, 5580
Mr. Bryant	5579, 5581
Mr. Arnott	5581
Mr. Sorbara	5581
Mr. Yakabuski	5581
Ms. Churley	5581

Automotive industry

Mr. Arthurs	5582
Mr. Cordiano	5582
Mr. Wilkinson	5582

Greenbelt

Mr. Hudak	5582
Mr. Duncan	5583

Pension plans

Ms. Horwath	5583
Mr. Cordiano	5584

Skills training

Mr. McNeely	5584
Ms. Chambers	5584

Ontario drug benefit program

Mr. Jackson	5585
Mr. Smitherman	5585

Hydro generation

Ms. Churley	5585
Mr. Duncan	5586

Trucking safety

Mr. Patten	5586
Mr. Takhar	5586

PETITIONS

Ontario farmers

Mr. Hardeman	5587
Mr. Yakabuski	5588

Regional centres for the developmentally disabled

Ms. Wynne	5587
Mr. Dunlop	5587
Mr. Prue	5587
Mr. Bisson	5588, 5589

Anaphylactic shock

Mr. Delaney	5588
Mr. Yakabuski	5589

GO Transit tunnel

Mr. Ruprecht	5588
--------------------	------

Volunteer firefighters

Mr. Arnott	5589
------------------	------

Control of smoking

Ms. Marsales	5589
--------------------	------

SECOND READINGS

Education Amendment Act, 2005,

Bill 167, Mr. Kennedy

Mr. Bisson	5590, 5592
Mrs. Van Bommel	5591
Mr. Dunlop	5591, 5596, 5604
Mr. Prue	5592, 5595, 5605, 5608
Mr. Wong	5592
Mrs. Cansfield	5593, 5596
Mr. Duguid	5594
Ms. Scott	5595, 5600
Mr. Arthurs	5595
Mr. Hudak	5596, 5601, 5607
Ms. Churley	5599, 5601, 5605
Mr. Oraziotti	5600
Mr. Bradley	5600
Mr. Fonseca	5604
Mr. Racco	5605
Mr. Delaney	5606, 5608
Mr. Wilkinson	5606
Mr. Caplan	5607
Mr. Colle	5608
Mrs. Witmer	5609
Debate deemed adjourned	5611

OTHER BUSINESS

Business of the House

Mr. Caplan	5601
------------------	------

Continued overleaf