



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 19 October 2005

Mercredi 19 octobre 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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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 19 October 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 19 octobre 2005

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

DÉBAT SUR LE DISCOURS DU TRÔNE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 18, 2005, on the amendment to the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): Thank you, Speaker. I've got another 15 minutes.

I just wanted to welcome the citizens and the taxpayers who are watching this political program. We are all live. It's a quarter to 7. Good to be back, and good to have this opportunity to directly speak to the citizens of Ontario.

Just to encapsulate and do a brief review of what the member for Brant was saying yesterday, because he was delivering an attack on the Conservative Party, he said that the Conservative Party has a penchant or a predilection for privatization in the areas of health care and/or other areas. I couldn't help but be amused, because he made it appear as if only Tories have that predilection to give away taxpayers' pecunia to the private sector.

But the Liberals—ah, the Liberals are good at it too. They love to give my money and your money—what I call “pecunia”—away to the private sector more quickly than you can say “pecunia.” It's gone to the private sector, and they're doing it with everything, because our new minister—not new. The minister of infrastructure has promised to spend billions of dollars and give it away to the private sector with the claim that he is being innovative and someone who uses the taxpayers' money wisely.

When he used to attack the Tories for engaging in the P3s, private-public partnerships, they said, through McGuinty, that they would never, ever do the same. In opposition they said this. They get into government and no sooner do they take hold of that limousine than the tune changes. It's no longer private-public partnerships; it is now called “alternative financing procurement.” You see, merely changing the name allows the Liberals to say, “Ah, ah, ah, it's different. Private-public partnerships are private stuff that the Tories were engaged in, but alternative financing procurement is not the same; it's

different. It's not about giving your money away to the private sector. It's a Liberal innovative thing.” But it's all the same. Incomprehensible as the name might appear to you, it's the same blah, blah, blah: private-public partnership, alternative financing procurement. Tory P3s, Liberal alternative financing procurement: It's all the same blah, blah with a different name. It's all about giving our money to the private sector so that they can build hospitals, so that they can build schools.

In essence, when you involve—I say to you, good doctor, my friend who used to be here, that when you let them build, in order for them to make a profit it means you are taking public dollars away from what should be going into our health care system, away from what should be going into our educational system and giving the private sector the pecunia they so desperately want and need, and we're giving it away. We're paying for it.

I want to say to the public watching that the Liberals are no different in this matter. They want to adopt a new mechanism of financing hospitals or educational systems or sewers so that it doesn't show up in their books as a debt which produces a deficit. That's what this game is all about. It's a political game of hiding money away from the books, onto a different ledger, and it doesn't show up in the books as a problem for the government. That's the political gain. They're just too embarrassed to say it. Because they can't be clear and transparent with the public, they have to invent new terminology such as “alternative financing procurement.” It makes a mockery of politics. It makes so many people become cynical with the political process. I expose it so that people know—not to become cynical, but to attack Liberals as ferociously as we used to attack the Tories.

1850

Moving on. The government says of their throne speech—one of the most boring of speeches that I have ever heard in this Legislature; Olympic in nature in terms of being boring. They had only one new idea, and they were so proud of this new idea. The new idea is a plan to guarantee that on-line applications for birth certificates will be processed and delivered within 15 business days or the applicant gets his or her money back, \$25 for the original and \$45 for a copy. It's the only bold idea the Liberals could come up with. It's almost embarrassing that they should put that in a throne speech.

Let me tell you what I know about this, because I have a strong suspicion that most MPPs don't have a clue what this is all about, but I could be wrong. I'm willing to give the benefit of the doubt to some MPPs. I found out in the course of my long work on this issue that it has taken us

anywhere from six months to a year to get a birth certificate, in spite of our involvement in the case, whatever case we were dealing with. After a great deal of political pushing, the government gave the MPPs a little more leverage when we call to expedite. "Expedition" doesn't mean that it was done in two or three or four weeks. No, no, I say to you. "Expedition" of the case meant that it still took many, many months to get that birth certificate. In spite of the pressure we have put on this government, it still takes a long time for birth certificates to get to people's homes.

Lo and behold, one day about two months ago my daughter said, "Dad, I applied on-line, and I was able to get the certificate in a week's time." I couldn't believe it, I say to the Liberals behind me, because I didn't know such a thing existed. I didn't know as an MPP. I suspect 99% of the MPPs here didn't even know that this can happen except when they heard it in the throne speech. When I discovered this, I said, "We've got to get on to this. We've got to let the people know, those who have computers, those who have Internet services; we've got to let them know that they can get it within a week." It was an amazing, bold announcement this government made: that if you apply on-line, you can get it in two weeks or your money back. Isn't it amazing that they gave a guarantee? They give a guarantee on something they know they can deliver on. Why wouldn't this government, liberal as you are, give a guarantee to the other poor folk who don't have a computer, who don't know how to operate it, who don't have the Internet? Why don't we give those people the same guarantee that they will get the birth certificate—

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): They just have to go to your office.

M. Marchese: Non, non, je vous dis non. Cela ne marche pas comme ça.

Mr. Lalonde: That's what they do when—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: No, no. I say to you boys, I am not sure you are familiar with this issue at all—

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Who are you calling "boy"?

Mr. Marchese: All of the boys on the other side, which includes the Minister of Citizenship. I say to him and the others who are here—a couple there, a couple here—that we have got to give a guarantee. We have to give a guarantee to those who don't have a computer, that they be given the same guarantee that they can get their birth certificates in two weeks. I expect every Liberal here—Mr. Duguid from Scarborough Centre is right here. I want him to lobby his minister and his government so that when that person who cannot go on-line applies for a birth certificate, they can have a guarantee that they can get it in two weeks. Do we have your pledge to do that?

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): They can go to my office and use my computer.

Mr. Marchese: We have no pledge.

The Deputy Speaker: I remind the members, when they decide that I'm not part of this conversation, I'll leave and you two can carry on.

Mr. Marchese: No, please, we need you.

The Deputy Speaker: OK.

Mr. Marchese: Speaker, remember, I'm just trying to be interactive, but we need you.

So here's the beautiful, bold initiative. The government says, "You've got a guarantee that if you apply on-line, you get it or your money back." But the other guys and women who apply to get their birth certificate in the traditional way, they've got no guarantee. They're still going to line up. They've still got to wait for six months. They have to wait for a year. See, it makes for cynical politics. We make fun of politics when we introduce such things in this place. I wouldn't be proud of that.

Moving on, there's so much to say on education, because, you see, education is the biggest thing the Liberals have done in a whole long time in this place. Today we had an announcement from the minister. Speaking about the standardized tests, the government said, "We will have 75% of Ontario students who will reach the provincial standard." It was 54%. So you say to yourself, how could they do that? Think about this, John. To be able to get students from 54% on the standardized test and move them to a standard of 75%, it's a big deal. You just don't move a body of people to that standard without a whole lot of work in the school and outside of the school to be able to get people ready.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): So how do they do it?

Mr. Marchese: How do they do it? I know how they're doing it, and how they did it, in spite of the denials of the Minister of Education. They have done three, four, five little things that make a difference, and the minister denies it. In fact, he says it's a conspiracy theory. I love that one. He calls what I'm about to say "conspiracy theory." I love it.

Let me tell you what he's done. Students in the past had a limited time to answer questions under the old regime. I'm repeating—"old regime," "the past"—but repetition sometimes is OK. This year's instructions to the test administrator state that "students may take the time they need to complete the section, as long as it is in one continuous sitting." Speaker, you know what that means. If you're writing a test and take six hours, students are now allowed to take eight hours, 10 hours or more to complete that test. It was never done before. That means students are able to do something today that they couldn't do before in terms of improving the overall mark.

