



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 20 April 2005

Mercredi 20 avril 2005

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 20 April 2005

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 20 avril 2005

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant):

Yesterday the Fair Air Association of Canada and the Pub and Bar Coalition of Canada released the most comprehensive analysis ever done on the economic impact that smoking bans will have on bars and pubs in four Ontario cities. The headlines today say it will cost Ontario \$1 billion in revenue and will see 50,000 jobs slashed in the broader hospitality sector. That \$1 billion could easily be exceeded because it doesn't take into account Legions, charity bingos, casinos, doughnut shops and other restaurants.

The study, conducted by economist Dr. Michael Evans, proves that smoking bans in several Ontario cities have had a real and dramatic impact on revenue. Bar and pub sales in Ottawa, London, Kingston and Kitchener have plunged by \$60 million between 2000 and 2003. Dr. Evans used Ontario Ministry of Finance sales and tax receipt data between 2000 and 2003 to ensure accuracy. To date, no one on either side of the debate has come close to producing a study this thorough, this complete, with the government's own numbers as the source material.

How this Liberal government can ignore such findings and have such disregard for the hospitality industry, small business and their employees is beyond me, especially when there is a scientific alternative: ventilation and designated smoking rooms.

**PARLIAMENTARY PRAYER
BREAKFAST**

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): This morning over 150 people gathered in the Legislature from all Christian denominations to prayerfully uphold and encourage our government leaders.

In the Bible, the Book of Timothy exhorts us to pray for our government and its leaders every day so that we will walk with all wisdom and sound judgment, making equitable decisions for those under our care and for the less fortunate.

There are daily battles to be fought here at the Legislature. Ultimately we, as leaders, must have the assurance

that we have been divinely called to the privilege of serving in our positions of authority. By acknowledging God, we can access the strength, perseverance and wisdom to stand at our post and not lose our joy.

So today we gathered to give thanks to our Creator for the many blessings He has lavished upon us and to recognize and honour Him in all our ways. We had a full house this morning. We started very early and we had a number of wonderful speakers. We had many wonderful words praising the politicians, legislators, everything that goes on in this place that we call our home and the home of our people. I hope their prayers and their blessing may be shed upon every member of this House.

GREENBELT

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): Yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs was scheduled to hike along the greenbelt with a group of grade 2 students from Scarborough.

I hope the minister gave the students a well-rounded education and showed them both sides of the Liberals' greenbelt. To this end, the minister should have planned his hike to end at the beautiful Forks of the Credit Provincial Park in the heart of the greenbelt near Caledon Village. There the children could listen for the roar of the gravel crushers and pit trucks emanating from neighbouring gravel pits—the largest contiguous set of gravel pits in North America.

For the sake of education and truth, I trust the minister told the students that the expansion of gravel pits and quarries within the greenbelt is now easier because of the McGuinty government's changes to the provincial policy statement.

From the Forks of the Credit Provincial Park it would have been a short hike over to Highway 10, where the minister could have modelled a major highway, the type this government is planning to run right through the greenbelt.

I just hope the kids took pictures, because, given the impermanency of the Liberals' floating greenbelt and with aggregate development eating up more and more of the greenbelt with each and every passing day, at least, sadly, the students will have a memory of what once was.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): The health transformation initiatives that we are undertaking in partnership with our hospitals and community health

organizations are absolutely essential to improve health care in our province.

Unlike the previous government, which failed to manage rising hospital costs, which failed to invest in community health organizations and promote health and wellness programs, we are targeting investments in a way that will improve health care now and in the future.

Under the previous government, the hospital in the riding I represent contained many long-term-care beds and, like many other hospitals, was forced to deliver services that should have been delivered in the community. The result of the previous mismanagement burdened hospitals with significant deficits.

One of the key components of the health care transformation is the reinvestment in community-based health care services, such as long-term care, home care, mental health and public health. Our city has seen over \$28 million in new funding since our government has taken office. Our government's record investments have also meant new jobs in the health care sector in Sault Ste. Marie. In fact, 124 full-time equivalent jobs, including 11 student health-related jobs, have been created. These positions include registered nurses, registered practical nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, health care aides, speech therapists and health fitness coordinators.

It's important to point out that job transfers in the health care sector clearly do not equate to job losses. While the opposition members continue their fear-mongering and attempt to generate negative headlines, we will continue to let residents across the province know the real story in health care: a transformation that will deliver improved access to doctors, reduce waiting times and bring health care closer to home.

1340

SEWAGE SPILL

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I rise today on behalf of the residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville who live in the vicinity of the sewage spill that occurred last Friday evening at Warden Avenue and Aurora Side Road. The information we received from the Minister of the Environment's office was that 10 million gallons of raw sewage overflowed from a lagoon at the King Cole duck farm and migrated into Bogart Creek, which flows into the Holland River and eventually discharges into Cook's Bay in Lake Simcoe.

Numerous residents have contacted me, concerned about how this issue was handled by the Ministry of the Environment. I would like to read from one e-mail in particular. Mr. Grant Purdy writes as follows:

"To give an idea of the scale of this spill, the Environmental Defence website categorizes a 3-million-litre spill in Manitoba as large. The one at King Cole was nearly ten times that amount." He goes on to say, "The press release on Saturday evening was ambiguous at best, so on Sunday I telephoned a number of agencies, including the MOE. My best information came from an MOE

worker I came upon by chance, who was taking water samples from the tributary."

Mr. Purdy and his neighbours living in the vicinity of this spill deserve answers to their questions. I want to serve notice today that I will be pursuing this directly with Minister Dombrowsky. I will be convening a public meeting to which the minister will be invited, and we will want answers about this spill. We will be looking for answers as to the consequences and the outcomes that affect Whitchurch-Stouffville residents, and we will be looking for assurances that every step is taken to guarantee the health and well-being of those residents.

FAMILY HEALTH TEAMS

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I'm very pleased to rise today to speak about the McGuinty government's family health team initiative. Minister Smitherman has been working very hard to find a new approach to primary health care. The first 55 teams were announced last week.

Family health teams will be comprised of doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, pharmacists and other complementary medical practitioners working together to meet patients' individual needs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's important to note that the family health teams will emphasize prevention and healthy living as much as treating illness. In my riding, the riding of Huron-Bruce, the Huron county family health team in Seaforth and the Maitland Valley health team in Goderich are absolutely thrilled to be able to provide better-quality health care for the people who live in their communities and in the surrounding areas.

What has worked before is not working now. In the 21st century, we have new challenges, new technology and growing populations. We must have courage to try new ideas and new approaches. I'm proud to be part of a government that is willing and able to work toward new solutions to old problems. This is a wonderful step forward for primary health care reform in the province of Ontario.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Recently, a judge in Ontario suggested that anyone believing a political party's promises in an election campaign was at best naive. That's a sad commentary on the way many Canadians view politics and politicians today. The Gomery inquiry, spelling out the flagrant misuse of tax dollars by the federal Liberals, and the unapologetic breaking of critically important election promises by the McGuinty Liberals are understandably continuing to fuel voter cynicism and indignation.

Last night, in an incredibly stupid move, this gang that can't shoot straight, the McGuinty government, added more fuel to escalating citizen resentment. If you can believe it, in the middle of debate on very controversial labour legislation giving construction unions the right to

do away with secret ballots and organizing drives, the Premier and many of his cabinet colleagues attended an unadvertised event where they were handed \$200,000 by the same unions who benefit from their legislation.

This is beyond the pale. It is shameful conduct on the part of the Premier and his government. It casts a dark shadow over the legitimacy of Bill 144. I call on the government to immediately withdraw the bill and remove the card certification provisions that now, because of this government's covert, offensive and clumsy fundraising activity, give the strong impression that this legislation was bought and paid for. I call on the Premier to take full responsibility for dragging the name of his once proud party even deeper into the muck and mire.

PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): The rift within the Tory caucus continues to grow every day. We have the member from Nepean–Carleton leaving for Ottawa and the member from Whitby–Ajax flirting or Flahertying with the idea. During the leadership, Tory called for the decorum in the House; meanwhile, his caveman caucus continues to act up in the House.

Tory has also called for fiscal transparency. He has said, “The good news.... Mr. McGuinty has brought in some measures that will allow all of us to have an objective examination of the books of the province.... And I give him full marks for that. It's the right thing to do.” That was Focus Ontario, March 20, 2005. Yet every day, every member over there of the Tory caucus voted against the McGuinty Liberal fiscal transparency legislation.

Now we've got the member from Erie–Lincoln openly contradicting his own leader. Mr. Tory has called on Premier McGuinty to soften his attack on the federal Liberals with regard to the \$23-billion gap that Ontario is currently facing. But just today, the member from Erie–Lincoln stated, “If McGuinty really wants to make a difference instead of just paying lip service on this issue, he's got to ratchet up the temperature.” The member went on to say, “Again, if McGuinty is really sincere about making changes on the gap, we should see him calling Paul Martin out on this issue during the election campaign.” Who's the leader over there?

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): It's clear to me that John Tory needs to check if his tiny Tory researchers actually passed grade 8 math. It seems that they can't get their facts straight, even when they're presented to them in the simplest possible manner, but it isn't all that surprising coming from the party that thought a \$5.6-billion deficit represented a balanced Magna budget.

For example, yesterday in this House, they accused us of cutting \$47 million in funding from municipalities. The truth is that we actually provided \$38 million more,

an increase of 6.1% over last year. In addition, there's \$233 million in one-time funding that will assist municipalities in their transition to the new funding model that we're implementing. As a result, not one municipality will receive less money this year than they did last year.

In my riding of Perth–Middlesex, residents of Perth county are receiving an overall 16% increase in funding. Residents of Middlesex county are receiving an overall 30% increase in funding.

Perhaps Mr. Flaherty and Mr. Hudak can't add either. These substantial investments will help municipalities pay for social services and policing costs as they manage the Tory legacy of downsizing.

Only those who failed grade 8 math or are motivated by crass politics would try to mislead the public into thinking that municipalities are getting less in provincial transfers. What's surprising is that John Tory likes to talk about wanting to practise a new type of politics. Apparently, the new type of politics that Tory wants to practise has nothing to do with the truth. If you don't fire your incompetent underlings, then I say, “Brand new Tory; same old story.”

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS SOUTIEN DE L'EMPLOI

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I rise in the House to inform all honourable members of an innovative pilot project my ministry is championing a project that will make a real and very positive difference in the lives of many Ontarians.

Last year, we made a number of changes to address many of our problems in our social assistance programs, problems that made those programs cumbersome, treated people unfairly, and created barriers to helping people improve their lives. Now we're taking steps to restore integrity to our social assistance programs. We're moving forward to address one of the root problems of financial dependence, and that's unemployment. We're launching an exciting initiative that is really going to help people move from working for welfare to working for a living.

1350

Ce matin, nous avons lancé le programme ActionEmplois—un tout nouveau projet pilote qui offrira du counselling d'emploi personnalisé, des services de placement et du soutien en matière d'emploi—pour aider les gens à se trouver un emploi et ainsi quitter pour de bon le système d'aide sociale.

This is not another version of the previous government's work-for-welfare program. This is not about forcing single moms and disadvantaged people to take make-work jobs that continue to lead to cyclical un-

employment. This is about providing the right supports to help people improve their lives and become self-sufficient.

JobsNow is unique in four ways:

First, JobsNow specifically focuses on people who have been on social assistance for more than 12 months. We know from experience that lots of people stay on social assistance for only a short period of time—a few months, maybe—while they're going through a temporary rough patch. JobsNow focuses on those people who have been trying to find employment and turn their lives around for at least a year but who have been unsuccessful for any number of reasons. We're doing this because research shows that the longer someone stays out of the workforce, the harder it becomes to get back in, and that one-year mark is a turning point. We know that once someone has been on social assistance for over a year, they're more likely to remain on social assistance for two or three years at least. JobsNow targets this group specifically so they don't end up in a cycle of chronic unemployment.

Second, JobsNow provides clients with the personalized, one-on-one support they need to get back in the workforce and stay there. This is something that my parliamentary assistant, Deb Matthews, the member for London North Centre, highlighted in her review of Ontario's social assistance programs, and we give kudos again to our member from London North, Deb Matthews, for a tremendous report. During her discussions with front-line caseworkers, clients and people who currently provide employment supports to these clients, she heard one thing loud and clear: One size fits all does not work. During her discussions, that's what she found. JobsNow is based on the principle that different people need different supports to find and keep a job. JobsNow will work one-on-one with individual welfare recipients to help them overcome the unique barriers they face, and then go one step further by working with individual employers to match the right person with the right job.

Third, JobsNow will connect with business and employers directly, through partners such as the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, to find those jobs that aren't always so easy to find. We had a tremendous announcement this morning at the office of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce; thanks to that group for having us come and launch such an exciting project. We know there's a hidden job market out there. Only a fraction of the jobs that are available actually get advertised. With JobsNow, we can help our clients find those jobs.

Fourth, JobsNow provides longer-term job retention support—up to 18 months worth of follow-up support—once somebody is placed in a job, because we know that keeping a job is as important as finding one in the first place. Research has shown that individuals who are employed for more than 12 months have a much higher likelihood of remaining employed. Our current Ontario Works employment supports include up to six months of job retention services. While this works for some clients, we know it has been less successful in helping longer-term unemployed individuals return to the workplace.

JobsNow recognizes that many people who rely on welfare want to find meaningful work that will last and that will allow them to make a better life for themselves and for their families. These people are not statistics. They're real people who want to find and keep a job. It's time our welfare programs worked as well. We believe JobsNow will get thousands of people into the workforce. That's good for our clients, it's good for the Ontario economy and it's good for our taxpayers.

Our government made a commitment to restore integrity to Ontario's social assistance programming by streamlining administration, which we're moving on; improving accountability, which we're moving on; and moving people off welfare into steady employment. I'm very excited about this latest part of our plan: a plan that will help improve lives across the province; a plan that strengthens our economy and our communities; a plan that recognizes that our people are our greatest resource. When they can fulfill their potential, the entire province benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that you too will recognize that this government has a whole new attitude when it comes to people who are on welfare. These are people who want and deserve to work, and the Dalton McGuinty government is going to get them there.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond on behalf of our critic, the member for Burlington, to the minister's comments. We believe, as Progressive Conservatives, that the best way to move people off welfare is into a job itself, into the workforce. The fundamental role of government is to make sure there are jobs for Ontarians, to make sure our economy stays strong and we can afford improvements in health care or education. The lesson learned: If you want to keep our economy strong, you need to make sure that you reduce taxes, control government spending and not run up massive Dalton McGuinty deficits, as we're seeing across the floor.

Let me point out another problem. This is a bit of an anagram: If you change the letters in "JobsNow," it's "snow job." This is a snow-job program and a snow-job announcement by the minister across the floor. If the minister really wanted to help people off welfare into work, they would not raise taxes as they are doing, they wouldn't raise hydro rates through the roof as Dalton McGuinty is doing, and they'd strive to balance the budget, which is the opposite of any effort that Dalton McGuinty is trying to make. What is worse, if you do succeed in moving somebody from welfare to work, they're hit with a punishing new Dalton McGuinty health tax that impacts those of most modest income the greatest—and shame on them. As soon as they get into the workforce, bam, a new health tax is levied on these individuals.

Let me read some of the details of the program. Does this sound familiar? "A program that will provide a wide range of employment supports that include: practical help in finding a job; community participation; employment

placements; supports to self-employment; basic education and job skills training; literacy testing and training; the LEAP program”—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): That sounds familiar.

Mr. Hudak: As my colleague from Durham said, it should sound familiar, because that's Ontario Works, the Mike Harris program that, when this member was across the floor, you had to pull her down off the roof complaining about work for welfare. My, these Liberals say one thing when they're in opposition, but when in government, they say the complete opposite.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: The minister is heckling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hudak: What I find interesting from the minister is that you're partnering with WCG International, a private, for-profit consulting firm. I heard all kinds of stuff from the Liberals about the evils of working with the private sector and contracts with private sector providers, but holy smokes, Sandra Papatello today getting in bed with WCG International, a private, for-profit company? Man, who are you and what happened to the Sandra Papatello who used to sit over here?

It sounds a lot like the Mike Harris program—a program that was successful in taking 600,000 people off work for welfare—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hudak: If there's a program that has ideas, work for welfare—we're proud of our record. Some 600,000 people moved from welfare back on to the employment rolls, a success copied across North America. We're pleased that Sandra Papatello seems to be taking the line of following a Conservative work-for-welfare policy.

We need a bit more detail. Where is the beef in this program? Please tell us. This sounds a lot like work for welfare—maybe we'll hear from the minister how it's not—a program that she would criticize day after day, month after month, year after year. It's a contract with a private sector company, the kind of thing she criticized day after day, month after month, year after year.

This ability of Dalton McGuinty's government to do these sorts of political gymnastics is incredible, where they say one thing before the campaign and something completely different when they're in government. You say it's something different. JobsNow is nothing but a snow job the minister is trying to put over on the public here today.

1400

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): I don't often agree with my friend from Erie—Lincoln, but he hit the nail right on the head. This is nothing but another Conservative policy. If you ask him if he's going to support you, of course he's going to support you, because you're doing exactly what Mike Harris did before. It has taken 18 months for your party to go from a party that said you cared for people into another government of Mike Harris on that side.

You said that this is a new and innovative program. It is not a new and innovative program; it is a program that

you have stolen lock, stock and barrel from the BC Liberals. It has been in British Columbia for a number of years. Even your definitions are the same. Even the company's the same: WCG International. It's the same private business that is not helping the people of British Columbia while it lines its own pockets. And you are doing the same thing today that you used to accuse the Mike Harris government of doing in the past. There is no obligation from this private company—absolutely none—to make their finances public. You will pour in millions and millions of dollars to them, and not once will they ever have to tell the people of this province how much you are paying them, how much profit they're making or what they're doing with the money.

It is quite normal that people on welfare go on and off welfare. In British Columbia, the people who were studying this program that you now laud as your own found that two-thirds of welfare cases go out of the system within six months of going on welfare. Unfortunately, it's normal that two-thirds of those who find a job go back on to welfare within two years following finding a job. The only thing that is sure in your announcement today is that WCG International, a private company that is raking in millions of dollars in BC, is now going to rake in millions of dollars more in Ontario.

We have to ask, what are you going to do to protect the poor people of Ontario once they have to apply to this new, for-profit agency? How much are you going to protect them?

I quote this from a publication in British Columbia. WCG vice-president and partner Diane Bradley was asked how much money the company makes. She said, "The bottom line is, we really are proud of what we do." When she was pushed for an answer, she said, "It's profitable, and thank heavens it is," and that's what this is about.