Secondly, the test is half as long. Whereas it was 10 hours last year, it's now six hours this year. The minister made this announcement. He declared that the tests would be half as long—not the EQAO, but the minister. Remember, the EQAO is supposed to be independent, somewhat independent, but the minister declared that part of the change in the test.

Third, students are allowed to use calculators. The minister had some backbencher ask a question today in the final wee hours of question period to simply declare

that Marchese and the leader of the NDP had it all wrong, that they did use calculators before. I couldn't believe that he got a backbencher to ask a question on that when he's clearly wrong and could not contest the other two things that I raised. I tell you this: Using calculators in grades 3 and 6 is new this time around. You could not use calculators before, and they did not use them, in spite of the denials of your buddy.

Hon. Mr. Colle: Shame. Ban the calculators.

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Mr. Marchese: Shame. This guy is so bold and bald in his statements. I'm telling you, he thinks he can get away with whatever he says.

Fourth, the test is simpler. There are many more multiple choice questions this time around than there were in the past.

Five, teachers are encouraged to mark up, not down.

I say this and the minister says it's a conspiracy theory. I couldn't believe it. Then he argues, "Oh no, we have an incredible amount of expertise. We have authorities involved in this. Oh no, NDP MPP Marchese has got it all wrong." I've got to tell you—

Hon. Mr. Colle: The Calculator Conspiracy.

Mr. Marchese: The calculator experience?

Hon. Mr. Colle: The title of your new book is The Calculator Conspiracy.

Mr. Marchese: Very good, my colleague the Minister of Citizenship: The Calculator Conspiracy. This is the signature piece of this government.

There's so much more I wanted to talk about: special ed, capital projects and physical education, where only 30% of our classrooms have physical education teachers. Your minister's worried about obesity, and 70% of our classrooms do not have physical education teachers. We're going to get teachers trained with one-time money to do a couple of exercises in the classroom. What we need are physical education teachers, what we need are librarians who contribute to the literacy of our kids, and we don't have them.

There's a slow decline, even under the Liberals. And your glory is going to be what you've done for education? I tell you, that's nothing to brag about. The way to improve our education system is to make sure we put the resources in place that I have mentioned. That would bring about improvements, not the fake numbers that have been introduced by this government.

I will have a lot more to say as time goes on. Please stay tuned.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): In these two minutes I'd just like to make some brief comments with regard to the presentation made by the member from Trinity–Spadina, my friend Mr. Marchese. As far as people having access to computers for their birth certificate applications, they can go to a constituency office. This was brought up by my friend from Scarborough Centre, Mr. Brad Duguid, who mentioned earlier that if a constituent does not have a computer and wants to apply on-line, they're welcome to go to an

MPP's office and ask the MPP or the MPP's staff to submit the application. We all have computers in our offices and the applications can be done that way. So that's how you solve that problem.

There's a lot more that can be said to address all the remarks made by the member from Trinity–Spadina, but I just wanted to say in this remaining minute or so that our government has set a path that started two years ago in early October, and we are continuing along that pathway. We're not going to deviate from it or react every time someone wants something different done.

We inherited a huge deficit of \$5.6 billion. It has been reported now that it's been reduced. Ontarians have worked together and we've reduced the provincial deficit from \$5.6 billion down to \$1.6 billion. These are audited numbers. So we're well on course to getting out of the financial mess that we inherited.

We're also working on the two key things that we planned to do when we ran for office, which were to create a better health care system and a better education system. We're seeing it every day. In fact, today in question period, both the education minister and the health minister were asked questions and made statements regarding their ministries. We are seeing improvements in both of those areas: better scores in the schools; shorter waiting times and more services available for those who need them in long-term care and our hospitals. So we're well on course and we've got two more years to make the province even better, healthier and stronger.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? The member has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Marchese: The member from Scarborough Southwest says, "Well, if you don't have a computer, I've got a solution: Come to the MPP's office; we've got computers," and it's done. That's it. That's not a solution.

The solution is to give a guarantee to whoever applies by whatever means for a birth certificate of getting that birth certificate within two weeks, and it doesn't matter how you apply. The member from Scarborough Southwest says, "Not a problemo. You come to my office and you get it solved." I've got to tell you, it assumes that the guy who comes to your office will either know how to use a computer or it assumes that people will know that all they have to do is go to their MPP's office versus people going through the traditional means of getting it. It just doesn't work that way. You've got it all wrong.

Your defence of this innovation is inadequate, in my humble view, and you've got a whole lot more to think about in terms of how you respond to that because you're not going to be able to do a good job of explaining that to your electorate.

With respect to the second part of his remarks, saying, "We're improving health and education," clearly he didn't hear my remarks.

Mr. Berardinetti: I did.

Mr. Marchese: If you did, member from Scarborough Southwest, you wouldn't be saying that. You have no good record when it comes to special ed. People have not received any extra funding. You've got no good record

on librarians. We've seen cuts under your government. You've got no good record on ESL. You have no good record on getting physical education teachers or music teachers in our schools. You don't have a record to be proud of, and all of this will be evidenced with time. We are exposing that myth, and doing it very well.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Duguid: I want to begin by saying to any of my constituents out there who have been calling in over the last couple of weeks since this session began: No, I have not joined the NDP. A lot of people see us in these seats. We've shifted our seats in this place, and I happen to be here beside my good friend from Trinity-Spadina, who is with the NDP. The line is drawn here, so these are the Liberals in this section. When some of these guys speak, it looks like we're behind them because of the camera angle. We may be behind them physically, but for much of what they're saying, we're not behind them at all. So I want to make it very clear now to all of my constituents that I have not, nor will I ever, cross the floor to the NDP, or to the Tories for that matter. I'm very proud to be working in the McGuinty government and working as a Liberal, and I'm proud of the throne speech that was delivered about a week or so ago here in this place.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): A dynamic speech.

Mr. Duguid: It was a dynamic speech. A throne speech is a time to assess where we've been and determine where we want to go from here. We're halfway through our mandate now. It's been 24 months and an incredible amount of activity, I'm proud to say, has happened in this province. In fact, I would say the face of this province has virtually changed in 24 quick and short months. There has been an incredible amount of progress made.

At this time, I think back to what we inherited when we came to office two years ago: a health care system that was failing, a health care system with a shortage of doctors and nurses, with labour strife throughout and long waiting lists for procedures. Worse than that, this system, as our health care minister is wont to say quite often, was really not a health care system at all; it was a system that was built in silos, with people going in different directions.

Perhaps worse than all of that, it was a health care system that wasn't at all sustainable going into the future, a system that was going to require investments of new billions of dollars each and every year, something that the people of this province simply could not afford for any extended period of time, let alone a year or two. So something had to be done to fix up that health care system. We'll get to that in a second, because I want to talk about something else we inherited.

We inherited an education system with declining test scores, an education system with a rising dropout rate, where young people were dropping out at alarming rates, giving up on their education and going into probably what would end up being low-end jobs, and not fulfilling their destinies, not fulfilling their potential. We inherited an education system rife with labour unrest, with teachers striking, with employees in their schools going off on

strike, with a record number of lost school days, something that was really impacting the quality in the classrooms and our ability to teach our young people.

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We inherited crumbling schools, schools that were allowed to deteriorate for over a decade with that lack of investment, schools that, frankly—I don't want to call them Third World schools, but there are some who would suggest that they were in bad shape and that they could almost be comparable to them. In fact, some would suggest that many Third World countries had schools that were superior in their physical status to our schools.

Then we look at the post-secondary education system in the province: 10th out of 10 in funding per capita for post-secondary education, something none of us should have been proud of back then and the previous government, frankly, should have been ashamed of. A skyrocketing tuition rate impacted the ability of young people to access post-secondary education and fulfill their potential.

We've all heard about it and we don't want to dwell on it too much more, but the fact is, we inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit which made our ability to tackle these challenges all the more difficult. But what did we do? Did we put down our heads and say, "Let's try to shuffle this deficit away," or try to hide it like the previous government did? No, we didn't do that. Did we run up a big, booming deficit and just spend, spend, spend on the things we felt we needed to spend on without paying any attention, like the NDP did when they came to office originally? No, absolutely not. Did we abandon our objective to improve public policy? I would say absolutely not. In fact, we are more committed now than we've ever been to ensuring that the commitments we've made to improve public policy and public programs throughout this province are met.

We faced up to this challenge. We made some tough decisions early in our mandate that are allowing us to invest in those areas that are very, very important to each and every Ontarian, crucial—not just important, but crucial—to the future prosperity of this province. In a short 24 months, as I said, we've changed the very face of this province. We've changed the priorities that the previous government had to the people's priorities, the priority of improved health care, the priority of improved education—primary, secondary and post-secondary. At the same time, we've tackled the deficit problem that we inherited.

We look at the waiting list problem that we inherited. We've invested heavily in ensuring that those waiting lists have come down. We're seeing more cancer care treatments, we're seeing more access to cardiac surgeries, we're seeing more access to cataract surgeries, we're seeing more access to MRIs and CT scans, we're seeing more hip and joint replacements. These are material improvements that people are experiencing in their health care system, and I know my constituents are experiencing them and they're appreciating the efforts that are being made.

Our family health teams are now being brought into action, because there was a shortage of doctors that was simply not being dealt with under the previous government. We're tackling that in part through our family health teams and people are gaining access to primary care throughout the province, something that's extremely important.

We're investing in our hospitals. In my area alone, Scarborough Hospital has been crying for years about the desperate need to improve their 50-year-old emergency services. Here's a hospital that sees more ambulances than any hospital in this city, probably more than any in the country, and it was operating in conditions that were 50 years old. We've invested \$30 million in a critical care and emergency wing improvements program that is going to make great strides in terms of improving the quality of care in that part of our city of Toronto, in Scarborough.

We're investing in community-based care versus institutional care—extremely important as we try to move that transition of the health care system over. We're creating local integration networks, and I don't have time today to go into what that is, but what this is, frankly, is breaking down the silos that existed in the previous lack of a system in health care that we inherited. In fact, we've brought greater labour peace to the health care industry with agreements with doctors and nurses.

We're making Ontarians healthier as well: less junk food in schools, prevention of smoking, attacking obesity in children, mandatory physical education programs. All of these things are going to make a great impact on our ability to improve the health care system and health in general for Ontarians.

In the education area, let's look at the fact that we've got labour peace now for the next four years. That makes a big difference. Teachers can now concentrate on teaching in their classrooms and not worry about having to man the barricades and worry about the labour strife that we inherited under the previous government.

Smaller class sizes in the early grades are ensuring that our young people get the attention that they need and deserve. Lead teachers in literacy and numeracy are ensuring that our young people are getting a better education and better skills in these areas, and the test scores are already proving results in that.

Hundreds of millions of dollars are being invested in our schools. Our crumbling schools are no longer crumbling; we're fixing them up bit by bit. I was in Churchill Collegiate in my riding not long ago—just a couple of weeks ago—

Interjection: What's it like, Brad?

Mr. Duguid: Well, I'll tell you, it was a mess before. The boiler rooms were just about broken down. There were safety issues. We've had to invest millions of dollars in those boilers—not a sexy thing to invest in, but at least when those young people are going to that school now, they're going to have a climate and an environment that they'll be able to effectively learn in, which would not have been the case without that investment.

We're improving test scores throughout the system. It's extremely important to the future of our province. We're investing \$6.2 billion in post-secondary education in the institutions themselves, to ensure that they're keeping pace with post-secondary institutions around the world but, just as importantly, in the people, the very young people who attend those institutions, in providing grants for the first time in at least a decade for young people to attend universities and colleges to ensure that they get the education they deserve, to ensure that they can become the best they can be.

These are important things to invest in for the individuals who benefit from these programs, but they're important for all of us, because if we are to meet our objective of having the most educated and skilled workforce on the planet—and that is our objective—we're going to be able to do that only if we have the best post-secondary system and the best education system in the world.

Mr. Speaker, as my time runs out, I thank you for this opportunity to respond to the throne speech. I'm sharing the rest of my time with the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, and I look forward to hearing her comments.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I'm certainly happy to be able to add my comments to the debate on the throne speech.

I should mention to the member from Trinity–Spadina that there are more than guys over on this side. I don't know if I sit in the corner and that's an issue.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): That's generic that he loves you.

Mrs. Van Bommel: Oh, yeah, right, or maybe it's just my occupation before I got here that makes him think I should be of the other gender.

Anyway, I want to comment on some of the things that have been said about agriculture and its role in the throne speech. I've heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about there being nothing for agriculture in the throne speech. I've heard other members of the opposition qualify that by saying it was virtually ignored, and I've seen comments in the press. As a first-term MPP, it kind of tweaked my curiosity, and so I decided I would do a little research.

First of all, I have to say thank you to my staff and to the legislative library staff for the role that they played in this. I asked them to search out the past decade of throne speeches. We actually have a total of nine throne speeches that were given in the past 10 years. I started in 1995, and in 1995's throne speech there is exactly one sentence dedicated to agriculture.

It got the same sort of notice in 1998. In that throne speech it says, "Agriculture and food industries leading the nation in farm cash receipts and value-added food production." It doesn't say anything about what the government will do for agriculture; it just gives us a little bit of a fact.

Then in 1999 and the following one in 2001, there is no mention of agriculture whatsoever. It doesn't even appear in the throne speech at all.

As a farmer, over the years I have certainly paid a lot of attention to the prominence of agriculture in the throne speech and in the government of the day, and I know that a lot of my own constituents have done the same thing. There are certain key words that farmers look for when they're listening to throne speeches, and one of them is "farm income." It's a very important phrase to those of us who make our living in agriculture. The throne speech that was delivered by our government a week ago addresses the government's priorities for agriculture and farming. In that throne speech we talk about innovation, marketing and farm income.

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I want to read into the record the comments made by Paul Mistele, who is the vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. For the record, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture is the largest general farm organization in this province, with a membership of 40,000 farms, farm business registry of registered farms in this province. From his comments to the membership of the Ontario federation, I'm going to read the following: "The Ontario government's speech from the throne contained a number of encouraging indicators for Ontario agriculture."

He goes on to say, "It was good news to hear our Lieutenant Governor give details of the government's focus on three priorities for agriculture—innovation to support research and development; marketing Ontario food as the government works with the industry to develop a new branding and marketing strategy; and improved farm income through a joint effort with OFA and our commodity partners to improve our system of safety nets."

He also goes on to acknowledge that, "The speech referred to 'massive agricultural subsidies in Europe and the US hurting our farmers and making it difficult for them to compete.'

"This is a clear indication the McGuinty government understands what's behind our calls for new risk management and production insurance programs for Ontario agriculture."

At the end of his comments, he says, "OFA is encouraged by the speech from the throne and looks forward to working with the government to meet Ontario agriculture's needs for the future."

As a farmer, I can honestly say that is about as encouraged as the farm community has ever been with a throne speech, certainly within the last decade. We have very much looked forward to comments and recognition by the government on issues around farm income and the impact of the global markets on that income.

He also talks about—and we mention in the throne speech—the marketing. The marketing includes things such as the Foodland Ontario branding program, which was started in 1977 but continues to evolve to meet the demands of the day. We also talked about things such as innovation, and Mr. Mistele speaks to innovation. We

know that we need innovation in the field of agriculture if we are going to be able to respond to global markets, and more importantly, to consumer demand.

Agriculture is an evolving business. We know that our food is safe, plentiful and nutritious, but we need to market those qualities. That is where the marketing issue and the innovation will come in. We need that kind of thing to happen so that our consumers demand Ontario agriculture; so that they go to the grocery store and say to the managers and the buyers there, "We want Ontario products."