The minister says that people are going to be placed off of welfare. What is the definition in BC of "being placed"? The definition in British Columbia, which I think you're adopting here, is that you're no longer on the system. In British Columbia, if somebody moves to Alberta and gets off the welfare system in British Columbia, they are deemed to be placed, and the company gets a profit. Is that what you have planned for Ontario? If somebody goes into a hospital and is off the welfare system, the company gets a profit. If somebody goes to jail and is off the welfare system, the company gets a profit. Is that what you mean by "placement" in your bill? We think that's what it is.

We have to say that this is a Tory bill, a Mike Harris bill, a bill that's going to do nothing to help the poor.

As one person in British Columbia had to say about this program and how it didn't work for him—and again, I quote from the paper:

"I left income assistance for a permanent job,' one person said. 'The job lasted [only] weeks. When I went back to human resources, I was told I couldn't reapply for income assistance for the next five years. My MLA has not been any help. The government should tear up the

contracts of those high-paid workers they have contracts with, and give people like me a job.”

Madam Minister, if you really want to help, you'll have non-profits do this job and do the placements—non-profits who work to make no money at all. You'll have training subsidies for those who need them. You'll have a requirement that employers, in order to get funds, will maintain the employment for one year or get no funding at all. Last but not least, and most importantly, for the many people who have children, you will provide adequate subsidized child care so that people can actually go out and find a job and keep it.

VISITORS

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just wanted to take a moment to introduce the personnel from WCG who are here in the House with us. We're proud to have them here.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): That was not a point of order, but let me hear the point of order from the member from Niagara Centre.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want the chamber to know that page Jessica Simoneau is joined by her parents, Edith Toscher and Denis Simoneau; her sister, Emilie; her grandparents Toscher; her grand-mère Falardeau and her Aunt Caroline.

The Speaker: That is also not a point of order, but welcome.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In the east gallery, I'd also like to introduce Mr. Peter Love, Ontario's new chief energy conservation officer, and his family.

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order—

The Speaker: Is this the same type of point of order?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I'm wondering if it would be a point of order if I recognize St. Paul elementary school from the riding of London West up in the gallery.

The Speaker: I hope that—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Let me get a point of order in too. I'd like better behaviour and no shouting across from one to the other, so that when I do call oral questions, we get that co-operation.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Premier, Thunder Bay, North Bay and Sudbury collectively received \$3.2 million in

gas tax revenues in 2004-05 but will lose \$8.2 million in transfers under your so-called fairer municipal funding program. These municipalities have a choice to make: They can fund public transit, as was intended with the gas tax money, they can use it to partially make up for the cuts in the transfer payments, or, of course, raise property taxes. Why are you cutting this \$5 million from these northern cities and forcing them to impose big property tax increases?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I know the Minister of Finance is prepared to speak to this.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I know the Leader of the Opposition is still trying to recruit in his office, and I really recommend strongly that he look for better researchers, because, as yesterday with the member from Erie—Lincoln, my friend just has it wrong on the new Ontario municipal partnership funding.

Let's just deal with the north for a moment. We're very proud of the two cents per litre in gas tax that is going to help in public transit. We're very proud of the fact that we are going to be absorbing more of the cost of public health. And on the municipal financing partnership, I should tell the Leader of the Opposition that the special allocations for northern and rural municipalities are going to be of significant help to municipalities right across the north. I recommend to the Leader of the Opposition that he pay more attention to his details.

Mr. Tory: I would recommend that you might try answering the question, because I asked you not about the north; I asked about North Bay, Thunder Bay and Sudbury, which you didn't deal with whatsoever.

My supplementary question is to the Premier. Premier, the city of Brantford received just over \$700,000 in gas taxes for 2004-05 but will lose 10 times that amount—\$6.681 million annually—under your so-called fairer program for cities and towns. Brantford mayor Mike Hancock just two days ago said he felt a sense of betrayal. No wonder. Brantford has a choice to make: They can either use the gas tax money granted for public transit while facing a \$7-million cut in transfers, or they can raise property taxes. Can you confirm these numbers for Brantford and tell us why you're forcing them to raise taxes in this way?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My very good friend the Leader of the Opposition referred to Sudbury. Let's hear what Greater Sudbury ward 5 councillor Doug Craig said recently in the Sudbury Star apropos of this program: “It is a reliable and predictable source of new revenue, and it's something we're very fortunate to get.”

1410

Now let's go to Brantford. Let's point out to the people of Ontario that under the new Ontario municipal partnership fund, no community in Ontario will receive less than they did last year. Let's point out to my friend the Leader of the Opposition that this program in this year represents a 6.1% increase in municipal grants from the province of Ontario.

Finally, let's point out to the Leader of the Opposition that we are scrapping what we inherited from the Tories,

which was inequitable, very expensive, and unfair, and we're replacing it with a program which, at the heart of it is driven by equity and fairness and appropriate levels of funding.

Mr. Tory: Again to the Premier: Let's point out to the people of Ontario, first of all, that you didn't answer the question, and secondly, that there are an awful lot of cities and towns that are going to get a lot less next year and the year after that, whatever you say is going to happen this year.

My final supplementary: Your pledge to the cities and towns is to give them a share of gas taxes for public transit, and I would argue that it's a sham. Kingston, the riding of your own Minister of Municipal Affairs, will lose \$3.4 million under your so-called fair municipal funding program but receive just over \$1 million in gas taxes. Can you confirm these numbers and tell us why you are hurting Kingston this way and forcing them to raise property taxes?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I want to help out the Leader of the Opposition. He mentions Brantford, so I think it's appropriate to point out that \$792,741 in new gas-tax funds and public health funding will be going to the community of Brantford.

I regret that I don't have the funding for Kingston right in front of me, but he needs to know, the people of Kingston need to know and the people of Ontario need to know that no community in Ontario will receive less this year than they did last year. So for him to suggest in this Legislature that somehow any community is suffering under this new program is simply not in accordance with the facts.

I reiterate: We are putting 6.1% more in our new municipal partnership program than was in the program that existed, and we've scrapped the program that the Tories had because it simply did not work.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): New question, the leader of the official opposition.

Mr. Tory: We didn't get an answer on the cuts to Thunder Bay, North Bay, Sudbury, Brantford or Kingston, and of course the minister is talking about this year and very carefully not talking about next year or the year after.

Let's talk about Chatham. Chatham is losing a staggering \$12.8 million under your so-called fair program, and yet they're receiving \$610,000 in gas tax money. The Chatham Daily News says property taxes will go up 10.5% as a result. Guelph will receive nothing—zero—under your new fairer program, a hole of \$2.7 million, and they'll receive roughly half of that in gas transfers.

Can you confirm these numbers and tell us why you are forcing those cities to raise taxes on their residents? Why are you hurting Guelph and Chatham? Why are you hurting them?

The Speaker: The question is directed to whom?

Mr. Tory: To the Premier.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Let's just go back to some basic principles, for example. At the last meeting of the Asso-

ciation of Municipalities of Ontario—AMO—the tone, if I could sum it up, was simply this: “We are so glad, finally, that we have a government at Queen's Park that is listening to our concerns.” As we were developing the new Ontario municipal partnership fund, the leaders of AMO and communities all across the province said, “We need to make sure that we are able to reconcile our accounts for 2003 and reconcile our accounts for 2004.” So we made sure that, in developing this program, we did that, and that has resulted in some \$233 million in transitional funding. It's one of the strongest points of the new program.

The Speaker: Supplementary, the member from Erie—Lincoln.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): Back to the Premier: I remember the recent Rural Ontario Municipal Association meeting, where your ministers on the stage were booed and jeered regularly when they gave these types of weaselly answers to the questions municipalities were asking.

Minister, Premier, your so-called new deal for municipalities has turned out to be a raw deal for those municipalities. Let's look at Windsor, for example. In 2004, Windsor received \$2.1 million up front and an additional \$3.3 million under reconciliation—a \$5-million CRF transfer. Their new permanent funding under Dalton McGuinty is zero; zip; nada; not a penny. Do you expect them to pump their gas money into this hole that McGuinty has created, or to take the full \$5 million from welfare and children's services?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: This is all based on the press release that my friend put out yesterday, which, not to put it too delicately, was trash. Let's just talk about southwestern Ontario. Lambton county: from \$9.03 million in 2004 to \$10.29 million in 2005; Huron county—very close to my friend's heart: from \$13.6 million in 2004 to \$15.78 million in 2005; Perth county: from \$10.88 million in 2004 to \$12.64 million in 2005; the city of London: over \$13 million in new funding. Why? Because it was the right and equitable thing to do, to repair the broken monster that we got left with from the previous administration.

Mr. Hudak: I think the minister is being a little fast and loose with the numbers. Look at your own chart, Minister. You referenced Perth county, close to my heart. They received \$2.7 million last year. Their permanent base funding was zero. Your own numbers: their permanent base funding, zero. If you don't know your own program, no wonder that municipalities across Ontario are calling you to account.

Belleville received half a million dollars, slashed from their program supports—social services, policing—under Dalton McGuinty's raw deal for municipalities. The average income in Belleville is 16% below the provincial average. If you want to attract jobs to Belleville, it's not going to help that the municipality will be forced to raise taxes or cut services because of Dalton McGuinty's raw deal and broken promises. What is your answer for Belleville? Do they use their gas tax and pump it into that

hole that McGuinty has created, or do they cut their programs to the local taxpayers?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I'd like to say to my friend from Erie-Lincoln that if he wants an opportunity to visit us at the Ministry of Finance to get a better understanding of the Ontario municipal partnership fund, we will make time available in the morning, afternoon or evening. I'll say to him that the funding partnership is made up of a number of grants, including a northern and rural grant which looks to the specific needs of northern and more remote communities where populations are spread out and the need for additional funding is driven by the fact that services are more expensive; a policing grant, because particularly in smaller municipalities the cost of policing is an inordinate cost; and then a grant for social services, recognizing that in some communities the cost of providing social services is much higher.

I wish my friend had the opportunity to visit the ministry and discover the mess that was left by them and their downloading on municipalities right across Ontario.

LOBBYISTS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Before the last election, you promised to set a higher ethical standard, but yesterday we learned that your Minister of Transportation thinks it's OK to hire someone who is funnelling illegal money to political candidates; that it's OK as long as he isn't facing criminal charges.

Today I want to ask you about some high-priced seminars for lobbyists. Over the last year, Leonard Domino and Associates have held a series of seminars. They charge clients \$550 a head to teach them how to get the inside track with the McGuinty government. My question is this: Do you think it's appropriate for your MPPs and cabinet ministers to actually be providing the lessons at these lobbying sessions?

1420

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Once again the leader of the NDP is desperately pursuing a non-existent lead. We take pride in having set what I think is a good standard when it comes to ethics and integrity. Let me tell you about some of the things we've done. I know the members opposite don't support these kinds of things. For example, we've introduced greater transparency into government financing by bringing forward the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, something the Conservatives would not support. We've also been clear that we intend to expand the powers of the Provincial Auditor so that he can look, for example, at our colleges and universities and hospitals, some of our transfer partners. Again, the members opposite gave us some difficulty in increasing that transparency and accountability.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, that was a valiant effort at avoiding answering the question.

We're not talking about ordinary speaking engagements here. This is a crash course on how to get goodies

from the McGuinty government, and members of your caucus and of your cabinet actually go and teach the lessons. In the advertisement for one seminar it states, "You'll need new strategies to deal with the new government ... whether your concerns are primarily about funding, about regulation, about scope of practice or any other aspect of government policy." Just below that there's a photo of two lucky customers and Sandra Pupatello, your minister. Take the picture to the Premier, please.

Minister Pupatello isn't the only McGuinty Liberal who is providing access at a price. Here are George Smitherman, Brad Duguid, Mike Colle, David Zimmer, Mario Racco, Lorenzo Berardinetti and David Caplan. It seems like for \$550 a head you can meet a lot of Liberals.

Premier, will you release the names of the lobbyists who bought access to your caucus members and your cabinet members?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): First of all, I think you've got to be truthful with people when you ask a question in this House. I'm glad you brought a photo here, because what I am telling you is that I recall very well the people I spoke with, people who represent non-profit organizations trying to advance things for the most vulnerable: housing issues, social service issues, individuals who are struggling to make life work in our province.

That party thinks there's something wrong with asking the minister responsible for social services about what the dreams are of the Liberal Party as a government. I stand by any organization I spoke with about the best way to help vulnerable people, and I look forward to another question on this matter.

Mr. Hampton: I heard a lot of bluster there, but I didn't hear an answer.

Before the last election, Dalton McGuinty said, "The Harris-Eves government gave money too much influence and citizens too little. We will put the public interest ahead of special interest."

Premier, the last time I noticed, when autistic parents and their children were here, you wouldn't even look them in the eye, but if somebody has \$550 a head to pay to this lobbying firm, they can get access to your cabinet ministers, to your caucus members. All it takes is \$550 a head. I should add that it's not just the opportunity to chat up your members; you get Atlantic smoked salmon, tiger shrimp and grilled portobello mushrooms while they chat up your cabinet members and your caucus members.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, will you release the names of the lobbyists who bought access to your MPPs and cabinet ministers at these high-priced, private lobbying seminars? Please don't tell us it was the poor—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I would like this leader of the opposition to know, to understand. Do you know who I

spend more time with in the boardroom of the Ministry of Community and Social Services? Tories, who are out of work because that government lost, bring organizations to see me, to talk about the most vulnerable people in the province. Individuals who used to work for that government come into my boardroom today to talk about how to get housing for people, how we make services work in social services. They come to talk to me about long-term care. They come to talk to me about how to get more special services at home. Tories are bringing people to see me. That's my job.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier—and I'll send over the rest of the photos. By the way, the Premier makes it on to this advertising campaign at \$550 a head as well.

Premier, again, you were going to provide strong leadership, you were going to set higher standards, you were going to do things differently from your predecessor. But it seems that you are just as addicted to inside advisers and backroom fixers and lobbyists as Mike Harris was.

Today, the Toronto Star reports that your chief backroom fixer, Warren Kinsella, held a secret meeting with Stephen Harper's senior adviser on April 6, the day after you spoke to Stephen Harper about your problems with Paul Martin. We know that Mr. Kinsella is an effective lobbyist. We saw him take your spills bill on behalf of the chemical industry and send it out the side door to a dead-end committee. He's very good.

The question I want to ask you is what is going on here? What is going on with your government?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'd like to give the House a very good example of an individual who worked for Premier Dalton McGuinty. His name is Phil Dewan. Phil Dewan called my office. He's a consultant, as this member would call him. Do you know what he did? He brought parents of individuals who live at Huronia into my boardroom. Moreover, he wasn't paid for that work, but he certainly is a consultant. If that individual has a problem with the work that Phil Dewan was doing on behalf of parents from Huronia, I want him to say that too, because those are the kinds of people I am proud to meet with.

The people who come to see me, the individuals I would step forward to talk to about what we have as policy as a government—I am proud, because I can tell you, for 10 years nobody wanted to talk about social services in this province. The people who were affiliated with my ministry were used as punching bags for the last 10 years. That has changed under Dalton McGuinty, and we will continue to change that.

Mr. Hampton: More bluster from a cabinet minister who's trying to explain away a \$550-a-head lobbyist session.

My question was to the Premier. It was about Warren Kinsella. You see, there's a remarkable string of coincidences with Mr. Kinsella. Mr. Kinsella is a staunch opponent of Paul Martin—just like you, apparently. He was your most prominent campaign insider and is now your backroom fixer. In fact, he is so close to you that even as

a paid lobbyist he got invited to, and attended, your cabinet meeting on March 23. Then, days later, on April 5, you get on the phone with Stephen Harper. The very next day, Mr. Kinsella attends a secret meeting with Mr. Harper's senior strategist. Premier, can you explain Mr. Kinsella's role in your family feud with Paul Martin?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'd like to refer that to the Premier, please.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: This is what you call a desperate attempt to pursue a story that was written this morning, to try to get in on that story. The meeting to which the leader of the NDP makes reference was attended by Mr. Kinsella on his own behalf without purporting to represent me, our government or my party. Of course, he's free to engage in those kinds of things.

I'm glad the leader of the NDP has raised the issue of the \$23-billion gap, because I know that's what the people of Ontario are very concerned about. In particular, I know that the leader of the NDP will want to again take the opportunity in a supplementary to lend his support, together with his federal colleague Jack Layton. I was pleased to receive that support. I was pleased to receive the support of Mr. Harper, as I was of Mr. Tory on this issue. We will continue to maintain this campaign on behalf of the people of Ontario to ensure that this matter can be effectively and fairly addressed by the federal government.

1430

Mr. Hampton: Premier, New Democrats don't blame you for your conspiring against Paul Martin and the federal Liberals—another Liberal government that doesn't keep its promise. As I say, we know how effective Mr. Kinsella is as a high-priced lobbyist and backroom fixer, but I think you have to be straight with the people of Ontario. There's a remarkable follow-on of coincidences here. Mr. Kinsella comes to the cabinet meeting—very unusual for a high-priced, backroom lobbyist to come to a cabinet meeting. Days later, you get on the phone with Stephen Harper. The day following, Mr. Kinsella holds a secret meeting with Mr. Harper's special adviser.

I'm just asking you to be open with the people of Ontario. Is—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I think you need to be straight with the people of Ontario. Is Mr. Kinsella leading your charge to bring down Paul Martin, and if he is, who is paying the tab for this very high-priced lobbyist and backroom fixer?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP asked me to be straight with Ontarians. I don't know how he can ask that kind of question with a straight face.

Notwithstanding—I'll give him the benefit of the doubt—the failed attempt at humour in this matter, this is a serious issue. We're talking about a \$23-billion gap that 10 years ago was \$2 billion. We think it's important that we continue to reach out to everybody on Parliament

Hill. We have had a good reception from the federal NDP and from the federal Conservatives. We're now working actively with the federal government, and, notwithstanding the leader of the NDP's desire to find ghosts behind every corner, we have been very transparent and very active.

There is one matter I'm sure the leader of the NDP would like to have drawn to his attention, because he made reference earlier to the lobbyist Leonard Domino and Associates. I think he would be interested in learning that if you go to that lobbyist's Web site today, you will find a link to the NDP.

HURONIA REGIONAL CENTRE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister and members of this House, today we have present in the Speaker's gallery four residents from Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia. They're here with their attendants. Their names are David Rodgers, Carey Buss, Wendy Sayer and Pip Bruce-Robertson. They have resided at the facility for a combined total of 170 years.