Currently, the farm community is involved in a campaign called Farmers Feed Cities! Farmers Feed Cities! calls upon the government to play a role, but it also calls upon consumers to play a role. We need, as consumers, to be conscious of the fact that our food comes from the farmers in rural Ontario. As a government, we recognize and acknowledge the difficulties that are currently experienced by some sectors in agriculture. The grains and oilseeds farmers are currently experiencing great difficulties in pricing and commodities. Our government is acknowledging that. We want to work with them and our federal counterparts to address those issues.

There are also issues such as supply management, which my husband and I are involved in. We are going to the world trade talks soon, and we need the support of both levels of government, federal and provincial, to make sure we sustain that sector of agriculture. Supply management has been very successful in this province and in this country, and it has provided a great income for those farmers who enjoy that. But not all farmers have the advantage of being in supply management and not all farmers want to be in supply management. Many of them indulge in such things as grains and oilseeds or they work in the livestock industries, which have experienced great difficulty, especially the beef industry which is just overcoming the BSE crisis that we've experienced for the past two years.

For the farm community, this throne speech has been very encouraging. We enjoy the support of our farmers when we go forward to help address those issues that they know are critical to their success and to the long-term sustainability of agriculture in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Prue: If no one else wants to comment, I think I have just heard two very erudite speeches. I don't necessarily agree with what you have to say. I do have to tell you—and I will be speaking to this myself tonight—that that was one of the most boring throne speeches in the history of this House. It was pretty bad. You only had to look at the Toronto Star cartoon a couple of days later, with the poor Premier standing there winning the award for boredom. I have to tell you, there was nothing much new. There were only two new things said in all of that throne speech. I had to sit there and wonder, "How good is this?"

There was one that some people would welcome, although I'm a little bit tentative about whether it's a good thing, and that had to do with the grade 12 diploma. I understand why it's being done: because we have so

many failures because they've ratcheted up the system. We have so many people who have difficulty passing that they're giving them an alternate and hopefully similar certificate at the end, so they can say they have completed high school. And you should, because there are many skills and abilities that are not necessarily related to reading and writing.

The second one, which was actually new in the throne speech, I thought was one of the most bizarre things I have ever heard in my life. The rest was all, "Rah, rah, what a great job we're doing." If you believe it, you believe it; most of us don't. The second thing was about birth certificates, which I really thought was kind of funny. You have a birth certificate system where people wait for months and years to get a certificate, but if you're really savvy and smart, if you know how to use a computer and you know how to handle it right down to the nth degree, there is now a money-back guarantee. But I will tell you, if you live in northern Ontario, if it's difficult and you don't have a computer, all of that's impossible.

I'll speak some more when I get my 20 minutes.

M. Lalonde: C'est avec plaisir que je dois répondre au député de Trinity-Spadina.

Je dois dire, lorsqu'il a fait référence aux certificats de naissance, je crois qu'il y a un travail à faire à l'intérieur de son bureau. C'est vrai que dans le discours du trône nous avons dit que maintenant il sera plus facile d'obtenir un certificat de naissance, mais ce sera directement lorsqu'on applique par l'ordinateur. Mais nos bureaux sont ouverts à tous les jours, j'espère, de 8 h 30 à 5 h, pour répondre aux besoins des personnes qui n'ont pas accès à un ordinateur.

Laissez-moi vous dire que c'est vrai que nous avons promis 15 jours. Par la fin du décembre prochain, nous devons avoir le système en place. Mais pourquoi est-ce que, dans le passé et encore aujourd'hui, nous prenons jusqu'à six mois pour obtenir un certificat de naissance? C'est que l'ancien gouvernement nous a laissé avec un groupe d'employés qui n'avaient pas des emplois à plein temps. Aujourd'hui, nous avons procédé avec l'emploi à plein temps pour au moins 125 personnes additionnelles. Ces personnes-là étaient à temps partiel auparavant, donc, à chaque année il fallait recommencer à former les personnes et leur donner l'information nécessaire.

Mais le gouvernement McGuinty a livré un discours du trône, un des meilleurs que nous avons eus depuis peut-être 40 ans.

Nous allons répondre immédiatement aux besoins scolaires, et puis, cela le démontre aujourd'hui même, lorsque le ministre de l'Éducation a fait le rapport. Je suis fier de dire que les résultats des écoles françaises ont vraiment augmenté. Si je regarde dans la lecture, nous avons atteint un pointage de 67 %. Nous regardons dans les mathématiques: 74 %; en écriture, 70 %.

Donc, nous avons fait des progrès et nous avons investi dans—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I was not able to sit here in person and listen to the comments made by the honourable members, but I was in my office doing some work and listening to what they had to say.

Interestingly enough, although I respect them very much, unfortunately, my perspective is that this throne speech didn't say very much at all to the people of Ontario. It's a very sad day when the people of Ontario's expectations are built up during a provincial election campaign. Two years into the mandate of the government, people expected some kind of signal that some of those expectations would in fact be realized at some point during the mandate of this government, but lo and behold, the government prorogues the House, comes back with a throne speech and it's a big letdown. Nothing was said of any significance so that any of the people of Ontario could say, "Oh, right. I remember now. That's why we voted for the Liberals in the first place."

Unfortunately, the Liberal government squandered the opportunity to reassure the people of Ontario that they actually do have something to offer, that they actually do have something to provide, that they actually are going to make a difference and make a change for the people of Ontario. Unfortunately, that wasn't done. Instead, what we got was a rehashing of the old promises, a restating of some of the old directions, many of which, I have to say, the opposition parties are blowing huge holes through day after day in this very chamber with not too much effort. Quite frankly, as all of us will recognize, the many promises, the many pieces of a platform that the Liberals had when they were running for election have simply disappeared into the horizon. The fact of the matter is, the people of Ontario are not so gullible to imagine that the restating of this vision, the restating of this dismal failure halfway through their mandate is going to make any iota of difference to the reality they face in Ontario.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I think the voters of Ontario know what they got in the first two years and know what they will get in the next two years. The speech from the throne was just laying out more of the path that we're going on.

I'd like to address the gas tax for the city of Ottawa. At the end of 2007, \$40 million is to be given every year, which will help them with their budgeting. There's \$200 million for public transit in Ottawa.

I've talked to the teachers, and they're saying, "We have more resources and the schools are really going well." The teachers are happy. They're proud of their profession. They're in agreement. The parents are together, the boards are together, the government is together with the teachers, and it's doing a great job for the kids.

I really want to talk about health care, because the Harris-Baird team, as I like to call it, left Ottawa 14th out of 14 in wait times, the longest wait times in this province. I just want to go through some of the things our government is doing in Ottawa. A recent investment in the Montfort Hospital of \$125 million will create 81 new bed spaces, with operating rooms. The Queensway Carleton has an expansion in their emergency services,

the ICU and the geriatric unit. The Ottawa Regional Cancer Centre has \$6.6 million for more linear accelerators—new equipment that's badly needed. Rogers House is the first community support that we have for children dying from cancer, and our government is picking up 90% of the operating costs of that. The civic site at the Ottawa Hospital is expanding its emergency department, from 55,000 patients to eventually 75,000 patients, and the University of Ottawa medical school is getting new work for research. All of these things are happening. We've taken MRIs, where we were the worst in the province—almost a year for an MRI. There are now 14,000 more MRIs per year, and that's really cutting down the wait times and serving our people.

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The Deputy Speaker: The member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex would like to reply.

Mrs. Van Bommel: I want to say thank you very much to the members for Beaches—East York, Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Hamilton East and Ottawa—Orléans for their comments.