Minister Papatello, you and your government have decided to close HRC, very clearly without any kind of plan. How can you and your government even consider closing HRC when you haven't even met with the residents to determine their needs? You have yet to even lay out a detailed plan that will assure family members who are here today that their loved ones will be cared for in the same manner as they have become accustomed to at Huronia Regional Centre.

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): Order. Let's just sit down. Thank you.

Hon. Sandra Papatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Can I say on behalf of every member of this House how pleased we are to see individuals who live at Huronia here at Queen's Park today. We applaud you. We thank you for coming here today.

They may also know that both my parliamentary assistant, Ernie Parsons, who is with them in the House today, as well as myself have tried valiantly, despite quarantines because of the flu, to actually be on-site at Huronia. That has hobbled us twice in our efforts to get there. We have had an opportunity to speak to parents. We will continue to do that. We would like to speak to every single parent, because what we're committed to do in this House, on behalf of every government that has been the government since the mid-1980s that enacted a plan that would close the institutions—where we have moved from having 16 institutions in Ontario for people with developmental disabilities to three. We have announced the closure of those three. There are still 1,000 people living there. We understand what the challenges and the fears are, and I appreciate the opportunity to see face-to-face and continue to strive to meet those challenges and fears.

I look forward to the next question.

Mr. Dunlop: I guess that's why we don't call this "answer period."

I want to congratulate the minister, first of all, on her JobsNow project that she announced today. That will really help the 2,100 people from the Ontario public service whom you're putting out of work with this decision. At a time when Community Living in Ontario says they have a crisis on hand because of a 25% turnover of staff due to your underfunding and do not have enough funds to offer space to those on other waiting lists, you have made a decision, again without any plan, to close HRC, Rideau Regional Centre and Southwestern Regional Centre and add 1,000 of the most profoundly disabled people to those lists. When will the families and residents actually see a plan to offer the same level of care and medical attention that they receive today at HRC? I'm talking about a plan. When will you start to consult with those who actually care about these people?

Minister, I know you say you've tried to make it up there a couple of times, but the bottom line is that you've got lots of time to make it to your fancy casino announcements and whatever \$550-a-plate you were at recently, but you haven't had the courtesy to come to the Huronia Regional Centre and meet, as the landlord and as the person responsible for these people—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Ms. Papatello: There are some things within my ministry and across the government that are completely non-partisan, and this is one of them. When this member stands to ask a question, I remind him that he was part of a government, over the last eight years before we became the government, that continued with this plan to close facilities. Your government never wavered. Your government continued to close institutions, because in 1980 we understood that it was the right thing to do, that we wanted to see people in our community, as we have people in our House today, being in the community. I'd also like to know if this is the same MPP who has met on more than one occasion with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, who is now speaking about the "What next?" plan, the potential of a university on the site of Huronia. I will also tell him that those people who have worked diligently with us in this ministry, the people who work in the institutions, are important to us. We have met with them and we continue to meet.

AUTISM SERVICES

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a question for the Attorney General. The thirty-five-year old Hasit Khagram has autism. For four years now he's been kept in solitary confinement, in a unit that has windows that don't open, where he is not allowed outside because the fencing is inadequate, and where, if there is an effort to bring in fresh air by opening that exterior door, it's soon frustrated as hordes of flies are attracted by the feces which are an inevitable part of Mr. Khagram's presence in the unit because he is incontinent. Two one-hour visits per week with his mother and father

are all he is permitted. Why? And how can that be allowed to happen in this province of Ontario in the 21st century?

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): You started it by making reference to an autistic individual; you made reference as well to a unit. I wish the member would provide me with more information so I'll be able to better answer his question. If there something we can do, we will do it.

Mr. Kormos: Attorney General, Mr. Khagram is your ward. He is in the guardianship of the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee, which put him in this facility and approved this so-called treatment plan which, as psychiatrist Dr. Max Wheeler notes, has led to his deteriorated condition. "I am appalled by the fact that Hasit has had essentially no human physical contact in four years.... Hasit's so-called family visits through Plexiglas.

"It is my professional opinion [that] isolation has led to deterioration in his behaviour socially. I feel very strongly that Hasit's social isolation should not continue one more day."

The imposition of his solitary confinement at Bethesda Home in St. Catharines is a direct result of the directions given by your Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee. Will you meet with Hasit's mother and stepfather, Dr. Shah, to discuss the options they have to restore health to their son and in fact save his life and his humanity from these degrading conditions?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I don't see why it would be inappropriate for me to do so. Unless there's some matter involving litigation, the answer is yes.

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EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. As we heard earlier in the House this morning, you announced a new employment supports initiative called JobsNow. I am pleased to say that one of the pilot sites is in Hamilton, so that should be of benefit to some of the residents of my riding.

We know that the government is working hard to restore integrity to Ontario's social assistance program, and you've cited several examples: streamlining administration, improving accountability, and, for the first time in 11 very long years, there is an increase in assistance.

I know that in my riding, there are people who are on welfare and don't want to be. They want to get a job, but the journey is long and a difficult one. How is JobsNow going to help them make that long-term change from welfare to the workforce?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I applaud the member from Stoney Creek, who really took on this project. The fact is that JobsNow is being launched in Hamilton as one of six pilot sites,

along with Ottawa, Nipissing, Peel region, Durham region and Windsor. I'm very pleased to see the kind of support we've had in the Hamilton area.

The difference is this: Our current employment support programs last for six months. Our research tells us that we've got to get people into that job and retaining that job past the 12-month mark. What we've organized with JobsNow through WCG International—yes, a company that has had success in another province—which we went searching for to bring to Ontario, may I add.

We know that long-term support is the key. Most people, if they hit that first crisis in a new job position, end up finding themselves back on welfare. The key is that the supports continue for 18 months. That is what we believe will be the key to people in Hamilton and beyond having success at finding and retaining work.

Ms. Mossop: There are employment supports and social assistance already in place, but we did hear from your parliamentary assistant, my colleague Deb Matthews, in her report that there were some concerns about the work-for-welfare program that we inherited from the previous government. I need to know how JobsNow is going to improve on the areas that were left behind.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I can tell you that this member, because of the work we did in our caucus, understood the dismay we had when we realized that Ontario Works was not about working. As a matter of fact, only 13% of all people on welfare have any earnings whatsoever. It really was a public relations sham so that the public would believe that workfare was somehow about working. It wasn't.

What we are doing is moving from working for welfare to working for a living. What we are determined to do is prove that what was essentially missing was matching: finding the job and matching that job to the people on our rolls who want to work. I know that the member from Stoney Creek understands as well that the Dalton McGuinty government has a new attitude—far different from the last government's, I'll say. We expect dignity and fairness for people who are on welfare. We know that they want a job, and it's up to us to do what we need to do and be as creative as we need to be to find people work in this province.

RECYCLING PLANT

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Noxious odours from the Halton recycling plant in Newmarket are adversely affecting the health and quality of life of residents and working people in my riding. Local families have lost the enjoyment of their properties for themselves and their children. They face threats to their health and well-being and risk a decline in the value of their homes. The main RCMP detachment and other workers in the area are also being affected by the odours that are making their working conditions intolerable. Minister, what are you going to do about this serious situation?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): The Ministry of the Environment received a request from the mayor of Newmarket, and ministry staff did have an opportunity to meet with representatives of the town council on April 12. At that meeting, the ministry did commit to the following: a non-standard procedure with the Spills Action Centre, which will result in the dispatch of the environmental response person, will be put in place; we will enhance response by ministry staff when we receive complaints from people in that community; there was also a request for the trace atmospheric gas analyzer, our TAGA unit, a portable air monitor that will serve this particular situation; there will be regular attendance by ministry district staff on a liaison committee that has been established as a result of this particular circumstance; and the ministry will update staff at future council meetings about the progress on this particular issue.

Mrs. Munro: I've met with many constituents, and they are very concerned about the need for immediate action. I spoke to them after the April 12 meeting. Their concern is that they're not seeing the kind of progress they believe the ministry should undertake, so of course they are looking for answers. Among those is the concern about whether this plant can in fact meet the kinds of demands that are necessary. Minister, when are you going to consider closing the plant?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: In fairness, I think it's appropriate that the ministry work with the owner of the facility to see what can be done to mitigate these very serious issues. The ministry has also committed to working with the community liaison committee so that they have a person they can contact with whom to share their concerns. As a result of the communication that has already taken place, they have directed the company to remove wood waste from outdoor storage, repair the biofilter at the facility, complete permanent enclosure for the vertical composting units, and submit outstanding reports required by the certificate of approval. I think it's appropriate, when dealing with these sorts of issues, that we take a progressive approach, deal with the concerns that have come from people in the community, and work with the company to see how they can be mitigated reasonably and to the satisfaction of people in the area.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Last week, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives outlined an alternative budget that would address your social deficit in Ontario. They provided your government with sound ideas to fulfill your election promise to build thousands of affordable housing units, including 6,600 units of supportive housing that you and your government promised to groups like the Dream Team. The Dream Team came here today to find out exactly what you're doing.

You can't be proud of your plan to provide a measly 935 units of affordable rental housing in Toronto when

73,000 people sit on the social housing waiting list. You can't be proud of a couple of hundred condominiums that you promised to build as an answer to the crisis.

Minister, the Centre for Policy Alternatives has an idea. Will you pony up the provincial share, provide rent supplements and supportive housing, and build the affordable rental stock that this province needs and not the condominiums you're promising?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I would certainly agree with the member if the facts he presented are correct.

Eight billion dollars in new taxes is not innovative or creative in any way. In fact, we've had other individuals talk about our record on delivering affordable housing; for example, Heather DeBruyn, executive director of the Elgin branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. I quote: "These new dollars will allow us to reduce our waiting lists for affordable housing as well as provide support within our community."

That's in addition to the over 3,600 units of affordable housing that we have announced, that we are funding and that we have made groundbreakings on. It is by far the single largest affordable housing expansion in a decade, and I am incredibly proud of it.

In the supplementary I will outline in detail for the member opposite the very exciting things that are happening in this province from one end to the other.

1450

Mr. Prue: Perhaps in the supplementary, you can talk about the 18 units you've so far built. Minister, you're not answering my question, and I can't believe you're trying to fool us again with believing your claims of millions being poured into affordable housing. If that were true, you wouldn't have had the people from ISARC here last week telling you that you're not building any; you wouldn't have had the Dream Team come here today to say that there is no supportive housing for them. They came here and handed over 4,000 cards like these to Minister Smitherman. I don't know what's going to happen to those cards, but certainly there was no promise to them from that minister that anything was going to be done for them.

I'm asking you again—and the question is clear: Will your government's next budget make housing Ontario's homeless a priority by putting shovels in the ground and not simply making promise after promise that is never kept and never met?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I'm delighted to contrast the approach that our government has taken, as far as community mental health and affordable housing, with the cuts to community mental health that your government imposed when you were in government. I think, frankly, that Heather DeBruyn, the executive director of the Elgin branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association, is far more credible than the member opposite.

The member attended a groundbreaking ceremony in Scarborough with us on hundreds of units, so I don't think the member has much credibility. In fact, I have read the list of affordable housing: over \$75 million this

year alone in our budget and another \$85 million; 3,600 units of new, affordable housing—no thanks to the members opposite, I must say, but all thanks to Dalton McGuinty and to the resolve of this government to get on with the job—

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

Hon. Mr. Caplan: We owe this member no apology. In fact, if he really cared, he'd be helping us to deliver even more.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, yesterday in this House, some members of the Tory party claimed that the McGuinty government was cutting funding to municipalities by \$47 million.

Now, we both know that the Tory party accusing anyone else of giving municipalities the short end of the stick is nothing more than the pot calling the kettle black. We also both know that Roger Anderson, president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, said, “This reconciliation announcement shows that the Premier is listening to municipalities. The province’s decision to pay money owed to municipalities for 2003 and 2004 is good news for property taxpayers all over Ontario.”

Perhaps, Minister, you could take a minute and explain to Messrs. Tory and Flaherty and Hudak exactly how wrong they really are on this one.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I appreciate the question from my friend from Perth–Middlesex. I think what we need to remember is what dilemma we were trying to fix with the new partnership funding.

First of all, we were trying to repair the damage done primarily by downloading under the previous administration. If you look up “downloading” in the Canadian political dictionary, you will see the definition goes something like this: “The act of offloading the cost of services to a lower level of government, primarily practised by the Harris-Eves government, 1995-2003.” It’s right there in the dictionary.

The new partnership program is a key component of restoring equitable funding for public services in municipalities right across the province.

Mr. Wilkinson: Minister, as you know, I represent the riding of Perth–Middlesex, which includes my hometown of Stratford. The Tories had the nerve to get up yesterday and say that Stratford would go from \$2.8 million in funding last year to nothing this year. At the very least, their math is questionable. That’s something unparliamentary. I have actually asked whether Mr. Tory checks to make sure that his little, tiny Tory researchers have actually passed grade 8 math.

Again, Minister, you and I know that Stratford got \$2.3 million last year and will get the same amount this year, as well as almost \$1.2 million in one-time transitional funding. On top of this, Stratford will benefit from the gas tax, as well as the uploading of public health costs. Both of these sources of funding will increase in

the future, and this does not include the very welcome \$90,000 given to Stratford for fire equipment and training.

My question is this, Minister: Can you fill the Tories in on why this makes them nothing more than the pot calling the kettle black?

Hon. Mr Sorbara: The very short answer to my friend from Perth–Middlesex is, no, I can’t. The Tories will absolutely refuse to understand what is going on in the new Ontario municipal partnership fund. They refuse to understand it because systematically, over the course of eight and a half years, they downloaded the costs of public services to local governments. Since we have been elected we have legislated the provision of two cents per litre in gas tax to help municipalities with public transit. We are taking on more of the costs of public health. We are helping fire departments all over the province with the training necessary to make sure they have state-of-the-art facilities. I want to assure you that every single one of us is going to be going to the Stratford Festival when it opens later on this month.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I had a difficult time hearing the response of the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): I would like to hear the point of order.

Mr. Dunlop: I had a difficult time hearing her response, but I understand she insinuated that I was in support of the closure of the Huronia Regional Centre. That facility takes up 13 acres of—

The Speaker: Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: You raised a point of order. You want me to rule on it, don’t you? It is not a point of order.

OAKVILLE HOSPITAL

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): My question is for the Premier. On April 5, 2005, the Oakville town council sent you a resolution asking you to give priority to the construction of a new hospital, which has become necessary because of growth. They desperately need this new facility. At the same time, your Places to Grow legislation will, if passed, force Oakville’s continued rapid growth, already one of the fastest-growing communities in Canada. On the one hand, you are withholding infrastructure growth in the form of a hospital; on the other hand, you are forcing more residential growth in Oakville. Premier, does your left hand know what your right hand is doing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister for Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): First of all, in accordance with the town of Oakville, we have designated midtown Oakville as the centre for what we call an urban growth centre, which would be a site for more intense services. In fact, Oak-

ville's own official plan calls for significant growth. We've worked with the regional planning commissioners in Halton region. They agree with the figures we have come up with, which are publicly posted on our Web site at PIR—I hope the member will take a look at it—as far as household, employment and population distribution are concerned. So we are completely in accordance with Oakville.

Regarding the hospital site, you should not be lecturing anybody here. Your government left a complete mess as far as hospital capital goes in this province. You went out and made cheque presentations to hospital community after community, without any money to pay for it. We are cleaning up the mess that this member and his government left, and we will do so as quickly as we possibly can, complicated by the fact that you left us—

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

Mr. Chudleigh: It's always nice to hear the bluster from the minister.

I point out that the land available for this hospital was transferred from Management Board to the town of Oakville, or was almost transferred. Not a thing has happened in the past two years under your administration. This hospital had proceeded down the road to where it was about a year and half away from construction, and since your election to government in 2003 nothing has happened for the progress of that hospital.

It sounds like Oakville is not going to get their hospital, but they're going to continue to have that high growth. The people of Oakville have a severe gap between their rapid growth and their lack of medical facilities. Are you going to redress that?

1500

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I can inform the member that in fact this government did transfer to the town of Oakville a 50-acre parcel of land for the construction of a new hospital.

I can tell you that we are working as fast as we can to remediate the mess that your government left in relation to health care. You were very quick to close hospitals but you weren't very quick to invest in them. You were very fast to make cheque presentations but you weren't very fast to make sure the money was in the bank. I've got to tell you, with 1.7 billion new hospital dollars—\$700 million more than your government had in place in your infamous Magna budget—our government has done considerably more than you even dreamed of.

I think the member should get a reality check. The lands have been transferred. We're dealing with the backlog. We're dealing with the chronic funding problems that this member and his government left. It's a much brighter future for Oakville and for all communities across Ontario because of the actions of this Premier and this government.

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Premier. The Ontario Human Rights

Tribunal's hearing on transsexual people's right to sex reassignment surgery has just concluded. Your government forced this hearing because your Minister of Health broke his promise to the community to restore funding for the medical procedure last spring, a decision that puts into question your government's commitment to fight for the rights of individuals who face extreme discrimination on a daily basis.

Members of the transsexual community are here today. They want to know where you stand. Premier, do you view sex reassignment surgery as a medically necessary procedure?

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

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I thank the member for her question. I hope it's fair to say that on the issue of discrimination and equality, the member and I agree more than disagree on issues. This is a particularly difficult one.

The member said in her press release that sex reassignment surgery "is not a casual decision for either the individual or the health care team involved," and I agree. I respect and acknowledge that. The issue that's before the tribunal is what OHIP will cover and what it will not cover. The submissions have been made before the tribunal, and it is now almost complete. We'll let the tribunal do their work and then take a good look at the decision.

Ms. Churley: Premier, when the Tories cut funding, transsexual individuals lost access to health care that had been recognized as a medical procedure in Ontario since 1969 and continues to be funded in other provinces such as Alberta, BC etc. The impact of that decision has been particularly devastating for individuals who were undergoing related procedures at the time. Their lives have been in limbo ever since.

Martine Stonehouse, one of these individuals, is here today. She has expressly written to you, Premier, calling on you to recognize that sex reassignment surgery is a medically necessary procedure and is not a casual decision made by individuals and the health care professionals involved. I will send over a copy of her third letter to you.

I ask you, if the tribunal rules in favour of reinstating funding, will you ensure that your government respects the ruling and reinstate the funding immediately after that ruling?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I refer the supplementary to the Premier.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to be very, very direct to the member's question: Yes.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. On April 12 of this year, your ministry's environmental SWAT team issued provincial officer orders to three

industrial facilities in the Sarnia area. As the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, I recall that in early 2004 this government sent the environmental SWAT teams into the Sarnia area to inspect industrial facilities after we had a series of spills into the St. Clair River that impacted on many of my constituents.

Minister, my constituents would like to know if these latest orders bring to an end the inspections initiative, and could you update the members of this assembly, my constituents and the people of Ontario on the results of those inspections?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): Yes; in fact, it did take almost a year for the SWAT team to complete its assignment in the Sarnia area. They inspected 34 industrial facilities, and 32 of those facilities have been issued provincial officers' orders. These orders require facilities to address concerns like spill containment, the storage of chemicals, controlling air emissions, waste management practices, equipment calibration and the maintenance of their records.

Also, SWAT team officers will periodically visit those facilities in the Sarnia area that have been served orders to ensure that the company is following up on the orders that were issued. Staff at the ministry office in Sarnia will, as well, work with our industry partners to assist them to achieve what we expect of them through their certificates of approval.

Mrs. Van Bommel: I know that people in the down-river communities, such as Wallaceburg and Walpole Island, as well as the citizens of Sarnia–Lambton are pleased that the government has taken this definitive action.

Minister, moving forward from this point, what more will this government be doing to ensure that the environment and human health are better protected from spills from industrial facilities in the Sarnia area and, for that matter, all across Ontario?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the honourable member for the good work she provided to the province as a member of the industrial pollution action team, which I established to provide the government—

Applause.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: She did a fine job. That team has provided the government with recommendations that focus particularly on the health and well-being of people not only in that community but across Ontario.

I'm very happy to say that we are looking at those recommendations to develop a plan that will shift the focus from just managing spills to preventing spills. A couple of things have happened to date: Number one, our government was instrumental in having the federal government remove that ability for companies to deduct fines for such events from their income tax. The second very significant item is that this government has introduced Bill 133, which is a penalties legislation that, if passed, will ensure that companies will have spills prevention plans in place.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery two members of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, Australia. They are Mr. Allan Shearan and Mr. Russell Turner. Please join me in welcoming them to the Legislature.

Mr. Mike Colle (Eglinton–Lawrence): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd also mention that Mr. Paul Nanoff, the father of page Alexandre Nanoff from Eglinton–Lawrence, is here. I'd like to welcome him to the gallery.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition signed by the good citizens of Cambridge directed to the Parliament of Ontario that's headed "Preserve Our Seniors Drug Plan":

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government is considering cutting and diminishing the present program of necessary prescription drugs for Ontario seniors; and

"Whereas Ontario's seniors are presently struggling to maintain their health and homes against cost-of-living increases, including Ontario's new health tax, Ontario's increased hydro rates, increased municipal taxes and gasoline prices;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government of Ontario maintain the present program of providing prescription drugs for seniors."

I sign this on behalf of the citizens.

SEXUAL REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): I have a short petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the previous government removed OHIP funding for sexual reassignment surgery on October 1, 1998, without consultation with medical professionals or the trans-gendered community;

"Whereas Ontario is one of the only provinces in Canada that does not fund SRS;

"Whereas transsexual people in Ontario have the right to equality in health care;

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

"Reinstate OHIP funding for sexual reassignment surgery for transsexual individuals."

I will sign this petition, and I will also be delivering all these cards from the community, calling on the government to reinstate funding, to the Premier.

1510

WEARING OF HELMETS

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I'm pleased to present this petition:

"Whereas each year tragedy strikes cyclists, in-line skaters, skateboarders etc. who are involved in collisions on our roadways;

"Whereas many of these involve injury to the head;

"Whereas the cost of treating an individual with a severe head injury can be \$4 million to \$9 million over the course of their lifetime;

"Whereas wearing a certified helmet can prevent 85% of head injuries;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to swiftly pass Bill 129 and make it mandatory for all individuals to wear a certified helmet when cycling, in-line skating, skateboarding or using any other type of muscular-powered vehicle on Ontario's roadways."

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

WATERLOO–WELLINGTON
TRANSPORTATION ACTION PLAN

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

"Whereas the residents of Waterloo–Wellington need and deserve excellent roads and highways for their safe travel; and

"Whereas good transportation links are vital to the strength of our local economy, supporting job creation through the efficient delivery of our products to the North American marketplace; and

"Whereas transit services are essential to managing the future growth of our urban communities and have a relatively minimal impact on our natural environment; and

"Whereas Waterloo–Wellington MPP Ted Arnott has asked all municipalities in Waterloo–Wellington to provide him with their top transportation priorities for the next five years and beyond, all of them responded, and their recommendations form the Waterloo–Wellington transportation action plan; and

"Whereas former Transportation Minister Frank Klees responded quickly to MPP Ted Arnott's request for a meeting with the councillors and staff of Waterloo–Wellington's municipalities and listened to their recommendations; and

"Whereas the Waterloo–Wellington transportation action plan contains over 40 recommendations provided to MPP Ted Arnott by municipalities, and there is recurrent support for implementing the corridor study of Highway 7/8 between Kitchener and Stratford, a new four-lane Highway 7 from Kitchener to Guelph, assistance for Wellington county to rebuild Highway 24 from Guelph to Cambridge, a repaired and upgraded Highway 6 from Fergus to Mount Forest, Waterloo region's light

rail transit initiative, OSTAR funding for transportation-related projects and other projects;

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

"That the provincial government support Ted Arnott's Waterloo–Wellington transportation action plan and initiate the necessary studies and/or construction of the projects in it."

SENIOR CITIZENS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This is a small petition—not in terms of numbers but in terms of literature—which comes from the people of Hamilton, largely in the lower city, because that's where a great deal of nursing homes are.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"To immediately commit to action and funding to ensure the rights and protection for our senior citizens living in nursing homes and retirement homes in Ontario."

Mr. Speaker, I present this petition with pride. It will come down by way of Jessica. I thank you very much for the opportunity.

CREDIT VALLEY HOSPITAL

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly from Peter and Iris Orphanos and some of their neighbours. It's about improvements to the Credit Valley Hospital, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas some 20,000 people each year choose to make their home in Mississauga, and a Halton-Peel District Health Council capacity study stated that the Credit Valley Hospital should be operating 435 beds by now and 514 beds by 2016; and

"Whereas the Credit Valley Hospital bed count has remained constant at 365 beds since its opening in November 1985, even though some 4,800 babies are delivered each year at the Credit Valley Hospital in a facility designed to handle 2,700 births annually; and

"Whereas donors in Mississauga and the regional municipalities served by the Credit Valley Hospital have contributed more than \$41 million of a \$50-million fundraising objective, the most ambitious of any community hospital in the country, to support the construction of an expanded facility able to meet the needs of our community;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care undertake specific measures to ensure the allocation of capital funds for the construction of A and H block at the Credit Valley Hospital to ensure the ongoing acute care needs of the patients and families served by the hospital are met in a timely and professional manner, to reduce

wait times for patients in the hospital emergency department and to better serve patients in the community in Halton and Peel regions by reducing severe overcrowding in the labour and delivery suite.”

I agree with this petition. I thank all the folks on Drenkelly Court for sending it to me, and I'll send it down with Alexandre.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

The Speaker (Hon. Alvin Curling): The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the prompt recognition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the federal Income Tax Act at present has a minimum amount of medical expenses for which a taxpayer is entitled to claim a non-refundable income tax credit;

“Whereas the health and medical expenses of every citizen in the province of Ontario, great or small, affect their overall net income;

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government moved in their 2004 budget on May 18, 2004, to delist publicly funded medical services such as chiropractic services, optometry examinations and physiotherapy services;

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

“That the Income Tax Act remove the present minimum amount of medical expenses for which an Ontario taxpayer is entitled to claim a non-refundable income tax credit.”

I am pleased to endorse and sign this in support of my riding of Durham.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current government has proposed province-wide legislation that would ban smoking in public places; and

“Whereas the proposed legislation will also prohibit smoking in private, non-profit clubs such as Legion halls, navy clubs and related facilities; and

“Whereas these organizations have elected representatives that determine the rules and regulations that affect the membership of the individual club and facility; and

“Whereas by imposing smoke-free legislation on these clubs disregards the rights of these citizens and the original intentions of these clubs, especially with respect to our veterans;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly exempt Legion halls, navy clubs and other non-profit, private or veterans' clubs from government smoke-free legislation.”

I have signed this petition, and I want to thank Edward Beaven, who is the veterans' services officer of the Royal Canadian Legion, Tottenham, branch 329.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly from Florian and Eunice Bergeron, and it read as follows:

“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;

“Therefore be it 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 agree with this petition. I will affix my signature to it, and I thank Florian and Eunice Bergeron of Crickadorn Court in Meadowvale and all of their neighbours for having signed and sent it to me.

MOTORCYCLE INSURANCE

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): This petition is titled “Fix Motorcycle Insurance.”

“Whereas responsible motorcyclists have been hit with huge increases in insurance or are being denied coverage; and

“Whereas motorcycle insurance has increased over 40% in the past two years; and

“Whereas sales of motorcycles in Ontario have dropped over 7%; and

“Whereas many businesses and individuals in the motorcycle industry are suffering because of the loss of sales and decreased employment that high insurance rates are causing;

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

“That the Dalton McGuinty government take steps to make motorcycle insurance more affordable and ensure that motorcyclists are treated fairly and equitably by the insurance industry.”

I certainly affix my signature to this petition, and I will let the Speaker know that Friday the 13th is coming up next month.

1520

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I appreciate having two petitions in one day.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned,

"Share the concern of Ontario pharmacists that the government is considering changes to the drug program that could restrict access to some medications or force patients to pay more for their prescriptions, placing seniors, low-income families and many other Ontarians at risk;

"Recognize that these changes could affect the ability of pharmacists to continue to provide quality programs and services, decreasing Ontario's access to essential health care services; and

"Believe that pharmacists, as advocates for quality patient care, should have a greater role to play in advising the government when it considers changes that will affect the health of Ontarians;

"We hereby petition the government of Ontario:

"To work with Ontario pharmacists to prevent cut-backs to the drug program; and,

"To establish a process that brings pharmacists to the table to provide solutions that will protect patients and strengthen health care for all Ontarians."

I'm pleased, on behalf of the pharmacists of Ontario, the OPA, to sign this and endorse it. I encourage the Minister of Health to follow up on the recommendations.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

"Whereas the town of New Tecumseth, under the leadership of Mayor Mike MacEachern and former Mayor Larry Keogh, has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

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

"That the Minister of Culture and the Liberal government step in to ensure that the Banting homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come."

I agree with the petition and have signed it.

ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's my pleasure to rise today to assist my seatmate, Kim Craitor

from Niagara Falls, with this petition forwarded to him from a Niagara area support group. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"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 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 thank the parents from the Niagara area for sending in this petition. It's my pleasure to sign it and to ask Alex to carry it for me.

ONTARIO FARMERS

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant):

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

"Whereas the Rural Revolution believes that rural Ontario is in crisis due to lost property rights and a crushing regulatory burden, and ... demonstrating their resolve and determination at Queen's Park ... ;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to consider the issue of municipal jurisdiction brought forward by the Rural Revolution's resolutions to respect property and prosperity as follows:

"Resolution number 5: Municipal governments shall be constituted to take control and jurisdiction over matters that pertain to their constituents.

"Resolution number 9: All municipalities forced or coerced with amalgamations shall hold a binding referendum on de-amalgamation at the next general election."

I sign this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 4, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 92, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 / Projet de loi 92, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): Mr. Speaker, before I commence my debate, I would like personally to thank you for sitting in that chair today. Members of the Legislature may not be aware, but it is my turn to be there, and since this is the second time that the rotation has come through for my lead, it was not possible to do so without the kind co-operation of the Speaker. So I thank him very much for allowing me to make this speech here today.

This is an issue that, on the face of it, looks kind of simple. On the face of it, it looks like Ontario has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and everyone is going to feel—it's a feel-good thing, that we're going to consult, we're going to talk to you and we're not going to do anything we shouldn't be doing. Yet, there is so much in this bill that really cries out for answers, that cries out for dealing with municipalities in a different way.

There are two difficulties that we see with this bill at the outset. The first is that it does not cover all the municipalities of Ontario. There are some 465 municipalities in Ontario, and around 410 belong to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. That leaves out some 50, and chief and, I think, foremost amongst all of those that are not members would have to be the city of Toronto, Ontario's and Canada's largest city, which has chosen for reasons of its own not to belong to AMO.

The second problem we see with it is that AMO is not an elected organization. It is an organization which is sort of an amalgamation, if you want to put it that way, or an association of various municipalities—some very large, some very small—that band together, more in an education capacity than anything else. They pass resolutions—if you've ever been to one of their conferences or conventions, as I'm sure you have—intended to be passed down to other levels of government, primarily this. As to the feelings that the majority of members hold to be true, they are not always united; they are not always unanimous. As any organization that exists can tell you, it does not happen. They purport and, I think attempt, to try very hard to speak for the majority of their members. But it is not a truism to say that this is an organization that is unique and that does not speak for its constituent members on an individual basis. Therefore, if there is a dispute from one town to another, or a dispute within town functionings, then quite simply AMO is not the appropriate authority to speak for them.

We in the New Democratic Party support consultations between municipalities and the province on issues related to their governance. AMO is a good place to start. If you're going to talk in very broad terms about what needs to be done for municipalities in general, then I can't think of a better organization than that one to talk in broad terms of what affects all municipalities. But that isn't the reality of many of the day-to-day consultations with municipalities, which are individualistic. Whether it be the minister talking to the people of Kawartha Lakes about whether or not they can de-amalgamate, whether it's the minister or the finance minister talking to the peo-

ple of Hamilton as to whether they are going to get sufficient monies that they should be getting because of downloaded services, whether it's the minister or the Minister of Finance or the Premier talking to the mayor of Toronto about how much money is needed for the TTC, the majority of, I would put to you, very large-scale operations involving municipalities are done on a one-to-one basis; they are not done through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

The province has in the past, at least for the past eight or 10 years, been very good at dumping responsibility and services on to the backs of municipalities without necessary funds to deliver them. This bill that we have here today, Bill 92, talks about the consultation and the negotiation, but sadly—and I understand why—it does not deal with the wherewithal of providing the necessary funds to the municipalities to allow them to be self-sufficient.

1530

We have heard many times in this Legislature, including today in question period, answers from the government, taunting other members in this Legislature, “When are you going to get on board the government's plan to try to wrest some \$23 billion more from the federal government?” The municipalities can ask the same question—I am sure every one of them is asking the same question: “When can we expect the people of Ontario to get on board and in line with the mayors of the various cities and towns in making sure that the cities and towns that produce the wealth in Ontario get their fair share back from the provincial government?”

I cannot speak for all cities and towns, and I don't know how many have done the exercise, but the city of Toronto estimates—using almost identical research and data that the Premier touts in the \$23-billion scenario. They've done their own, which concludes that the people of the city of Toronto give \$11 billion more in taxes and government monies than they get back in services from the province and the federal government. If we have a right in Ontario to say that Confederation is not working—at least in this regard, as far as the people of Ontario go—then I think it behooves us to listen to the municipalities who are saying that the selfsame thing is happening in the relationship between their taxpayers and how much money is flowing or not flowing back from the province and the federal government. In regard to Toronto alone, that is some \$11 billion. If we believe in the justice and the justness of our own cause, we must believe in the justice and the justness of their cause, which is almost identical.

The downloading, as I said, happened for most of the last eight to 10 years. I am not for a moment suggesting that the government opposite is responsible for that. The responsibility lies elsewhere, in a past government or governments. You have inherited what I would suggest to you has been a bit of a mess in terms of the relationship between the cities and towns of Ontario and this province.

If you look for a moment at some of the largest cities in Ontario, those that are over 200,000 people, it's quite a

small list in Ontario. I have the list here of what those largest cities are. There is, of course, Toronto, followed by Ottawa, Mississauga, Hamilton, London, Brampton, Markham and Windsor. All other cities in Ontario are fewer than 200,000 people. We only have eight of them that are large and probably produce a great deal of the wealth of this province.

We see what is happening in these large cities. We see that the city of Toronto had a budget shortfall of \$119 million for this fiscal year, and that the province came along and allowed an increase in business taxes worth \$27 million and an additional \$45 million, leaving a shortfall of some \$47 million, which the taxpayers of the city of Toronto have had to pick up in order to sustain this city. We see that the city of Hamilton had a \$51-million budget shortfall because of downloading this year. After \$15.1 million in provincial funding found its way to that city through the infusion from the government, they are still left with a \$35.9-million shortfall, which undoubtedly will lead and has led to increased taxation.

I have to say, we know that the money was not sufficient. We know that the cities are starting to hurt in some very real ways. This bill will not do what is necessary to redress what has to be the chief problem that cities are facing. This is the reality of municipal governments that exist today, and we have a bill here which purports to try to sit down and talk a little more. But I would suggest that what the cities need, and certainly what the mayors of the cities are telling us they need, are additional powers, including, but not limited to, powers to obtain additional funds, and they need Queen's Park to have a hands-off approach in a lot of areas that, quite frankly, I don't believe serves us any good to get involved in. I'm going to get into that a little later.

The Liberals claim they do things differently from the Conservatives and there is a new municipal partnership fund. We heard a lot about that today in question period. We had a number of questions that were put forward by the official opposition. I believe there was even one small statement contained in a question from the New Democrats here today.

Various cities and municipalities have come forward to say, however, or at least have made public statements to the effect that they are going to be worse off under this program. I heard the finance minister today try to assuage those fears. I heard him saying today that there are plans to make sure that the cities and towns are not going to find themselves with even less money. But I think it's clear for the record, from the statements made by the city of Peterborough, various municipalities in the Niagara region and some in the north, such as the township of Fauquier-Strickland, that they are going to be in much worse circumstances.

In almost every case the municipalities are asking for money, not for dialogue, yet what this bill is going to do is talk about dialogue. With whom is that dialogue going to take place? It is going to take place with the association of municipalities. This is not a government. This is not like the negotiations of the Premier with the Prime

Minister or the Premier and the pseudo-Prime Minister, who wishes he was Prime Minister and who may call and force an election. This is not a government body; it is a group of municipalities that are bound together, and I don't see how the negotiations can possibly take effect.

AMO must represent all municipalities that choose to belong to it, and, as I told you, there are some 410, including some of Canada's and Ontario's largest cities, but the majority of its 400 members are from small-town Ontario. I tried to do some research to find out which was the smallest member of AMO, one that participates, one that sends people to the AMO conference, one that is a fully functioning member, and I think I found it. My apologies if there is a smaller one—

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): East York.