In our throne speech, we talked about all the different issues. The members especially from Beaches—East York and from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell talked about birth certificates. When I was first elected, one of the biggest issues my office had to deal with was birth certificates. It was an incredibly frustrating thing for not just my staff but for all of my constituents to try and get a birth certificate. That needed to be solved, and it is solved. We are moving forward to improve that whole system, and we are doing that.

In terms of the throne speech, our constituents are looking for improvement in areas such as education and health care. Those are also very important issues in rural Ontario, as they are in urban Ontario. In my particular riding, Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital has realized a reduced waiting time for cataract surgery because of funding from our government. The people in our community are actually able to get cataract surgery done more quickly now than those even in the city of London. So we're really enjoying the benefits.

The throne speech is a discussion of where we're going and how we're continuing on the path that we have set out for the things we told our constituents and the electorate when we were elected that we would do. This is just to confirm that we are still on that path.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo—Wellington): I'm delighted to have this chance tonight to speak for a few minutes in response to last week's throne speech, which was read by the Honourable James Bartleman, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

In the 15 years that I have been privileged by my constituents to serve in this assembly, I've been witness to the pageantry of numerous throne speeches, reflecting the perspectives of governments of all stripes. I have seen the passionate idealism of the New Democrats, the non-sense common sense of our Progressive Conservative Party, and the all-things-to-all-people effort of the current government. Each speech painted a canvas in broad

strokes, as is normally the tradition of throne speeches, outlining the future course of action for the government for the coming session; the legislation that the government plans to propose to the Legislature for its consideration; the new ideas that are intended to improve the quality of life of residents of the province who sent us here; an outline of how our health services will be improved; how our schools will be improved; how our efforts to protect our natural environment will be improved; how safety on our streets and in our communities will be improved; how our basic infrastructure, so long neglected, like roads and bridges and sewers and water services, will be improved; how the government will ensure that our economic competitiveness, our ability to create new jobs, will be improved; how the prospects of our farm families, many of whom are facing severe crisis, will be improved; during Small Business Month, how our entrepreneurs' prospects will be improved; how our efforts to promote Ontario's world-class tourism attractions will be improved. A plan for the future: This is what throne speeches traditionally represent.

What did we hear last Tuesday? I don't think the most partisan of government MPPs would have the audacity to suggest that last week's throne speech constituted a plan for the future. Rehash? Yes. Progress report of accomplishments to date? Yes. Self-congratulatory political treatise? Perhaps. But visionary plan for the future? Definitely not. It was thin gruel for an electorate hungry for answers to the challenges facing Ontario today and thirsting for a leadership rooted in integrity.

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For we know that this Liberal government at Queen's Park continues to be hobbled by its reputation as being a party of promise-breakers who have reverted to the traditional Liberal pattern of governing: tax and spend. As a result, Ontario is at risk of squandering its hard-earned prosperity, which manifests itself as slower growth in the economy, fewer new jobs being created, government spending which exceeds revenue, a higher provincial debt and higher taxes. After two years of Liberal government, there are clouds on Ontario's horizon.

And what does our party offer in response? A new leader, John Tory, who is principled and pragmatic, hard-working and genuine, smart and decent; a record in government that, while not perfect, showed we kept our word and had the courage to confront problems that previous governments had swept under the carpet for years; an experienced caucus, which day to day is calling the government to account and rebuilding the sense of trust that we will need to govern again; and tens of thousands of members, volunteers who believe fervently in the values and principles of our party, values and principles that will motivate and animate our policy development process as we build toward the next election on October 4, 2007.

I want to take a few moments now to remind members of some of the important issues which I continue to put before the government as the priorities of the residents of Waterloo—Wellington. Our Waterloo—Wellington transportation action plan is something I have been promoting

since 2003. It's geared toward ensuring that drivers and their families can travel and commute safely. It's also an action plan to enable businesses to move their products to market efficiently, which supports jobs. The Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan is motivated by my belief that it is my obligation to ensure that our area receives its fair share of provincial transportation dollars.

The price of gasoline at the pump has skyrocketed in recent weeks, and believe me, I've noticed it too. It's especially galling when you consider that the provincial government is charging 14.7 cents a litre of gas in tax. That adds up quickly. For example, on a 50-litre fill up, the province of Ontario's take is \$7.35. The Liberals decided to share part of the gas tax with municipalities, but they deliberately excluded rural and small-town Ontario by flowing all of this gas tax money exclusively to cities for transit projects.

I know that our cities need help with their transit systems, but to deny that rural municipalities face similar challenges with their roads and bridges is to demonstrate a complete disregard for most of the province in terms of geography, most of our municipalities in terms of their number, and certainly most of my riding of Waterloo-Wellington. It is unfair, unjust and untenable, especially when you consider that the federal government is sharing part of its gas tax with municipalities and is giving support to municipalities large and small.

Health care continues to be the number one concern on most people's minds. Will timely, quality health care be there for me or my family or my neighbour, when and if we need it? Answering this question in the affirmative must be a central preoccupation of any provincial government.

In the township of Centre Wellington, in the community of Fergus, the Groves Memorial Community Hospital has for years maintained a sterling reputation for caring and compassion. In spite of this, we continue to wait for approval from the Ministry of Health so that we can begin the next stage of planning for our redevelopment project to meet the needs of our growing population. We have raised almost \$15 million, and we've been waiting for this approval now for almost two years. While our community has been patient, as the MPP for Waterloo-Wellington, my patience is beginning to wear thin. We need an immediate answer from the minister, giving the hospital approval to move forward with its redevelopment plan to make the excellent health care provided by Groves even better.

Mr. Speaker, you know of my support for double-hatter firefighters, an issue that I've been working on for more than three years now. As I've said repeatedly, as long as there is a need for a private member's bill to protect the right of double-hatter firefighters to volunteer in their home communities, then I will continue to fight for it.

Typically, a double-hatter firefighter works full-time for a city fire department and lives in a small town nearby. On his days off, he offers his services to protect his neighbours. No union should have the right to prevent

him from offering his skills, talents and expertise to make his community safer, yet this is what the firefighters' union seeks to do.

Recently, it was brought to my attention that this union is once again turning up the heat on these dedicated volunteers, who simply want to apply their skills and training to make their neighbours safer. A few days ago, I received a letter from Fire Chief Tim Bond of the Kemptville Fire Department in eastern Ontario, who has written to the Premier asking the government to take immediate action in support of double-hatters. He writes, "Due to the union's current intimidation campaign, our community is losing a volunteer firefighter with 22 years' experience who is a senior captain/leader in our fire department. You don't just train ordinary people to replace this depth of experience overnight. It will be extremely difficult, very expensive and will take a long time to replace his skills."

He goes on, "Over the past two years we have lost four members due to union pressure. These firefighters were my front-line men/officers/leaders. They were forced to resign against their will. This has had a major negative impact on our fire department which will take a long time to rectify."

After making reference to some 206 municipalities that in recent months have passed resolutions addressed to the government in support of double-hatter firefighters, Chief Bond says, "Premier McGuinty, we need you to stand up for the safety of our communities and we need you to protect the rights of individuals who choose to volunteer. Now is the time. Please take action and get it done."

Obviously I couldn't agree more, and I've written to the Premier as well and asked for his intervention and response to resolve this issue.

On the issue of education, which was a central theme of this throne speech, the government took credit for achieving peace and stability in our classrooms. What they neglected to say is that they have bought peace with the teachers' unions at a very high price to the taxpayer.

The good news is that our students are no longer being used as pawns in an unfortunate and wholly unnecessary political battle. The bad news is that the Minister of Education is apparently looking at lowering the standards that had been set to measure student achievement, standards that encouraged a culture of continuous improvement in our schools, allowing our students—all of our students—to achieve their full potential.

While we must be there to help all students demonstrate their special talents and achieve these higher standards, any reduction in our expectations that they do their very best is something we cannot support. Instead, we must encourage all our students to reach as high as they can, even into the stratosphere.