Mr. Prue: No, the smallest wouldn't be East York. East York was bigger than Pickering, by the way, Mr. Member, and still is. The smallest one I could find was Burpee and Mills township on the island of Manitoulin. It had a population in 2001 of 362 people and a population in 1996 of 368 people. The sad reality is that they've actually lost six people in the five-year period between 1996 and 2001. But in terms of square kilometres, it is a large municipality, covering some 218.49 square kilometres. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario must, under its bylaws and constitution, give the same credibility to the municipality of Burpee and Mills as it does to the city of Toronto, the city of Ottawa, the city of Hamilton, the city of London, the city of Windsor.

This is a difficulty. I don't know how this government can expect to negotiate with AMO, which is a body that cannot make decisions or enforce its rules between municipalities, that tries to do things on consensus when it must deal with some of the very small and rural municipalities, such as the one I've cited, and some very large ones like Hamilton or Ottawa or, formerly, like Toronto.

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This bill purports to give powers to facilitate one municipal voice in the memorandum of understanding. I question what the government will do if approached by individual municipalities on issues. You can't send them to AMO, and this seems to me to be at the crux of the problem and the dilemma that this government has had.

I'd like to cite two very clear examples. The first one is what is happening today in the regional municipality of Peel. The minister stood up here last week and announced that he had a new plan for the people of Peel, a plan which has been, I think, severely castigated by the mayor of the city of Brampton.

His plan is to increase the size of the regional municipality of Peel by three members, giving two more members to the constituency in Mississauga and one more member to the constituency in Brampton. This runs diametrically opposed to what his own government study said. It runs diametrically opposed to what Justice Arthurs, I believe his name was, had to say in his ruling. The justice was appointed by the Minister of Finance and brought down a long-awaited report suggesting that it

was Brampton, not Mississauga, that was underrepresented, and suggesting that the solution to the dilemma that Peel was finding itself in was to give five more members to Brampton and one to Mississauga.

The minister chose to ignore that very specific advice, but in doing so and coming up with his own plan, he also ran exactly contrary to what he has said in this particular bill. This particular bill says that there is going to be dialogue and that the dialogue is going to be facilitated through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Instead of doing that, the minister has chosen to unilaterally make a decision contrary to the best advice he was given by the learned judge, contrary to the best advice he was given by the municipalities themselves, and contrary, I would suggest, to the way things have been done in Peel and in other regional municipalities for a number of years. Where there have been disputes in the past between one municipality and another, even close municipalities like Mississauga and Brampton and Caledon, this was resolved at the regional government level. There was a committee struck. There was an opportunity for all sides to be heard. The committee was supposed to make a recommendation. The Ontario government was supposed to act on that recommendation. None of this has been done in the case of Peel this time, and Mayor Fennell is understandably quite exercised over what has happened and what continues to happen.

I had a very short conversation with her today, because I was going to be making this speech and I wanted to know precisely what her feeling was. She said that there had been no meeting and continues to be no meeting in the region of Peel. A facilitator was brought in, as I said, named by the Minister of Finance. There was a news blackout imposed so that no one could talk about it until the facilitator's solution was made. Then, when it was introduced and Brampton seemed, for at least an hour or two, to be kind of happy with the results, the next thing she knew, without any consultation whatsoever with the government, and contrary to the best advice she had been given by MPPs on the government side of the House who represent the Brampton area, a decision was unilaterally imposed upon her and the people of Brampton. The minister did not even seem to want to consult with them—the same way, I would suggest, that he did not want to talk to or consult with the people of Kawartha Lakes.

It's all well and good to say that you have a consultation document, and it's all well and good to say that you want to consult with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, but when it comes right down to dealing with an individual municipality, I'm afraid that just doesn't work. We have the very sad case of the people of Kawartha Lakes, a people who were led to believe by this government and by this minister and by this Premier that there was a real chance that democracy could come alive and work in their municipality. You see, a few years ago, under the previous administration, under the previous government, they were amalgamated against their will, like so many other municipalities. And,

like so many other municipalities, they were very upset at how they were treated. But in a unique turnabout, the then minister who represented that area—I'm trying to think of what his ministry was; it was Minister Hodgson, in any event—negotiated and said that—

Mr. McMeekin: Municipal affairs.

Mr. Prue: —the Minister of Municipal Affairs—he would undo that amalgamation if the people of Kawartha Lakes wanted to undo it. A deal was struck between that Minister of Municipal Affairs, the people of Kawartha Lakes and all sides of this House that if a referendum was held and the majority of people voted to de-amalgamate, knowing full well the costs of the de-amalgamation, the pros and cons of the de-amalgamation, it would be honoured.

Mr. McMeekin: Did they know that?

Mr. Prue: They knew it. They had all of those facts available to them. They knew it, and in the last municipal election they voted—not overwhelmingly, but by majority—to de-amalgamate.

It is a shame what happened to them following that, because this minister, who now purports to want to have a dialogue, refuses to have a dialogue with the people who democratically voted to de-amalgamate their city, one that the majority of them feels does not work in the best interests of the people who live there. They have continued to organize; they have continued to have meetings. They have continued to come up with alternatives, because now the minister says he needs alternatives to de-amalgamation because he doesn't believe that all of the constituent municipalities of that new city are able to function on their very own.

If this is what we can see in this bill, that there will be consultation with municipalities, we can see, in at least two very clear examples, one involving all of the people of the city of Kawartha Lakes, who took the bother and the time to go out and vote and to exercise their democratic franchise, that the minister was not and is not, and this government could care less about consultation with them or what their democratic wishes are.

On the other hand, if we look to the more recent example, that of Peel, and if we see what has happened there, we can see quite clearly that this government did not wish to consult and imposed a person to do a study. When the study came out and the government didn't like what it said, it ignored it and unilaterally imposed its own findings upon the people of that region.

It is no wonder that politicians at the municipal level are skeptical of this bill. Even though the bill purports to do the right things, it quite frankly does not do so. No one will believe that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario is going to have the kind of clout that has been denied to ordinary cities and towns.

The city of Toronto has sent a very clear message about AMO and to AMO. They have decided that AMO does not meet their interests. The 2.5 million people who live in the city of Toronto, in this new megacity of Canada, in this largest and most populous place, have decided that AMO does not work for them. If this

memorandum is signed, how is Toronto going to be dealt with? I think this is a reasonable question, and we have yet to have any reasonable answers to it. Is there going to be a separate deal for Toronto? I would think there would have to be one. But if there is a separate deal for Toronto, surely there would need to be separate deals for some of the other large cities in Ontario.

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Surely if there's a separate deal for Toronto, why wouldn't there be a separate deal for Ottawa? Ottawa has 774,072 people. Why wouldn't there be a separate deal for Mississauga? Mississauga has 613,000 people. Why not for Hamilton, at 490,000 people? Or for London, at 336,000 people? I don't know where the list ends there, but it keeps going down. Let me at least mention Brampton again, at 325,000 people and growing, probably as one of Canada's and Ontario's fastest-growing cities.

Toronto has chosen to withdraw. Toronto is now starting to talk to the province about not only going it alone, but they are arguing that their issues are unique and simply cannot be melted down into a composite, as proposed by this bill.

I'd like to turn to a particular section of the bill. If you'll bear with me for a second, I'd like to find it. It is section 3 of schedule C, while I'm looking here. There it is. Section 3 of schedule C talks about Ontario's role. It talks about how Ontario is going to deal with the federal government vis-à-vis its dealings with the cities. I ask the members present to just try to answer the question: How is this going to occur? It says: "Ontario recognizes that funds provided by Canada to Ontario under a program of financial assistance to municipalities should be applied exclusively to that program." So the federal government, as an example, wants to give gas tax—five cents per litre—back to the municipalities, but it is Ontario's role under this to determine how it should be applied exclusively to the program.

We have seen the difficulties that this has encountered. We have seen the petitions in this House over the last couple of weeks, where large municipalities like Toronto are quite clear, possibly like Ottawa and Hamilton, that they can use that money for transit within the municipality. But we have also seen small municipalities and rural municipalities that do not have transit systems or have very rudimentary transit systems say that they would like to use the money instead for roads and for infrastructure, and that they feel very left out as to how that money is going to come about. This is the dilemma, as well, that AMO has. This is the dilemma they have, because they try to speak for all municipalities, and they simply cannot do so.

There is some discussion, because Toronto has chosen—and other large municipalities may choose—to drop out of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, that the government wants to deal with them independently. There are other groups, of course. There's the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario, known as LUMCO; there are groups that meet at the behest of Mayor McCallion in Mississauga. From time to time,

some of the large urban mayors meet from across Canada to discuss issues. But there is no organization that speaks for them, so we can only assume that those municipalities, and especially the large ones, that choose not to participate in AMO are going to have to go it alone. Toronto is seeking its own seat at the table; in fact, I believe that Mayor Miller says that he, and he alone, speaks for the city, and a group like AMO does not.

The government has promised a new City of Toronto Act, which I think should have been introduced simultaneously with this bill. If we are to know how that is going to affect the city of Toronto, we might have a better understanding of how this government's future relations will be with the cities of this province, but they have not done so. The negotiations continue day after day. There's sort of a news blackout. We are not hearing what is actually happening around the negotiation.

One can read the papers, though. You might dismiss as idle speculation what the newspapers are saying is going on inside these closed negotiations: whether or not the city of Toronto is going to have a super-mayor system, whether or not the city of Toronto is going to have a reduction from its 44 members of council or whether there's going to be a board of directors inside the city or not. But I would suggest to you that it's hardly idle speculation to see these musings in the press—if, indeed, they are musings—because what we have seen in the past during the hated amalgamation of the city of Toronto is that these same speculations found their way into the newspapers of the city and then subsequently found themselves on to the provincial Legislature floor in the terms of legislation, because these were trial balloons being floated by the government to see what the reaction of the people was.

The reaction was pretty swift, and it was pretty brutal. People in general did not support the forced amalgamation of their city. In fact, what we're seeing today is that these ideas about changing the City of Toronto Act and giving charter status are contingent somehow upon the city adopting a new electoral system. I think it's so much hokey—I hope that's a parliamentary word, Mr. Speaker—that is being floated around, as if Toronto's problems were somehow related to the fact that members of municipal council can speak up to five minutes on each issue, and that is somehow bringing Toronto into disrespect. That is not the issue. The issue, as I have said before, is that there is not enough money in our municipalities. If the negotiations are to take place, they need to take place between people in positions of power and influence, negotiating back and forth as to how the money is spent, how it is funnelled down or, conversely, how it is funnelled up. We need a charter for the city of Toronto. As a person who has lived within what is now the confines of this city for his entire life, I want to tell you that nothing speaks stronger than the need for this city to go its own way.

But when I say that, I also believe that we are entering a different phase, a different organization. This is not the Canada of 1867, when the Constitution and the British

North America Act were first passed and became the law of the land; when people lived in rural municipalities; when people didn't have much education; where it was impossible to travel back and forth to get to Ottawa or places of governance like Queen's Park; where it quite literally would take a week or two weeks for the member from Timmins or James Bay or Algoma to make his or her way down—I shouldn't say "her," because it was only "him" in those days—to make his way down to Toronto to argue in the Legislature and to bring the thoughts of the people of his region. Those days are gone. We live in an era of technology, where almost every member of this Legislature now has a BlackBerry. I can see that some of them are intent on working on their BlackBerry and passing e-mail messages back and forth with the push of a button. We live in a place where you can pick up the phone. Even if you have to travel, you can travel from the farthest end of this province to Toronto by plane in a few hours.

We have also, at the same time, seen a huge increase in the numbers of people who choose to live in cities. Whereas this was once a place of mines and mills, a place of many farmers, many people who lived off the land in the rural areas, this is increasingly an urban population in this province. This urban population has governance and governance structures that need to change and need to be strengthened.

The day is coming, I would suggest, that this government needs to sit down and grant charter status to our municipalities. That charter status will not involve simple negotiations through a third body like the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, but in fact will be direct and mature negotiations, one partner to another. I believe quite strongly that that is the way it needs to go. The municipalities have suffered for a number of years as downloading has taken its toll.

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We have seen that the once mighty city of Toronto—and Metropolitan Toronto—used to be the place people came to from all over the world to study as a form of governance that worked so well. There used to be visitors who came from Africa, Asia and Europe to study how well Toronto worked and how its governance structure was accessible to the people who lived here, how its politicians were plugged in, how its committees worked.

People don't come from all over the world to see how Toronto works today. They may come here for the restaurants, they may come here for the theatre, they may come here for the ambience or the bars or the night life or for 100 things that one can find in Toronto, but they no longer come here to see how this city and its governance work, because quite frankly it is broken. It is broken through the weighted-down problems it has with finance. It is broken because there is not direct dialogue and discussion between the mayor and council of this city and this province. Things have gone very badly askew.

We have a bill here, Bill 92, that is supported in part by people from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. I don't blame them for supporting this bill and I

don't blame them for saying that this bill is a good thing, because it gives them credibility in the eyes of their members and credibility in terms of themselves to say they are speaking on behalf of the municipalities, even though they don't speak on behalf of all of them, even though they don't speak on behalf of the biggest ones, and even though their consensus decision does not always do the right thing for large municipalities versus small ones, and vice versa, or for those that may be in conflict with each other.

I think this bill does very little. I don't want to say that I wouldn't support it, because I don't think it causes much harm, but the problems of the municipalities of Ontario are much greater than what is going to be remedied by this bill. I would suggest the government needs to do a lot more. To begin to do more:

(1) Do a charter for the larger cities.

(2) Sit down and negotiate with the cities on a mature basis. I would put first and foremost the problem that has developed in Peel, Mississauga, Caledon and Brampton. That is a problem that cannot and should not be resolved by the minister standing up in this House and simply announcing that he is unilaterally taking action, contrary to the wishes of at least two of the member municipalities and contrary to his own government's report.

(3) The minister needs to reverse his position on democracy. It is the people, I believe, who always know best. Whether the government opposite believes that the people of Kawartha Lakes know best or don't know best, they certainly have made a decision that they wish to de-amalgamate. No one questions the decision they made to send a member to this House from Kawartha Lakes, from Haliburton-Brock. No one questions that, but you question their other democratic principles that you agreed to recognize in the beginning. The fundamentals of democracy in the municipalities is the third thing that must be addressed, and the government must reverse itself.

If the government does those three things and then gives sufficient monies and wherewithal for the municipalities to do what they need to do in this downloaded and increasingly technological society, then perhaps this bill would be of some benefit.

The government has gone about it all wrong. Instead of dealing with this at the end, they have put it forward as a panacea. It is hardly a panacea. It is simply another tool that embraces consultation. Consultation does not produce what the cities of Ontario need.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much again for allowing me the opportunity to make this speech. I promise that after questions and comments I will hasten to the chair.

The Acting Speaker: You're very welcome.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I was listening very attentively to the submission by the member from Beaches-East York. Yes, indeed, he does bring quite a few perspectives, if I can call them that. I believe it's due to his long-standing career being associated with municipal politics. You can see that the experience speaks for itself. But let me add this: If we have to look, indeed, at

some of the shortcomings, then no one else, other than the opposition, should insist that this bill proceed to consultation, because only then can we make the bill better. I can appreciate what the member is saying.

Let me say one thing: We have a bill here which is on one page. It's a very short bill; it's one particular clause. It doesn't happen too often, but I would say that if there is a particular bill that should be microwaved, it should be this one here: one clause on one page.

Interjection.

Mr. Sergio: Yes, put it in the microwave, push the button, take it out and it's ready to go; it's done. But we are committed to public consultation. The opposition, I am sure, would like to see consultation on this bill. We have Ontario municipalities that have been asking for that. It was our commitment that we would be doing that, and this is what we are doing. So I would say, for the benefit of all involved, the various municipalities and cities, let's give them that opportunity to go and consult with them.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): The member for Beaches–East York made mention of Kawartha Lakes in his discussion of Bill 92 in the context of a piece of legislation that's actually a law that will require this provincial government to consult with the municipalities. This is demanded of them by the municipalities. Kawartha Lakes is an example of a lack of consultation. The municipality itself consulted with its residents and constituents through a referendum, and this government turned its back on that particular municipality and denied that referendum. I suggest we all stay tuned with respect to the movement for municipal restructuring in Kawartha Lakes, certainly Hamilton and Chatham–Kent.

The member for Beaches–East York made mention of the Ontario municipal partnership fund, a new name—not necessarily a new initiative—for a program presented by this government to replace what was established by the previous PC government: the community reinvestment fund, or CRF. The CRF was established by the previous government to assist municipalities—that was the goal—in funding services through what was referred to as the local services realignment process, which stemmed earlier on from the Who Does What Panel. The evidence is in, recently announced under this newly named Liberal program: 207 municipalities in the province of Ontario will see a reduction in provincial funding to support those very same social services they deal with.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's certainly my pleasure, for a couple of reasons, to make some comments on the lead debate by the critic in our party on this particular bill.

One is because I come from the municipal sector. Of course, so does the member from Beaches–East York, having been the mayor of that municipality prior to amalgamation. It was a city of about 114,000, he tells me. Coming from the city of Hamilton, also an amalgamated situation, I can assure you that his comments are not only appropriate but very wise, in particular because he has a

working knowledge of AMO and a working understanding of what's been happening on the municipal scene over the last several years—definitely.

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Also, I think his comments reflect the problem with this bill insofar as it purports to be a simple, non-threatening bill that simply talks about consultation, but what it really does is leave out a number of interests, a number of municipalities that have particular issues that are not met or addressed by the AMO body. I think he spent some time talking not only about that, but also about how ironic it is that some of those municipalities are not having a voice—they are in a similar situation as the McGuinty government in its complaints with the federal government—about the lack of funding to municipalities that this government refuses to address. Speaking from my own municipality's perspective, it's chronic underfunding in our budget, chronic underfunding in social housing, chronic underfunding in social assistance, chronic underfunding in infrastructure, chronic underfunding in transit.

Mr. Speaker, I've said it all. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for—help me.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge.

The Acting Speaker: Uxbridge. Thank you.

Mr. Arthurs: It's always a challenge, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to have fun leaving it to the Speaker to search through the notes on his desk, to check the seating plan and all the stuff that goes with that, but I appreciate that.

The Hamilton member was just making reference to her particular background in municipal government. I look around this chamber—although it's not quite full right now, it's close—and there are a great number of us who come from a municipal background of one sort or another. I think we come here from the municipal sector, having done work in that capacity for a constituency at a local level, and understand that there's also a role we can play in a broader context in establishing policy, or challenging the policy of the government of the day in opposition, as the case might be, but with a clear understanding as well that our role municipally encourages us to work in this environment because we want to keep that bridge. We want a bridge between the provincial activity and the municipal activity.