As I mentioned earlier, our farm families in many cases are facing their greatest economic challenge in a generation. Commodity prices are stuck at 25-year lows because of US and European Union subsidies. Provincial government policy and regulation have made our farm families feel besieged. Our beef producers have struggled

for two years through the loss of their most important export market and the resulting collapse of beef prices. Now that the US border has finally reopened to our beef exports, it will still take years if these farm families are ever to recover the loss of equity that they've experienced. As an MPP proud to represent a largely rural riding, I would have to ask, could governments have done more to help? I think the answer is yes.

Consider again Ontario's economy. We know that the world economy is dynamic and ever-changing. We are faced with new challenges from emerging economies like China and India. As a result of a number of factors, Ontario is slipping as Canada's economic engine. In the past year there has been a disturbing trend of lost manufacturing jobs—jobs in factories and industries that have helped make our province the driving force in the country. While the throne speech paid lip service to the need for a strong and growing economy, it completely ignored the pending crisis in our manufacturing sector. Surely the provincial government has enough evidence to conclude that immediate action is needed to ensure that we can continue to compete and win.

Last May, I introduced a private member's resolution to address some of these issues, and it calls upon the standing committee on finance and economic affairs to immediately begin an investigation into Ontario's industrial and economic competitiveness and develop an action plan to maintain and expand our domestic and international markets in the coming years. The government should take action in support of this resolution and all MPPs should be given this opportunity to help support an effort to transform our competitive challenges into competitive advantages.

Having consulted with business leaders in Ontario on these issues, I've received letters of endorsement from key organizations that are concerned about job creation in this province. So far, I have received expressions of support for my resolution from Richard Paton, president and CEO of Canada's Chemical Producers; Thomas d'Aquino, president and chief executive of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives; Jack Mintz, president and CEO of the C.D. Howe Institute; Sherri Helmka, executive director of the Employers' Advocacy Council in Kitchener; James Flood, director of government relations at the Ontario Real Estate Association; and the Honourable Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

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I would like to quote Perrin Beatty, who said, "I believe that the study you propose can make a valuable contribution to Ontario's and Canada's economic future. CME would be pleased to collaborate fully with you and your colleagues on all sides of the" House "in ensuring that the initiative will bring forward concrete and achievable strategies for improving the competitiveness of Ontario's industry, which is so important to the economic success of all of Canada. We congratulate you on taking this initiative, which we hope will be strongly supported by all parties."

Even though there was no reference to it in the throne speech this past fall, there was some good news for families who are now compelled by provincial legislation to purchase new car booster seats for their older children. My private member's Bill 77, introduced in May 2004, proposed tax relief for parents having to purchase these seats, exempting them from the 8% retail sales tax. I was very pleased when the government adopted the principle of my bill as government policy in its 2005 budget. They listened, and today, if you have to buy a booster seat for your child or grandchild, you don't have to pay provincial sales tax because of Bill 77.

Another thing that was not mentioned in the throne speech, but should have been, were the major concerns and issues swirling around the influence that financial contributors appear to have on politicians and on public policy. Last winter, to restore integrity and accountability, I introduced yet another private member's bill, Bill 180, to provide for the immediate public reporting of political contributions that exceed \$100.

Within days after I asked a question in the House on this issue, the Liberals responded with legislation committing to a system that they call "real-time" reporting of political donations. The government legislation, Bill 214, would require public reporting within five business days. The changes I pursued through my bill would have required the real-time reporting on a Web site of the name of the contributor and the amount given, "real time" meaning the actual day that the cheques were cashed.

My bill would have also required this accountability to be comprehensive, so that donations to constituency associations would not be excluded, making all ridings accountable, as they should be, everywhere in the province.

I know that there are other MPPs who wish to give their remarks, so I will conclude. As I do, I want to paraphrase our leader, the member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey, who led the debate for Progressive Conservatives by talking about what average working families would have hoped to hear from this government in its throne speech but did not.

When we look at higher provincial taxes, higher electricity bills, higher gasoline prices, higher natural gas prices, higher interest rates, higher property taxes, lost jobs and little said about future prospects, I absolutely agree that at the half-time point of this government, the clouds that I alluded to earlier have indeed rolled in and we're experiencing rainy days for the average Ontarian.

Ours is the mission to see Ontarians through this storm, with hope that we will continue to hold this government to account and offer Ontarians a better day on the horizon, what we in Waterloo–Wellington call the promise of the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to share my time with the member for Durham.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Durham.

Mr. O'Toole: It's a real pleasure to follow the member from Waterloo–Wellington, because his commitment is beyond reproach. I would say I am quite supportive of his remarks, especially the work he's done on

the double-hatter issue. It's a tireless effort, and I would put on the record that I'm supportive of that. Certainly I think of fire chief Richard Miller in Port Perry, who would argue on your behalf.

I would say that it is a controversial issue, and he's had courage. That's what's lacking in this throne speech. If I want to talk about the economic advantage, it's arguable that under the guise that their Minister of Finance has resigned, the economic advantage may be that he has resigned. But Smokey the Bear, the former Minister of Energy, Dwight Duncan, taking over is another question of a shadow cast over Ontario's energy sector, and there could be a lot said about that.

I just want to put a few things on the record. You know, what really is important here tonight, for the people watching and those few listening, is that tonight was a night we all celebrated, because Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada had a celebration. I want to name just a few people who were recognized. I want to thank Big Brothers and Big Sisters for the work they've done, and also the many volunteers, not just in my riding of Durham but across the province.

I just want to mention a few of the people I can see here in the House tonight who were recognized: the member from York North, Julia Munro, who's sitting right in front of me; the member from Whitby-Ajax, Jim Flaherty, who received an award; the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Bill Murdoch; and others here tonight such as Jim Wilson from Simcoe-Grey; and Mr. Bartolucci, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Many people recognized a worthy cause. I congratulate you. I was very humbled, actually.

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Here's another one.

Mr. O'Toole: And Mr. Gerretsen, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I brought my plaque, but most important, I brought the pin presented to me, and other members of the House here tonight for their great work.

All of us, at the end of the day—

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: Jeff Leal, from Peterborough, of course.

Almost all members here tonight know the importance of working in our communities. I was impressed because Lisa McNee-Baker, the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters in Oshawa-Clarington, and Donna Paquette, a teacher at a French immersion school, were there tonight. She's the Big Sister for Emily, her Little Sister, and they were featured, I would say, in a non-partisan way. It had nothing to do with anything that I do.

I think of the volunteer board members who were there tonight. This is what makes Ontario strong: volunteerism. There need to be more recognition and opportunities at a non-partisan event like tonight. I think that Deb Matthews did a very nice job, as well as the Big Brothers and Big Sisters, who put on the event tonight. I think of Chris Charlton and the work he's done. He's the director of relations for Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Canada. I thank them for putting on the reception and I

thank the members who attended. The ongoing work that needs to be done: Why is that necessary when this province is so strong?

I was going through some preparation notes for this evening, and I'm actually looking for them now. I would say that the time has run out. But I want to put on the record that my wife is watching, and she has to teach tomorrow. I know it's difficult because there's so much prep time that isn't allowed in the new Kennedy curriculum. Thank you very much for the time that Mr. Arnott left me.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Prue: It's always a privilege to listen to my Conservative counterparts. They talk and they criticize the government, sometimes very fairly. Sometimes they're right. When they say that the government throne speech talked about platitudes and self-congratulation, they're right, because that's basically all that was in the document that the poor Lieutenant Governor had to read with a straight face. I will tell you that they are right on the rural stuff and on northern Ontario. But I have to tell you that they are so wrong when they get into the nostalgia about the great, good old days with Mike Harris and that ilk. They are so terribly wrong to equate the Mike Harris government with any kind of direction. If they had any kind of direction at all, I would equate it with "Wrong Way" Corrigan—you know the guy who hopped in the plane and was supposed to go to California and went to Ireland instead? For those of you who weren't here in the last Parliament, that's exactly what happened with Mike Harris.