We understand the need for ongoing consultation and contact with our municipal partners, with our peers in many cases, particularly in this relatively straightforward piece of legislation, to entrench that consultation through an MOU that will enshrine it in legislation, that will say that, by law, we acknowledge and recognize the importance of ongoing consultation and contact, in this instance, primarily with a body that represents the municipal interests of a range of municipalities across the province. Even if not all municipalities are members, it certainly provides the breadth of membership, from the smallest municipalities, as was referenced in the earlier

leadoff speech, to among the largest at this point in time. It's unfortunate, in my view, that the largest municipalities have chosen at this point to remove themselves from AMO, but hopefully that will be corrected in the years ahead.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Beaches–East York has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Prue: I would like to thank the members from York West, Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant, Hamilton East and Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge for their comments.

To the member from York West, the bill itself is one paragraph. One would not deny that, except that attached to the bill is the memorandum of understanding from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and it is some 10 detailed pages. It is these 10 detailed pages from whence my comments came, because the 10 detailed pages deal with a great many areas: the respect for the jurisdiction, the commitment, the consultation, the responsibilities, the protocol, the co-operation, the place that meetings are held, when the memorandum is reviewed, and it goes on and on. That is the true subject, because the bill itself says only that it will be as per the memorandum of understanding.

The member from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant talked about the people of Kawartha Lakes and their organization, and they are not alone. There are other organizations, including quite an active one in the rural Hamilton area, around Aldershot and Dundas, that I think perhaps the member from that area is quite aware of as well.

The member from Hamilton East raised the irony about the lack of funding, and I don't think that's an irony. That is so well understood by municipal politicians. That is hardly an irony at all. Municipal politicians understand that they have to go, cap in hand, to the province each and every year, whether they come from a small municipality or a large one. There are not sufficient avenues for them to get and to have sufficient monies to look after their people unless they are lucky enough to be living in a growth area where new assessment takes care of that. If they're not, it simply cannot be done.

The member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge too was a mayor, and I agree that general consultations are important. That is the role of AMO, for general consultations, but it is the specific to which I tried to turn and how the specific has failed Toronto and Hamilton, the people of Kawartha Lakes and the people of Peel. That's what needs to be addressed.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Sergio: I want to give notice to the Speaker that I will be sharing the time allotted to our side with the wonderful member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, the best riding in all of southwestern Ontario, with the exclusion that some other members may be claiming the same riding.

We only have a few minutes to debate and to add to the debate on Bill 92. At the outset, let me say that Bill 92 was introduced almost a year ago and we're nowhere close to completing the debate, discussions, hearings,

consultation and giving the various municipalities what they were asking for.

June 2004 is when the bill was introduced. What does this particular bill seek to do? It's very simple. It is on one page. It is one clause, which is very explicit and seeks consultation on matters of mutual interest between the province and the various municipalities. You may say, "Why are you debating this if it is so simple, if it's something the various municipalities have been asking for and want?" Well, it is our process, first of all, to go through the normal routine, if you will. As I said before, it's been a year since we introduced the bill. It's gone through first reading, and now we are doing debate on second reading, and hopefully we can have the blessing of members on both sides of the House, saying, "It doesn't take very much to send it to the public out there in the various municipalities. Let's hear what they have to say."

The bill may not be what the opposition wants it to be. But isn't this the reason we are debating? We are saying, "Then let's send it for consultation and let's see what various municipalities have to say." I would hope that during that particular process, which is the only thing the bill is asking for, it will go ahead, and it will have the opposition and various municipalities saying, "Well, it's a good step, it's a good beginning, but we'd like to see something else." That is fine. But let's give the process its quick, expedient time, let's bring it back and then we can deal with it. Why are we doing this? Not only do we have this so-called memorandum of understanding between the province—the government—and the various municipalities; we have this memorandum of understanding between the province and AMO, which is the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. If members of the House say, "Well, you know, the memorandum of understanding does not go far enough, does not contain everything that we would like to see or that the municipalities would like to see," then let me repeat myself: Let's give this speedy passage and go to the various municipalities and to AMO and see what else they would like to see.

Let's not forget that this was one of our commitments during the past election campaign, when municipalities said, "We would like to see some changes." Do we know what some of those changes are? We may have an idea. We all have our own ideas about what some of those changes may be. But are they financial changes, taxation changes, boundary changes, election changes, if you will, composition changes to their own councils? What are those changes? I think we should find out. I think that if we go to the public, we will find out.

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Bill 92 does exactly that, nothing more. It says we are going to consult with the municipalities and then bring it back. Our government has taken the lead, giving the municipalities the opportunity to say, "We want to talk. We want to co-operate and see where changes are required and where changes are needed." I have to say that this government has been very friendly to local

municipalities when it came to their request. I have, if you will, to blow our own horn on this side of the House, because we have been so amenable to the requests of local municipalities—especially my own here in Toronto—to the point where our Premier, Mr. McGuinty, has said that maybe we should go one step further and involve the federal government in those areas of mutual responsibility, together with local municipalities. I think it's a great idea.

When there is full co-operation between the municipalities, the province and the federal government, things happen—things happen quicker; things happen better. Do you know what? Ultimately it is the goal of every government—in our case, the province of Ontario and our own municipalities—to seek that particular co-operation, because healthy co-operation provides for a healthy environment in negotiations and the health of the local municipalities and the province. When that happens, we have better communities, have more livable communities, safer communities. I am sure that is the aspiration of every member of this House. It doesn't matter where they come from in Ontario, it doesn't matter what political party, they all want the best for their communities. Who can argue against our constituents' aspirations that they live in harmonious, safer communities? It's our responsibility.

So I say to the members of the House, let's not negate that. As matter of fact, let's work with the government so we can indeed reach that goal, so we can provide more of those amenities for our local municipalities. Why should we go after the federal government? To make it a partner, if you will, in this particular process. I know that in the past we all said, when we were on different sides of the House, "The government says one thing and then they do another." I won't criticize or speak for the former government, but I can speak for this government. We have said that we want to consult local municipalities, we want to give them some of those powers, if you will, and make some of the changes that are better for them and better for us. Because if it's better for the local municipalities, it's better for our people and better for the people of Ontario. Don't we all have one taxpayer? We all do.

We have said that, and we want to maintain that promise. We want to go to the people of Ontario and say that we are here, through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Let's see where we can improve so we can do a better job and they can do a better job for the people of those municipalities.

That is my quest, that is my wish, that indeed we can move on. As I said before, it's a very simple bill with a very simple request. I don't want to dwell on some of the actions of past governments when they said, "They have been forcing this on us," even though we said something else. I'm not saying that this government is going to do something different, but let's at least give them a chance and say, "They promised that they are going to hear us, they're going to consult with us. We want to see if, indeed, they will provide something that we require." That's the aim of this bill.

Unless I was wrong, Mr. Speaker, I saw 20 minutes on the board. Am I correct? May I ask, on a point of order, Mr. Speaker, because I think I have taken my—oh, there we go. OK. Is the Clerk playing games with the clock today? Maybe not. I guess they are testing my attention.

Having said that, I know that the next speaker, my colleague from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, a wonderful former mayor, a mature municipal politician, wants to add to the bill, and he will have wonderful information to provide to the members of the House. I am going to end my remarks and pass to my colleague.

Mr. McMeekin: Speaking after my colleague is a little bit like dancing after Baryshnikov.

I believe, like so many others in this place, that it's the steady rain that nurtures, not the flash flood. That's an important perspective that we who have had the privilege of serving in municipal government understand.

I am one who has come from that background, having served as the youngest member of Hamilton city council for two terms when I was in my 20s and then being out of politics for a while and coming back as mayor of town of Flamborough, the only municipality, by the way, in all of Ontario that actually lowered local taxes six years in a row. I have checked that out.

It's important, because the past is really a prologue to our future. If we don't understand our past with the kind of sensitivity that we need, we're often doomed to repeat mistakes. Looking at the not-too-distant past, I can recall the provincial government, the previous government that brought in the Who Does What group, or the who-does-what-to-whom group. Talk about consultation. They went out and got the very best advice that could possibly be purchased. David Crombie chaired that group, as you may recall. It was a wonderfully talented group. They went out and got all this information together, put it into a report and then completely ignored it and made so many of the fundamental changes that have, if the truth be known, been the foundational underpinnings for much of the chaos that the previous government, in fairness, and the current government, have been struggling to correct.

We believe that policy should be directed by reason, supported by principle and designated to serve the greatest good. Understand, Speaker, that there are risks and costs to action, but the cost of action is far less than the risk of comfortable inaction. If we're to starve cynicism and build hope, we need to reflect back on that discussion we had when the Municipal Act was amended when we, then in opposition, spoke profusely about the importance of taking any memorandum of understanding and actually incorporating it into the legislation. We argued then, as I think my colleague appropriately pointed out, that to do anything less than that would be to trivialize the whole concept of dialogue.

1630

We also know that, in order to move ahead, we need to stop being so optophobic. Optophobia—

Mr. Arthurs: What is optophobia?

Mr. McMeekin: Optophobia is the fear of opening one's eyes. We need to understand what Aristotle used to say when—it's a true quote; I'm not making this up.

Mr. Sergio: Was he Greek?

Mr. McMeekin: He was Greek. The late, great Greek, Aristotle, said, "If you want to know if the shoe fits, you're best to ask the person who has to wear it, not the person who made it." Right? That's what consultation, that's what memoradums of understanding, that's what progressive legislation ought to look like in this place. I wonder how many great ideas get lost because we simply don't take the time to do the right thing, to just sit down and say, over a diet Pepsi or whatever, "What is it that's really troubling you? What can we do together? How can we partner? What's our shared sense of purpose? How can we dream and scheme to dare and to care and to share together, to build the kind of strong, healthy, vibrant, caring, compassionate communities that, on a good day, we all claim we want?"

I think a way to move in that direction is in fact by giving some substance, by an outward and visible expression of our desire to work together. I think there's no better way to do that than to fulfill the plea that we made when we were in opposition to roll the memorandum of understanding specifically into legislation. Had that been the case, we might very well have been in a position to more predictably and prudently plan a prelude to some of the issues that have happened.

I remember as mayor—I remember it well—having to cope with the situation where there was talk about amalgamation. Remember that? There was a promise made, and the promise made was that municipalities in Hamilton-Wentworth wouldn't be amalgamated without the consent of the people. I wouldn't be here today, ironically, if it weren't for the forced amalgamation, I suspect. But notwithstanding that historical footnote, that was a commitment that was made. You see, there was no memorandum of understanding, or whatever sense of understanding there was was completely discounted. I can remember the joy in the eyes of some of the municipal affairs bureaucrats when, as the mayor, I pleaded, "Please, please, don't do downloading and amalgamation and market value assessment all at the same time, because no one will know who to blame. No one will be accountable for anything." You know what? You could see the smiles creeping across their faces. That was all they needed to hear: No one would know who to blame.

You know what? We're sticking our necks out. Who is it—the guillotine operators?—who said, "The man who keeps his head when all about him are losing theirs"? We are sticking our necks out—I suspect a little bit like the turtle who moves ahead slowly by sticking his or her neck out—by indicating a willingness to work directly with municipalities. It isn't perfect, but we'll be forged in the fires of that partnership, that dialogue, that understanding, and we'll do that in the context of fulfilling our commitment to enshrine that in legislation, so that it is more easy, more prudent—

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): Easier.

Mr. McMeekin: Easier. Thank you, esteemed colleague. It would be easier to prudently and predictably plan the development of the caring communities that we all so desperately want to see in this province. It's time this government recognized it; I think all thoughtful members of this assembly do as well. We're for this. I would humbly urge all members of this Legislative Assembly to embrace this with the passion they might reserve for other kinds of activities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Questions and comments?

Mr. Barrett: The debate this afternoon is on the municipal consultations act. We hear phrases like Who Does What. That is something that has resurfaced under local service realignment and, more recently, the Ontario municipal partnership fund, as far as ensuring an adequate and fair transfer of funding between the two levels of government is concerned.

As I understand it, the expression before was "disentanglement." That was a word that came up under the David Peterson government. They initiated a paper, a disentanglement report. That was a means as well to try to sort out sources of revenue, to sort out expenditures, between the provincial and the municipal levels, whether it be property tax or sales tax, who gets what and who pays for what.

More recently, there was a Who Does What committee. I make mention of this because it was mentioned this afternoon. Much of their goal was to determine how we would take the cost of education off the property tax. That's certainly something I heard a call for from farmers in my area. In previous debate in this Legislature, we have been told that this approach to take the cost of education off land and off property was presented in the Fair Tax Commission, the Royal Commission on Learning and, more recently, as has been mentioned, the Who Does What committee.

Ms. Horwath: Both the member from York West and the member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot characterized this bill in their remarks, perhaps not specifically, as being a rather benign bill, one that merely talks about something as unharmed and non-problematic as consultation. On the surface of it, as you mentioned yourself, Mr. Speaker, in your own remarks earlier in the debate, you would think a one-paragraph bill is rather benign. It only talks about consultation, so that's perhaps benign too.

However, the reality is that the meat of the matter is in the memorandum of understanding. When you look through that, I think you have to recognize particularly who the memorandum is with and who that organization represents. From my perspective, that's what makes this not benign at all. In fact, it makes it quite troublesome.

I'm looking forward to having an opportunity to raise some of those issues and concerns when I take my time later on this afternoon, because what we recognize, what we realize is that it's not a homogeneous situation in Ontario. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario is not an organization that represents the interests, wills,

wishes, desires and realities of every single municipality across Ontario. Why? Not a single organization could ever do that because of the diversity that exists across this province. Cities, towns, rural areas and agricultural communities: All of these things are quite different.

From my perspective, this bill does a lot more than just benignly talk about consultation. It sets up an expectation that simply cannot be fulfilled—not if you're talking about the interests of all municipalities of Ontario. This bill does not accomplish that.

1640

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? This is a tough one. The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I know my riding has a long riding name and gives difficulty sometimes to the Speaker, so I appreciate your efforts. As a former municipal councillor in that particular riding, I wanted to speak about the way we in small communities and rural communities felt about the way we were treated by the province in former governments. We were defined as creatures of the province. I think we've moved a long way, as a government, away from that particular thing. We've been working hard to build better relationships with our municipalities, and I think it's been a long time since we've done this.

One of the things that have come about out of this memorandum of understanding is the opportunity for the AMO organization, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, to meet with our government. Those meetings are going on even now. They are not necessarily easy meetings. They are very difficult topics, but the fact is that we are trying to build a relationship with those municipalities. It's very important for municipalities to be able to speak with one voice, and they do that through AMO. AMO is made up of a lot of different organizations as well. One that I was involved in as a municipal councillor for a rural community was ROMA. There is also the Northern Ontario Municipal Association. We have LUMCO; we have OSUM; we have the eastern wardens and the western wardens. All of them give the opportunity to speak with one voice to the provincial government, through the organization of AMO. And the AMO memorandum of understanding is now clearly formalizing that relationship.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? Seeing none, the member has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Sergio: On behalf of my colleague, the wonderful former mayor from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot: wonderful comments from him. And the members from Hamilton East, Perth–Middlesex and Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant all made a contribution to the debate here today.

Let me say quickly that sometimes governments are called bullies. I have heard this particular name used in this House, on both sides of House, from time to time. If we are seeking this particular route in dealing with municipalities, it is because this is not our style of gov-

ernment. We kind of made a commitment, not a promise, that we would consult with municipalities on issues of extreme importance to both municipalities and the provincial government. So instead of confrontation, we have chosen the ways of co-operation, and that is the intent.

I want to laud Minister Gerretsen, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, for initiating, for leading, for taking up the role and saying, "There are many things that we have to discuss and debate, so let's consult. Let's get together." We are there. It's only a question of how fast, when we are going to get there, and when we are going to come back in the House. I don't want to dwell on the past, on who did what and when. We've had so many reports that I think now is now. We have to deal with the present. Municipalities are waiting. I'm saying, let's get moving, let's push this, let's approve second reading, and let's continue the consultation.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Barrett: I do welcome the opportunity for further debate on Bill 92 and the relationship between affairs municipal and consultation and the toing and froing of this particular government. I do wish to present some examples in my speech this afternoon—it does raise the question, and I have some examples, of whether this government truly believes in consultation or really understands what public consultation and the role of citizen participation in our democratic society is.

I would like to quote from the bill to kick off. This is An Act to amend the Municipal Act, and it holds that: "The province of Ontario endorses the principle of ongoing consultation between the province and municipalities in relation to matters of mutual interest and, consistent with this principle, the province shall consult with municipalities in accordance with a memorandum of understanding entered into between the province and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario."

I point out that this initiative was started by Chris Hodgson, a former municipal affairs minister in the previous government. To actually have to create a law at the request of the municipalities to ensure consultation suggests to me somewhat a lack of trust. Perhaps someone doesn't believe this government would actually consult with them, and hence they need a law for what I consider a forced dialogue.

Consultation is really what this amendment to the legislation is about, and it's the true meaning of consultation for this particular government that I would like to address today. While this government goes to great lengths to talk ad nauseam about its commitment to consultation, it runs a bit of a show. You could refer to it as a dog-and-pony show, in one sense. In reality, I'm concerned that this commitment to consultation would be about as thin as the paper it's written on. Real consultation is about giving all affected stakeholders a chance to have a say. Not only that, but real consultation is about listening to those you are consulting with; it's about considering their submissions for future action. This bill appears to further emphasize the Liberal

commitment to consultation, but history shows that this government's idea of consultation is more in the category of show-and-sham politics, if you will. I'm suggesting a modicum of sham and illusion. This is the same government that will again be trumpeting their dedication to the concept of consultation after they push the bill through.

For example, this is a government that cancelled the rural drainage program without any consultation. Then they changed their mind. There was a rural outcry. This government is known to change its mind.

This is the same government that introduced the guilty-until-proven-innocent spills bill legislation. Penalty-driven legislation was brought in without any consultation with those affected, no consultation with the very partners this government was supposed to be working with in the first place to prevent spills.