Mr. Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): That's a slur against the Irish. Apologize.

Mr. Prue: I will not. My mother's name is O'Sullivan, and I'm right.

What they did was wrong: Just look at the mess they made with the cities and amalgamations; look at the mess they made with downsizing; look at the mess they made with the poor; look at the mess they made on all the poverty issues, on housing, on homelessness; and look at the mess they made in finances by leaving you guys with \$5.6 billion in deficit.

I have to tell you, when you talk about nostalgia, that they're dead wrong to go back to that. If you should do anything on that side of the House, learn the lesson of what not to do. I want to tell you that the throne speech did not set the best example.

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Mr. Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): First of all, there are a number of aspects to deal with in the throne speech, but I thought, with your permission, I would like to speak about some of the health care initiatives. As a physician myself, I've seen some of the changes first-hand.

I'm reminded, for example, of patient Mr. N.S., if I may call him that, who basically had what we call degenerative arthritis. The bones in his knees had essentially collapsed in on themselves to the point where, as he would say, "Doctor, I'm even getting gypsy music"

coming from his knees because of the grinding, the mutual application of pressure and friction.

I recall, during the previous administration, having to arrange a full knee replacement for this individual for his right knee, which actually took; we couldn't believe it—one and a half years of waiting time. You can imagine the ultimate effect on this gentleman's quality of life: the daily suffering he had to endure, the amount of medication he had to ingest, and the diffuse effect it had on him, his family and his outlook.

I am pleased to say that this government understands, and using some of the vocabulary of the member from Waterloo–Wellington, in fact we are reaching higher, yes, into the stratosphere, with regard to the provision of all these new procedures, whether for imaging or urgent surgeries such as cataracts, cancer or heart-saving measures.

Enfin, je voudrais dire que je suis très encouragé par nos efforts, nos mesures et nos initiatives en soins de santé.

Mr. Flaherty: I said yesterday in this place that the throne speech was remarkable for the fact that it was thunderingly boring. It was also remarkable for its failure to disclose any plan. In Alice in Wonderland there is the wonderful line about, "If you don't know where you're going, any road will do," and that was reflected in the speech. It wandered all over the place. There is the absence of vision, the absence of a plan in a time when Ontario is suffering, and it's suffering in the north.

The Minister of Northern Development is here, the member for Sudbury. Yesterday I had the Steelworkers in my office talking about the closure of the mill by Abitibi that's coming up this weekend in Kenora. Hundreds of people are going to be out of work.

I was in North Bay on Saturday. You know, criminal justice is important. People are concerned about violent crime. This is a serious matter: the drug trade in this province. What did I hear in North Bay on Saturday? The youth justice committees that we brought in in 1999: The people of North Bay had 70 people come forward to volunteer to serve on the youth justice committee. Thirty of them paid their own way to get the training they needed. Have they got their funding from the government of Ontario? No.

The minister for the north is here. Take care of North Bay. This is a good program. The youth justice committees actually work, Minister. They help young people not graduate to adult criminal court. Pay attention to the north. Pay attention to Kenora, and pay attention to the youth justice committee in North Bay. I beg to you to do that for the sake of the youth in the north. It's a good program. It works. People shouldn't have to pay for their own training. Would you please talk to the Attorney General? You're in the cabinet. Get the money to the people in North Bay.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: I have to say, as a relative newcomer, that I feel like I tumbled down the rabbit hole of fantasy

coming into this House, especially with regard to the debate tonight, because these guys over here have a fantasy about what they did and didn't do in this province when they were at the helm. I believe they decimated this province in very, very many ways. It's not just about poverty; it's also about what they've done to municipalities and what they didn't do to fix some of the serious problems we're now having to deal with.

Having said that, we then go into the fantasy of the people across the way who have their heads somewhere in the stratosphere, whose egos are the only things they're really worried about, because they are not looking at the reality that faces them in this province. Unfortunately, they've come back with a throne speech, after proroguing this House, that does nothing to address the real problems that the previous government caused in this province. Although they talked about it at length when they were running in the last provincial election, not only did they not accomplish anything in the last portion of their term, their course is not what it was before, which means nothing, which means basically that the people of Ontario cannot expect any real changes. They cannot expect any real progress on major, major issues that are facing the people of Ontario, whether that is the issue of the eroding standard of living in every community across the province; whether that is the issue of still unresolved problems with major pieces of legislation, like the Tenant Protection Act; major problems like CVA or market value assessment; major concerns with a number of different pieces of the economy; losses of jobs; inability to keep the manufacturing sector robust; inability to make sure that communities have a decent standard of living, because they are losing all of the good-paying jobs. Quite frankly, this government has a lot of work to do, and they don't know where the heck they're going.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Durham, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. O'Toole: The members from Beaches–East York, Etobicoke North, Whitby–Ajax and Hamilton East, thank you for responding. Most of the general comment was basically that we're paying more and getting less. During the throne speech, I was looking around at some of the dignitaries here, and former Liberal Premier David Peterson was nodding off. That says it all. Most of the editorials, basically, were noncommittal on whether there was any substance. As I think back on the rather uneventful throne speech, it was kind of lay low, try to not get noticed. Basically, the biggest promise they made was to cut back the waiting time for birth certificates to 15 business days.

This troubles me. I look at a recent press release, and I'm just picking up the mail we all receive. Some of you should read it. What it says here is, "Dalton McGuinty has broken promises, hurting taxpayers." They're paying more every year. "Not only are Ontarians paying twice"—this is the issue. It came up in question period. Our leader, John Tory, has unearthed the travesty of their tax-and-spend strategy.

What we're now finding out with the new health premium is that each Ontario individual earning over \$30,000 a year is paying about \$900 a year. If you look at it, that's almost \$100 a month. Now, apparently, according to this Ontario court ruling, it has been ruled that certain public sector groups—I could name them: the Toronto Transit Commission, city of Hamilton, firefighters and others—have filed an arbitration concern, and now the province is going to have to pay their portion of the health premium, while my constituents, who are hard-working families, are going to be paying their own premiums, plus they're now going to be paying the premiums for the public sector.

That's the legacy of the Liberal government: tax and spend.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Prue: I wondered where to start my speech tonight, and I was thinking, Michael, it was your four-year anniversary just a few weeks ago. You've been in this House now for four years. I still remember that by-election night, and the throne speech brought some of it back, because the widow of Mr. Hunter was here. It was a good thing that the government did in terms of naming the park after him. He was a very great environmentalist, and a very gentle and nice man. Somebody had to win the by-election, and it was me, but I do take my hat off to him for everything he did in terms of Greenpeace, what he did for the environment, and how he put his whole soul and heart forward to run for the Liberal Party, although not successfully. You did the right thing in naming the park after him. In fact, in my own community there was a tree planting this past week, and the community planted a number of trees in his honour to try to keep the environmental dream alive.

I think back to that same night four years ago, or four years and a couple of weeks ago, and what was said and what was done that night, and I still remember my acceptance speech to all the crowd that was there cheering. They didn't cheer for much, because I don't know whether I said all that much that was exciting, until it got to the part where somebody yelled out, "What are you going to do at Queen's Park?" and I said, "I'm going to Queen's Park to get rid of Mike Harris." That got the biggest cheer of the night. I was only here a couple of days or a week when Mr. Harris stood up and announced that he was going to retire. Everybody on this side of the House stood up and said, "You did it," and I stood up and took a bow. It took me two weeks. I don't know whether that had much to do with it at all. But I do have to tell you, it was kind of a good day.