This is the same government that chose to claw back the CRF funding. CRF, the community reinvestment fund, now known as the Ontario municipal partnership fund, has been talked about considerably this week, not only during this debate but during question period. We know there are 207 municipalities that will see a reduction in provincial funding, money that was there and should be there this year, next year and in future years to support key social services. Many of those social services, as a result of the Who Does What exercise, now lie with municipalities. Overall, this fund, this so-called new deal being offered to the municipalities by the McGuinty Liberals, represents a reduction on average of 6.8%. However, in certain communities—I think of the tobacco town of Tillsonburg—the reduction amounts to 100%. Oxford county, a tobacco-producing county, is seeing a decrease of close to \$1 million under the CRF exercise; that is also a 100% reduction. These are municipalities that only two weeks ago were promised by this particular government that they would be receiving something on the order of \$15 million to be allocated through the community futures program to assist them to adjust their economies to the decline—in part government-initiated—in their tobacco-growing communities.

1650

I'm very concerned when I see this kind of shell game over the course of two weeks where, on one hand, \$15 million is announced for tobacco-growing communities like Tillsonburg and Oxford, and on the other hand; I inadvertently used the word "underhand." Actually, if you add up all the tobacco-growing communities, well over \$15 million is clawed back.

I mentioned Oxford and Tillsonburg. Other tobacco-growing communities—Norfolk county, Brant county and Elgin county. In Brant county, we see a decrease of 48% in local service realignment funding. Burford township—the Norfolk sand plain is an area where tobacco continues to dominate. They needed a share of that \$15 million. Brant county is seeing a reduction of \$2.9 million, a decrease of 48%.

Elgin county, the county of our Minister of Agriculture, would have been promised a share of the \$15

million in compensation money to assist their declining tobacco economy. Elgin county is seeing a decrease of 67.8% under the partnership fund announced by this government. So subtract \$4.48 million from Elgin county. Norfolk county is losing \$7.3 million.

This is the same government that, in my view, has literally forced frustrated farmers—not only tobacco farmers, but all farmers—and other rural residents out on to the highways. There was a reason the Elgin county farmers and the Brant, Oxford and Norfolk farmers went out on Highway 401 at Tillsonburg and Ingersoll this past winter. They showed up again at Prescott. They blocked the US border. They also blocked the Quebec border at the 401. Much of that was led by tractors from tobacco country, farmers living in municipalities who need assistance from the provincial government.

The farmers need assistance; the municipalities need assistance. There has been very little consultation locally with either the farmers or the municipalities on this tobacco issue. Perhaps this law would serve them well, would force this government to consult, because, truly, we do have rural municipalities, local governments in this province, that are dependent on assistance from Queen's Park. They're dependent on the maintenance of revenue neutrality between the provincial and municipal levels.

As I think of the frustrated rural residents, not only in my area—I attended a meeting last night in Barrie, hosted by cattlemen and corn producers. The guest speaker was Randy Hillier. There's a lot of frustration out there. Farmers, municipal politicians—a number of municipal politicians were present. The farmers were certainly inspired by Randy Hillier.

Interjection.

Mr. Barrett: Randy Hillier provided an awful lot of hope for my tobacco farmers. I spent a year and a half in this Legislature asking questions about where the Liberals' promised money was for my farmers, and I admit, I got nowhere with my questions to the Minister of Finance, nowhere with my questions to the Minister of Agriculture and nowhere with my questions to the Acting Premier of the day.

I went back to the farmers last fall and explained to them that this place, in my view, was dysfunctional and that there is no movement at all on either tobacco or any other agricultural issue. Only when those tractors, led by Randy Hillier, ended up on the 401 did we see action from this government. I thank the government for some of the things they have done in response to pressure from people like Randy Hillier, the Lanark Landowners' Association and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

Speaking of the frustration in rural Ontario and of rural residents, another group that is affiliated with the Rural Revolution and the Lanark Landowners' Association is VOCO, known as Voices of Central Ontario. If you go on the Web and just type "Rural Revolution" and "Lanark Landowners' Association" into Google, you can get the link to VOCO, Voices of Central Ontario. This is an organization that has come together for reasons of

municipal concern and concern with this government. They'll tell you that they were one of the first casualties in this government's commitment, I guess, to what they would consider—I shouldn't put words in their mouth; they're my words—to be a wishy-washy kind of Liberal-branded form of consultation.

Members of VOCO will tell you—in fact, Speaker, I think you presented at one of VOCO's consultation sessions a year ago or so at the Rockton Fairgrounds—that they are attempting to communicate to this government that putting Bill 92 forward—this is the same government that continues to ignore what VOCO considers the ultimate form of consultation: the practice of democratically-arrived-at decision-making through referendum. A referendum is certainly a time-honoured tradition. I know that, down our way, they have been held during municipal elections. I ask the members opposite who have indicated a bit of interest in it this afternoon to take a look at that VOCO Web site. Under their Web site you'll find it titled as, and I quote, “McGuinty Lie Number 201.” It goes on to quote the Premier as stating—

The Acting Speaker: I'm afraid you can't even quote someone else saying that word in here, OK? So I'd ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr. Barrett: I will withdraw it. It's just amazing what comes up on Web sites.

I will quote the Premier, however, and I will leave it to the House and the Speaker to determine whether there is any—I'd better not go there. I quote Premier McGuinty: “I have committed that a Liberal government will ensure a binding referendum is held to allow local citizens to determine whether or not to dismantle the amalgamated city.” I will emphasize the phrase “binding referendum.” Directly underneath that are written the words, “The referendum was held. The people voted yes to de-amalgamate. McGuinty's Liberals say no.”

Speaker, you can imagine what the people of VOCO have to say about this government's commitment to consultation. Actually, both you and I have heard what they had to say about this during our consultation with this particular group.

Now I'd like to go back a few years to an area near Lake Erie that's dear to my heart, where residents wanted their voices to be heard, through consultation, on forcing a de-amalgamation of their area. I ask your indulgence, if I could set the scene. This is a tale of two counties, the county of Haldimand and the county of Norfolk, a history that dates back some 155 years.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): Talk about Chatham–Kent.

Mr. Barrett: We could talk about Chatham–Kent. I don't know whether I have time.

Mr. McMeekin: Which your government ignored.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please. I don't remember the member from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant heckling to quite the extent when others were speaking. Please continue.

1700

Mr. Barrett: Speaker, I appreciate the comments and the heckling. I can't handle two at one time. I know there were comments about Chatham–Kent, and the other comments may have been about Hamilton—I know the member lives in the new Hamilton—two examples of amalgamation. Certainly, in Hamilton, we had that amalgamation structure happen there at exactly the same time as we had a de-amalgamation in Haldimand–Norfolk, courtesy of Mike Harris. Oftentimes when we talk about amalgamations, we forget about the very recent de-amalgamation down my way. But I will mention that there are residents from Hamilton whom I have been consulting with, and I've certainly been in touch with people from Chatham–Kent. I would ask the members of this government—maybe they're going to have to wait until they're legally bound to do this, but I would hope you would continue to speak with the residents of Chatham–Kent, who would like to see some changes. I hope you would speak with the people in the newly formed Hamilton. There may be a better way of doing things.

I had a chat with Milt Farrow on the weekend. Milt was attending a gymnastics competition in Caledonia. I had a very good chat about Hamilton. Milt Farrow was the consultant for Haldimand–Norfolk, but he also followed the Hamilton process very closely and had some very good ideas. I suggest that this government consult with Milt Farrow; our government did.

Interjection.

Mr. Barrett: I can't hear some of the heckling, but I'll continue on with some of my remarks, if I could interrupt.

The old Haldimand county and the old Norfolk county were neighbours. Things were fine. They were separately constituted municipally, and long had been economically viable. Haldimand county goes back to 1850 as far as its municipal incorporation goes; Norfolk, 1849. In fact, the original county of Norfolk was established in 1790. That's actually six years before my family on my mother's side arrived in Norfolk. So for more than 124 years, the two counties coexisted as two well-established and independent municipalities. They had a background rooted in earning a living from the land. They survived. They thrived by co-operating.

A decision was made about 30 years ago to merge the two counties. That went over like a lead balloon. There was consultation. I was part of that consultation exercise back at the time. I was working in the area at that time. Through consultation, we knew that 80% of the residents of Haldimand county and Norfolk county were opposed to a merger. They were opposed to being amalgamated. The government of the day consulted but did not listen. It took us 25 years.

There is hope for some of the people in Hamilton and in Chatham–Kent, there is hope for people in Kawartha Lakes, to consult with government, if government is willing to listen, whether they require a law to force them to listen or not. It took us 25 years, but things can change.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Horwath: It's a pleasure to make a few comments on the speech by the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. His comments began, I believe, with quite a critical look at this particular bill, Bill 92. I think his general gist was that he was not quite of the opinion that this bill would do what it purports to do, and that is to effectively consult with municipalities across Ontario. I would have to say that I concur with that particular sentiment. I look forward to making some more detailed comments in that regard in a few short minutes. However, I have to say that I really don't feel comfortable commenting on the issues he raised around his particular community and some of his own experiences, because obviously that's his purview and his experience.

I have to say, though, that from my own perspective, neither amalgamation nor downloading were smooth processes for the municipality I represent. I don't know that the efforts that were made by the previous government were ones that were particularly consultative. The unfortunate thing is that I don't see any change in Bill 92, because what it looks to do is to squeeze the consultation obligation, the consultative responsibility, into this window called AMO. Unfortunately, that will not address the concerns that are raised by other municipalities that are not necessarily in line with the position or the opinion of AMO, a majority of which is representative of smaller communities across the province and not of the medium-sized and larger communities like the one I come from, the city of Hamilton, and Toronto, Ottawa and those kinds of larger cities. That's the unfortunate reality of this bill.

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): It's wonderful to be able to stand up today and cite examples of where communication between cities, municipalities and the provincial government broke down and caused great injustice and ridiculous results.

The first example is with Steve Mahoney, a previous MPP in this House and the first housing minister federally appointed by Jean Chrétien. He actually had money to give away and came to the provincial government and said, "Would you please spend money on social housing?" Because of the inability to coordinate the municipalities and the province with the federal government, no money was spent by the previous government on this housing. That money went unspent, and today we have a huge backlog of social housing and issues.

There are other examples. As you all know, the region of Peel won an award for being the best-managed region in Ontario. Despite this extremely good management, the provincial government did not go to them and work with them on issues such as pooling and the cost of social services that they had downloaded to the region. As a result, there is a major imbalance in the Peel region, according to the Fair Share for Peel, whereby our services are underfunded by about 50% compared to any other part of Ontario, because it has not allowed for the fast growth. One would have thought that if the Tories were capable of good planning, they would plan for growth, not for failure, and yet they failed to do this in

consultation with the region of Peel and, of course, with our very famous mayor, Hazel McCallion.

It's wonderful today to mention these examples of the lack of good consultation between the province and the regions.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I'm pleased to rise to comment on the presentation of my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant. We feel in our caucus that we are lucky to have him work tirelessly for individuals who in many cases have no voice—the tobacco farmers, for instance. It's difficult to defend tobacco farming because of the ill effects and health reasons. It's not a popular subject. However, when the state imposes its will on individuals for the good of the whole, it always must be cognizant of the removal of the rights of those individuals. If need be, compensation should always be a consideration, and my good friend the member from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant has worked tirelessly on Ontario citizens who have lost part of their rights because of the imposition of laws in the province of Ontario.

1710

He has also worked so that this government and the prior government would consult in regard to many of the impositions that governments do make from time to time. Unfortunately, in this case, he has not been wholly successful because this government, I believe, has a reputation of not consulting. Certainly in the case of the bill presently before the House, it is plain to see that they have not consulted with the municipal officials before imposing this particular bill.

Mrs. Mitchell: It's certainly my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 92.

I must say that it is with a great deal of interest that I hear the speakers speak to Bill 92, with a specific comment to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant. I wonder, if the previous government had passed a bill like Bill 92, would the downloading list have gone on and on as it did?

Just so that everyone who is watching this late afternoon understands the scope of some of the downloading that happened from the previous government, it was ambulances, social services, roads, bridges, public health and the big one, amalgamations. I must say that when members of the House suddenly have what I would have to call a very slight case of amnesia about what happened in the past and how, I would be remiss if I did not stand up and jog the memories of what has happened and what we bring forward. So when I rise in my place to support Bill 92, I can't but ask myself and the viewers: Would, in fact, the previous government have passed a bill like Bill 92?

So I certainly do support Bill 92. I look forward to working with our municipal counterparts, because together we will build a stronger Ontario, and that is what the people of Ontario want for their province.

The Acting Speaker: The member has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Barrett: I do thank the members for their two-minute hits and some of their comments through heckling.

The word “amalgamation” comes up, and I would ask the members to please join me in attending some of these meetings and some of these conferences about de-amalgamation. I hear a chuckle from the member opposite; I don’t have time to name his riding. But just last year, I attended the conference at the Rockton Fairgrounds hosted by the Ontario local democracy de-amalgamation network. Issues of Hamilton were on the agenda, of course, as were Chatham–Kent and Kawartha Lakes.

The member from Cambridge may be interested. When I was driving south to that Saturday conference, I was coming down Highway 8 from Cambridge. I had a chance to view the road signs, and I took notes as I was driving. One of the first signs I passed—this was coming from Cambridge, entering what’s now called Hamilton—was a very large sign that said, “Welcome to the City of Hamilton.” I only went about half a mile and there was another sign that said, “Downtown Hamilton: 33 kilometres,” which is even more in miles. Then I saw a field that had five horses in it, and then there was a sign advertising the May 15 meeting at the Rockton Fairgrounds. Further down the road, I passed a flock of sheep—this is in Hamilton, the new Hamilton—and a field that had five horses in it. A little farther down the road there was a sign that said, “Bring back my plants that you stole, you jerk!” Now, this sign has nothing to do with what we are talking about here; I just thought it was kind of interesting. I thought I’d mention that.

This was miles away from the centre of Hamilton. You guys have an opportunity; you’re in government. Let’s fix it.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Horwath: I can’t start my debate without thanking the member from Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant and his wonderful description of the city that I come from, Hamilton.

Interestingly enough, I’ve had the opportunity to live in many parts of the city of Hamilton. I was raised in Stoney Creek and lived not too far away from the Highway 8 junction he’s talking about, in a place called Bullocks Corners, which I guess technically is in Flamborough, although I’m not positive.

Mr. McMeekin: What used to be Flamborough.

Ms. Horwath: What used to be Flamborough. I’m sorry.

Of course, now I spend much of my time in the downtown area and in Hamilton East, the riding I represent.

In preparing my remarks on Bill 92, I came across a quote that I thought I should take the time to share. I think it’s indicative of some of the concerns I have about Bill 92. I’ll talk about how it connects in a minute, but first let me quote to the people watching and the members of the Legislature this particular passage:

“Does anyone suppose that, in real life, answers to any of the great questions that worry us today are going to come out of homogeneous settlements?...

“But lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves.”

This is something that was written by a woman named Jane Jacobs, who is perhaps the most well-renowned author and commenter on urban issues in our society today and has written volumes and volumes on this topic. I raise it in contrast to the bill. There are three sections to the bill; it’s a very small bill. This is the whole thing; it fits on one page. It says in subsection 1(1), under the part that talks about consultation that, “the province shall consult with municipalities in accordance with a memorandum of understanding entered into between the province and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.” So not consulting with municipalities, full stop, but consulting with an association that is purporting to represent the interests of all municipalities in all communities across the province.

When Jane Jacobs talks about great questions worrying us today, that solutions are not going to come out of homogenous settlements, I would say that Bill 92 is the government’s attempt to settle some of the big issues that are facing communities across this province through the small homogeneous window of an organization called AMO.

Why is that a concern? It’s a concern because the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, an organization that I had the opportunity to participate in for a couple of annual conferences and where I had the time to meet some of the good people—and they are good people there. So any criticisms of the organization have nothing to do with the individuals there who work hard and the people who participate to try to make it a relevant organization. The problem is that AMO itself is not an elected body, per se. It doesn’t really have any power to represent anybody. There is no real authority that exists inside the body of AMO. There is no accountability, if you will. There is no way for anybody to make sure that this organization is actually doing what it says it’s going to do or what it says it is mandated to do. I’m not saying that it is or isn’t; I’m saying that there are no mechanisms, there’s no accountability, no way to ensure that that is happening.

The thing that gives me great difficulty with that is not just the principle, but the reality that as an organization, if you look at how Ontario is made up, if you look at the number of communities that make up Ontario, you will know that the diversity is extremely great, and that’s a very good thing. You have communities of every shape and size. Mr. Speaker, in your speech earlier on as the critic in this area for the New Democratic Party, which you and I both belong to, I think you indicated one community particularly, the smallest community in Ontario. But if you look at the list of Ontario communities, you will see that the range in size, in terms of population, is extremely significant. The range from the smallest to the largest is huge.

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There is also an issue around what each of these communities looks like. For example, the community of

Hamilton, the city of Hamilton, is quite diverse in and of itself in terms of the issues it is dealing with. It does deal with major urban issues very similar to the ones the city of Toronto has to deal with. But the vast majority of the land in the city of Hamilton is in fact agricultural land, so there are agricultural and rural issues that the city of Hamilton must deal with. There are also issues we deal with that are common across cities, towns and rural areas—in the city of Hamilton we deal with all of those things because we're that type of community—but we are not the same as any other community.

It's interesting, when you look at what's happening with this particular memorandum of understanding that is attached to the bill—I was looking through this, and I think it references the city of Toronto in the attachments here, but my understanding is that the city of Toronto is no longer even a member of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. I think the government needs to update its information, unless this is just old information I happened to come across myself.

One of the issues I'm really concerned about in regard to the AMO situation is that, in the context of the diversity of communities it represents, the vast majority, just by sheer numbers, are smaller communities. It's really apparent that the largest number of voices—it's just like it works in this Legislature. The government has the largest number of members. They're the government; their voice carries; their agenda goes forward. In AMO, it is not unlike what happens here: The largest number of voices have the greatest amount of steam and therefore carry the issues forward just on the basis of representation.

I did take the time to make a few telephone calls, knowing that I would be speaking in this debate this afternoon. I did speak to a couple of elected representatives in my home community. I heard considerable concern from them about this bill, based on some of the comments I've made already, based on the concern that, as a larger city, Hamilton's interests will not necessarily be taken up or be heard in the process of negotiation that's outlined in the memorandum. How do I know this? As I said, I did talk to some of the elected officials in the city of Hamilton, and they indicated to me that it's been a rather challenging experience, if I can put it politely, to have their concerns addressed within the structure of AMO, simply because of the things I've already mentioned in regard to the types of communities and the volume of communities that have a voice there that are not cities the size of Hamilton.

When I think about that, I get concerned: How do some of the larger cities like Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, London have a voice if they have similar concerns to my city in regard to their ability to be represented through Bill 92's process, this window of AMO? It seems to me that at this point their concerns still haven't been heard. Their concerns need to be addressed and likely will not be addressed in this new process. Just looking at where we are right now, we know that the concerns are not being addressed.

The consultation Hamilton needs to have with the government is one that speaks to the issues that face that community. They're not the same issues that face every community. They're not homogeneous issues, if you will, as Jane Jacobs describes it in the quote I mentioned earlier. They're issues that are specific to larger communities.

I raised that in my questions and comments opportunity a little earlier on when I was talking about the irony of the situation that municipalities find themselves in right now—municipalities like my own—where they are watching this government, the provincial Liberals, go after the federal Liberals because they don't think they're getting a fair deal in terms of the financing, and yet my very own community is having the same fight with the Liberals here in this Legislature because they're not getting a fair deal from their provincial government. It's quite interesting that that is happening. I call it ironic, and really it's outrageous; in fact it's completely outrageous. That's one of the things AMO is certainly not going to be able to address from that perspective, because not all communities are in that same boat.

I have to say that there are a number of things that communities the size of mine are dealing with—communities the size of Hamilton and others—that are not consistent and not the same as others in the AMO organization. For example, if Hamilton had its way, there would be things that need to be addressed, like the lack of affordable housing. In fact, there are a number of units that have been approved for affordable housing in my city. They are actually ready to be built. The approvals have been made, the zoning is in place, the partners are at the table, but what do I hear from the staff in Hamilton? I hear that the minister isn't delivering the funding. In fact, I've got organizations in Hamilton that are ready to tell the construction companies to get on the site, start doing the work, and damn the torpedoes, because it needs to be done and we need the housing units. They don't want to even wait for the minister's final approval because they're so fed up. They've been waiting for over a year for this approval. This is just one small matter that would make a huge difference if the minister could take the time to actually sign off on the federal agreement, which would then bring the funding forward and get those units built. But that's just one: affordable housing.

The city of Hamilton also has some serious transportation deficiencies, particularly in public transportation. Unfortunately, because of the problem with funding in the city of Hamilton, the lack of support from the provincial government and no sustainable way to deal with their budget shortfalls, the city council there has been having to make some not-so-positive decisions. What does that mean? It means that when the government of Ontario is not providing the appropriate resources to the cities, what gets cut? In Hamilton, everything gets cut. Trees don't get cut, so tree maintenance budgets get cut. That means that you can't keep an urban forest happening in a city like Hamilton, and that's an extremely important asset that the city needs. Public facilities, like

libraries and recreation services: Their budgets suffer. They have to reduce their hours. Again, the community's resources are depleted.

There are ongoing issues in Hamilton around support for second-stage housing. In fact, I've been trying like crazy to get the minister responsible to meet with me about second-stage housing in our community. In less than 30 days we're going to have about 28 beds shut down in transitional housing for women. Why? I have no idea why. I can't even get the minister to meet with me on that particular issue, and it's quite frustrating. These are the kinds of things on which cities like Hamilton need to consult with the government, and it's not going to happen through this body called AMO.

There are other major issues happening that I'm trying to deal with in the city of Hamilton; for example, the fact that security deposits are being charged on people who are late paying their hydro bills more than once in a 12-month period. I have huge complaints coming in about skyrocketing insurance rates. These are specifics that perhaps echo in the minds of some of these members that have something to do with their communities.

In terms of larger urban centres that have some history, there are also the major cutting-edge issues for cities, things like brownfields. Brownfields are a huge problem in places like Hamilton. Not every city or town or community across Ontario has that concern, has that problem. The ones that do heard a lot of talk by both federal Liberals and provincial Liberals about the brownfields issue, but we certainly haven't seen any walk to back up that talk. We certainly haven't seen any real addressing of that problem.

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In Hamilton, as well, there are the issues of the urban centre, of the need for more investment in our local infrastructure in the urban centre, and also on our waterfront, which is one of our jewels, if you will, that is going to help with our redevelopment over time. These are the things people in my city are very interested in. I can tell you, there are people who are sitting in this chamber right now who have an equal list of issues that are specific to their communities that need to be addressed. I can also tell you that those issues are not going to be addressed in any effective way through an amorphous body like AMO that, just by the way it functions, just by the way it is set up, isn't able to take on those issues.

If the government is hoping to use this Bill 92 and this memorandum of understanding as a way to streamline and manoeuvre things to be able to do whatever they want and wipe their hands of anything that looks like real consultation with communities across this province by saying, "Look, we've consulted with AMO," then I'm going to tell you that there are going to be a lot of disappointed communities and people around this province. Unfortunately, those are the kinds of comments and cautions that came from the elected officials I spoke to today from the city I represent.

Hamilton had a \$51-million budget shortfall again, and the provincial government bellied up after the city,

having to postpone its budget for about the third time and awaiting a response from the provincial government—the provincial government did come in with a minor adjustment or handout of about \$15 million, but the problem is that the last time this happened was about a year ago. There was a promise made by the government that this would be, first of all, a one-time payment because they were going to look at a way of achieving a sustainable solution to this problem, this problem being the problem of downloading and the problem that our city, Hamilton, has in terms of its ability to deal with the unfair downloading that took place.

Here we are a year later. There has been no sustainable solution. There is this other program the government has put forward to replace the community reinvestment fund. Unfortunately, it does little to reverse the crisis caused by the downloading situation, and unfortunately, none of us holds out much hope that it's the solution we were looking for.

Unless this government makes some real commitments to some kind of parallel process, some kind of other process that's going to deal with some of these bigger-picture issues that are facing cities across the province, we're in for big trouble, because these cities have the largest numbers of people living in them. They are the largest centres of population. They require specific solutions based on the various characteristics each of them has. The unfortunate reality is that Bill 92 is being touted as the solution, as the consultation opportunity the government is putting in place to talk to municipalities, and it's not going to be successful because there are not going to be the kinds of real solutions coming out of that dialogue.

Do I think dialogue is a wrong way to go? Absolutely not. Do I think consultation is appropriate? Absolutely; I do. But when you are putting forward something that narrows the consultation, that by definition cuts out a number of people in the process, that by mandate says, "This is the group we talk about and this is the forum at which we talk about it," then that raises some concern with me.

So I'm hoping the government will see its way to find other ways to consult with communities, to find other opportunities to make sure that the cities and towns across Ontario are addressed in an effective and appropriate way, because it's not a matter of homogeneous solutions by amorphous bodies that are not representative of the diversity of our province; it's a matter of rolling up your sleeves and working specifically one on one with our communities.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I have the pleasure tonight to stand up and speak in support of Bill 92. I believe it's very important, and I commend the minister for bringing it forward in order to maintain the good relationship between the province and the municipalities across Ontario.

We strongly believe, as the government of this province, that stronger communities lead to a stronger prov-

ince, a prosperous province. That's why our government has opened a consultation basis with our municipalities across the province, to maintain a good relationship, to maintain good education, good health care, and good, prosperous areas across this province.

I was listening carefully to the member from Hamilton East talking negatively about this approach. I wonder why, but anyway, it's her own opinion. But I tell you, we have a good relationship—I'm talking about London, Ontario. My colleagues Chris Bentley and Deb Matthews: We meet with our municipal mayor twice a year to address all the issues. Let me tell you, they're very happy with our government's approach because we're listening to them. We take their concerns to all the ministries to address their issues, and most of their concerns are being addressed and dealt with.

They were happy and honoured to receive \$13.1 million two weeks ago to help them deal with various issues concerning London. They commend our government and our leader of this government, Dalton McGuinty, for his opening a dialogue with the municipalities, for his openness in dealing with all the issues across the province, and also the accessibility of our ministers, to visit the municipalities, talk to the mayors and talk to the councillors to address all the issues: health, education, infrastructure.

That's why this approach was taken. I'm honoured to support this bill, and hopefully all the people in this place, all the members, will support it too.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member from—hold on, I've got to get it right—Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot.

Mr. McMeekin: The easy way to remember that is ADFA. You go Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, or, if you're in Aldershot, it's Aldershot and whatever fits.

I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes to comment—an unexpected couple of minutes, as it turns out, but notwithstanding, one to two minutes that I welcome.

The whole issue of dialogue is so fundamental to those things that, on a good day, we claim we would treasure here: to talk, to be partnering about the needs we have to move forward with building the strong, healthy, caring communities we all want: You can't do that if all you're doing is pointing fingers. You've got to be pointing direction. The way you point direction is by talking to one another about the kinds of things that have to happen.

I can tell you that in my beloved Hamilton—I was born and raised in the city of Hamilton, fell in love with another community called Flamborough and have tried over the years to respect and honour both—there are difficult challenges. I think the mayor, His Worship Larry De Ianni, appreciates, in ways he would describe much more eloquently than I can in this brief couple of moments, the favourable climate that has been created between a provincial government that actually cares to listen, is listening in order to learn and is learning in order to act. There's no sense in listening unless you're

going to learn from the listening, and no sense learning unless you're prepared to act.

It isn't perfect, as the member from Hamilton East knows, but it is one heck of a lot better than the climate we had not very long ago, I think she would agree.

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Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I'll be happy to support Bill 92. If Bill 92 passes, this proposed amendment would enshrine the principle that the province consult with municipalities on matters of mutual interest. What better thing to do?

We have a number of issues that must be addressed, both at the provincial and at the local level. Unfortunately, in the past, the two levels of government sometimes didn't seem to know what's happening on the other side. This bill would in fact promote that a more formal discussion take place and that spokespersons for the municipality be recognized. Of course, discussions can continue with any municipal politician, municipality or any other elected person to find out what the issues are in a specific area. But this bill would, as I said, make it a formal discussion and make sure that the issues are known to both levels.

I have discovered quite often, unfortunately, that what we do sometimes at the provincial level is not known at the municipal level and vice versa. That is why quite often we don't do what's most important for the people. Bill 92, in my opinion, would assist the province and the municipality to know better what the objectives are of both levels. Working together, we can achieve much more. I had that experience personally when I was first elected, when I brought together all the municipal politicians in the region of York with the three Liberal MPPs to understand what was important to all of us. Through that process, we did learn, and we are able to deliver better.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? Seeing none, the member from Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: I want to first thank the members who commented on my remarks. I have to say, if there's one thing that I think everybody would agree on, it's that consultation is definitely a valuable tool. The unfortunate problem we have is that Bill 92 doesn't go far enough in terms of its commitment to consultation, and it doesn't do that in a couple of ways.

It doesn't do that in that AMO, as an organization, is not an accountable organization in and of itself, so there's very little to assure anyone who is consulting with them that their position on any particular matter is reflective of the diversity of voices that participate at their various committees and tables. That's problematic on its own. The other piece that's problematic, and I think it's—I'm going to use that word again—ironic that members on the government side will say, "Well, you have to make a start somewhere." There's no doubt you do. But you don't make a start by automatically cutting out the formal dialogue with a number of different organizations, namely the municipalities across the province.

If I have trouble on the other hand, it's the concern I have that municipalities like my own—verified again by a discussion I had with a couple of elected officials today from the city of Hamilton, which reaffirmed the concern that AMO does not represent the issues that are on the top of their agenda, and a real nervousness from their perspective that this bill is going to mean that the government will not be consulting in any meaningful way on the unique issues that face municipalities like Hamilton, Toronto and others.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Martiniuk: It could be that I will be sharing my time with the member from Waterloo–Wellington and the member from York North. We are here debating Bill 92, which is exactly one page long. It is An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001, and first reading took place on June 8, 2004. I have difficulty remembering that far back. That's almost a year. The explanatory note says: "The bill provides that the province shall consult with municipalities on matters of mutual interest in accordance with a memorandum of understanding entered into between the province and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario." It's a nice, short bill, and of course the memorandum is somewhat longer. One of the intents of the bill is to seek further consultation between various levels of government and the exploration of problems between the governments and how we reach solutions.

Something happened in my riding that makes me think of the School of Architecture. Let me tell you about it, because I think that's a really good case of where parties came together with a mutual interest because of a need. Firstly, the school of architecture, which is famous in Canada and is located at the University of Waterloo, in the municipality of Waterloo, of course, has a branch office in Rome, Italy. It is a co-op school of architecture. When you're taking the degree course, you spend some time in Rome, Italy, a most attractive thought indeed. As a matter of fact, if I had known about this school when I was going to school, perhaps I would have ended up being an architect with my brother rather than going through law school. In any event, the school was very successful. It had, unfortunately, a great problem in that it was terribly overcrowded on the campus located on University Avenue in Waterloo. That need was there, and unfortunately, like everything, many needs at the university were met but that particular need for a new facility in the overcrowded school was not being met.

The story really starts with the dean of that school of architecture meeting with four individuals. Some had some interest in the University of Waterloo and some did not, but they were all Cambridge residents. The most prominent of those individuals with a connection to the University of Waterloo was Val O'Donovan. Mr. O'Donovan unfortunately is now deceased, but at that time he was the chair, I guess it would be, of the University of Waterloo. In any event, he was a public-spirited citizen and he did meet with other individuals from the city of Cambridge: Mr. John Wright, who was a prominent realtor in Cambridge; Jim Cassels, who at that

time worked for the company which I always think of as Angel Stone because they manufacture angel stone for North America, located in Cambridge; and Mr. Tom Watson, a local entrepreneur. Between the four of them, they approached David Johnson, who was the president of the university, and discussed with him the possibility of this school of architecture moving to Cambridge.

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The interesting part is that Cambridge's need—we know what the need of the school of architecture was, and of course that was also the need of the university: to provide more and larger premises to the school of architecture.

Cambridge's need—to start with, it has three downtowns, and that's a problem. Cambridge resulted from the amalgamation of Preston, Hespeler and Galt. When I moved to Cambridge some long time ago, I moved to what was then the town of Preston, and I still refer to myself on occasion as a Prestonian, although after that length of time I should be saying I come from Cambridge. I understand there are individuals from the city of Toronto who have a similar problem. They still come from Etobicoke, North York and, of course, East York, and so they should, because there's a sense of identity there that is precious, and we should be preserving it, even though mean governments at times impose amalgamations on us that we don't want. It happened to me, and I'm sure it has happened to others.

In any event, the problem in Cambridge is that, like any small city of just over 100,000, the downtowns are finding it more and more difficult to attract patrons to their retail stores. Cambridge has Highway 24, leading to the 401, the commerce river through Cambridge. We have the old commerce river, which is the Grand River, and the Speed River—they join at Cambridge; in Preston, as a matter of fact—but the 401 is the commerce river, and Highway 24 leads to it. Therefore—and all have seen it throughout North America—the street that leads to the major highway is complete with retail plazas, short-order restaurants, roadhouses and things of that kind, with signs that they tried to control but that have gotten out of control and unfortunately do not sometimes make a pretty picture.

In any event, it would seem that a good part of the comparative shopping in Cambridge has moved away from the three downtowns and ended up not just in Cambridge but in other plazas throughout Waterloo region—a region, by the way, approximately one hour's drive west of Toronto, and soon to have a half million souls. It also forms part of what we call the golden technological triangle with Waterloo region and Guelph.

In any event, the need is there, because we have a downtown that needs help. A school of architecture would inject young students. Also, I think being the location of a university does something for the prestige of any municipality. In Cambridge, there were no schools of higher learning, although just kitty-corner from Cambridge in the south part of Kitchener, which also is part of my riding, is Conestoga College, which is an excellent

community college in Ontario—as a matter of fact, I think it's the best, but I'm sure we can debate that at some other time.

So we have a need with a school that is going gang-busters, being very popular. We have a need, on the other hand, with a downtown which needs a boost. These four individuals—John Wright, Val O'Donovan, Jim Cassels and Tom Watson—approached the president of the University of Waterloo, David Johnson. He's quite a fine hockey player. As a matter of fact, when I was helping Mr. Lalonde with the Legiskaters, we invited Dave Johnson out one time, but he tells me his hockey days are over. I think he played for Harvard at one time. In any event, he's a fine gentleman. In a sense, though, he's a bureaucrat, and one would think he would want to preserve his bailiwick and keep everything in one nice little package. That's what I would have thought but, just to the contrary, he greeted the innovative idea from these four private citizens with open arms. He thought it was an excellent idea, and he worked with the board of directors and the dean of the university toward exploring how this could come about.

Here we get into the partnership. So we've got one partnership between the University of Waterloo and the school of architecture. We have another partnership between these four individuals who are public-spirited persons with no axe to grind. They're not in this for the buck; they're in this to assist Cambridge and the university. This all starts coming together.

The first place they approached was the city of Cambridge, because, first of all, they had to obtain a site. The question was whether they were going to build or whether they were going to use an older building, and they would need assistance and financial support, quite frankly. So the new partner comes in from the university, and now we have the city of Cambridge. I must say His Worship Doug Craig and the councillors leapt at the opportunity. They had the vision and the guts to put their money where their mouth was and say, "This is a worthwhile project for the city of Cambridge. This will benefit all the citizens of Cambridge." They started shelling out some money to back this project, and they got behind it.

I had been reading about this in the paper, but the next step, of course, was that they came banging on my door

to see if I could get some assistance from the Ontario government. We worked hard with the minister, Jim Flaherty, who was then in charge of the funding of projects of this kind. As a matter of fact, Minister Flaherty took the trouble to come down to examine the proposed site. At this stage, they had a proposed site right on the Grand Rivt to be somewhat more expensive than they could possibly handle. In any event, the minister personally came down to examine the site on behalf of SuperBuild.

After some time of due consideration, capital was set aside for this project. Of course, the next step was for these four individuals to approach the federal government. They did approach our local MP and obtained some. So now we've gone from four persons with an idea and the dean of the school of architecture of the University of Waterloo, to the board of directors of that university, to the president of the university, Mr. David Johnston, to the council of the city of Cambridge, to the province of Ontario, to the federal government.

But that's still not enough. The four of them now start—I did mention, Jim, that you personally came down to look at the project.

Interjection.

Mr. Martiniuk: It's a long drive all the way from Whitby, too; it surely is.

But it still takes more money—more than I've related to you up to now—so this group of four, the four horse-men of Cambridge, had to go to the public. All sorts of fundraising dinners and cocktail parties were held, and the people of Cambridge reacted magnificently. They came to the fore and raised sufficient monies.

By this stage, however, we had—

The Acting Speaker: Before you get to that stage, it is now 6 of the clock.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Very quickly, I know that my colleagues would like to share a very happy birthday to the member from Guelph-Wellington, Liz Sandals, today. Happy birthday.

The Acting Speaker: It is not a point of order, but many happy returns all the same.

It now being 6 of the clock, that this House is adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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