2010

I have to tell you, though, four years later, I sat here listening to the Lieutenant Governor make the throne speech. I know he didn't write it. I don't blame him for what he read out. I know he was reading stuff. The only really good part to me was when he started off talking about the 1.2 million books that he delivered to northern aboriginal communities. I thought that was a wonderful thing that that man had done, a wonderful direction he

had taken personally as the Lieutenant Governor, as the Queen's representative of this province. But as he went on and started reading what you told him to say, what was bereft, what was not there were the lofty goals that I expected from the Liberal Party, the lofty goals that I heard in the last election, the dreams that you had when you ousted the Harrisites. I did not hear any of that. I did not hear the ideals of where you want to take this province, of the things that you had said—the 231 promises you had made—and of the direction that people had dreamed that you would take them after eight long and tough years. I did not hear all of those great promises of 2003 reiterated.

Instead, as I said earlier in a statement, I heard only two new directions. One was welcomed, which was a grade 12 certificate for those young people who cannot pass the curriculum. That's welcomed. I'm going to tell you, it's a good thing.

The other one I think is kind of bizarre: the birth certificates. I think it's kind of bizarre because it only affects those people who have computers, those people who are computer savvy. The constituents who come in to see me and who have been waiting eight months for a birth certificate because they mailed it in, because they only had the wherewithal to buy a 50-cent stamp, because they had to fill out the form—eight months. My office is phoning weekly trying to find those and trying to get them. Oftentimes, when they find out, all that happens—

Interjections.

Mr. Prue: I can't hear myself with these guys screaming, so I have to talk louder.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Prue: We have to phone and write many, many times in order to get the process restarted. Sometimes they say that they can't find the cheque, even though the cheque has been cashed. Then we have to go through a whole process of making sure that the cheque was cashed. I have to tell you, you promised 15 days for people on computers. I will cheer when you promise 15 days for someone who mails it in, because I will know then that every Ontario citizen is being treated fairly, not those who have the thousand-dollar computers and the laptops and all the other stuff in their homes.

But having heard that, there was such a public yearning two years ago at the election. You guys went out there and said: "Vote for us. It's something new. It's a new promise. It's going to be a new world." And a lot of people voted for you; a lot of people who ordinarily would have voted for me, voted for you. I know them; they talked to me. They voted for you because they wanted them gone. They didn't care that they really believed what I was saying. They wanted them gone so badly that they voted for you and trusted what you said—

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): They knew you were a real Liberal anyway.

Mr. Prue: No, I'm not a real Liberal.

You know how I love to quote people. I'm going to quote Thomas Hobbes, but I'm going to take it a little bit out of context because I want to talk about the Harris

years. Thomas Hobbes is famous for what he described as the life of man. I want to say that the life of this province for eight years, between those years of 1995 and the last election, can be described best as brutal, nasty, solitary and all too long, because that's—

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): Short.

Mr. Prue: Yes, you've got that in there too, but the last part is what I wanted to change: It was all too long. Many people were victimized. Many people were marginalized, like those on welfare. Remember the welfare mothers? They wouldn't give them the money because they were going to drink beer with it? That was disgraceful. Do you remember the clawbacks? They took all the money that the federal government gave for the poorest of the poor kids and they clawed it back, saying they were going to use it for other purposes. Remember the frozen ODSP? Nobody who was on ODSP got any additional money for years and years, although everybody in the world knew that most of these unfortunate souls were not able to work because of circumstances far beyond their control. Do you remember when they talked about the housing boondoggle? People had nowhere to live and the homeless were on the streets and were dying. Remember the poverty and the homelessness and all of the stuff that was there, and nothing was done?

I remember all of that stuff, but I have to tell you with great chagrin, read the 26 pages of your document. There isn't a single word about poverty, there isn't a single word about welfare, there isn't a single word about what you're going to do on the clawback, there isn't a single word about what you're going to do with the frozen ODSP payments. You congratulate the federal government for finally getting into housing but you aren't going to spend any money at all on housing yourself.

I shake my head, because you know what I think about those guys and what they did for eight years, and then I look over there and I see people doing the same thing by omission. It's not because you're happy and proud. You don't stand up and say, "I'm happy and proud to do this," like they used to, but the end result is exactly the same. You end up doing the same thing. There's nothing in that speech—find it. Is there anything in there about what you're going to do to help the plight of those who are on welfare, of those single parents with kids who haven't enough money or food and have to go to the food banks? Is there anything in there about the poverty of those kids and what's going to happen when you grow up in Regent Park or Jane-Finch or Teesdale or Malvern? Is there anything in there that you're going to help them? There's nothing in there that you're going to help them.

Is there anything about your commitment on the clawback? I remember what Dalton McGuinty said, what Sandra Pupatello said and what all of you said: You would end the clawback. Is there anything in the throne speech that you're going to do any of that? There is not a single thing that you are going to do to help that. Is there anything in there about giving more money to ODSP? You didn't in the last budget. Is there anything to say that your plan is to finally make it better? Is there anything in

there about your plan for the two years? You talked about lots of things, but is there anything about that? There's not a single word. Is there anything in there—other than to say, "We've signed an accord with the federal government, which is going to release money"—that you're actually going to put some of the province's money into housing? There's not a single thing.

I have to tell you, I am so hugely disappointed. You saw, you knew and you campaigned against the brutality of those years, but when you have a chance to do something, you are singularly silent on that issue. I say that with chagrin.

I listened too to see what you were going to say on other issues. The whole issue of democratic renewal—there's a minister now responsible for democratic renewal and I'm suddenly on that committee. I remember the time of Mike Harris. I remember imposing the megacity upon the people of Toronto when they voted 78% to oppose it. I remember the downloading exercise that made it literally impossible for Toronto, Hamilton, London, Ottawa and every other municipality in this province to actually accomplish their goals. I remember the imposition of MVA—which is probably causing a lot of you some difficulties these days—on all of the municipalities, even though the suggestions were that it should be phased, it should be done right. There were a whole bunch of other things that needed to be done that weren't done and it's coming back to cause problems.

I have some difficulties, because I listened to that throne speech too about what you were going to do for democracy, and although there was a line or two in there that you were actually going to do something in terms of changing the democratic structure, making this place more democratic, making the people more relevant to the process, there really wasn't much there.

2020

Yesterday, there was a group here, some eight or 10 people sitting in that gallery, who came from the city of Kawartha Lakes. Of all the people, I think Mr. Gerretsen knows them best. Perhaps Mike Colle, the new minister, knows them as well, because in one of his more brilliant moments he described it as the city of Kawartha Mistakes. To this day, people still talk about what a silly idea it was for the previous government to amalgamate a whole bunch of farmland and pretend that it was a city.

If you've never been there, go there. I go there or drive through there once in a while. I go up to Lindsay. I have some relatives there. I remember one day driving from my parents, who live near Bancroft, Ontario, in a little town called Cardiff, and all of a sudden there was a sign, as I'm coming down toward Lindsay, saying, "Thank you for coming to the city of Kawartha Lakes." I drove and drove and it was at least one hour before I drove out and it said, "You're now leaving Kawartha Lakes." I saw some farms, I saw some highway, I saw some trees, I saw a couple of rivers, a few lakes, but do you know something? I don't think I ever saw anything that looked like a city. To this day, I really ponder why this government thinks it's a city or why the previous government thought it was a city.

The people were here yesterday because they believe in democracy. I'm coming back to this whole thing about electoral reform. The government imposed upon them a city which they did not want and the people fought back. The government then recognized how wrong this was and offered them an opportunity to vote against the city, if they didn't want to stay in a city. The people all got together and decided they were going to fight it. They worked with the then minister, Minister Hodgson, and developed a question, a referendum, which the minister said would be binding upon the people of the new city of Kawartha Lakes. Those people would have an opportunity to undo an amalgamation which was unjust, unfair and quite simply ludicrous—beyond belief ludicrous. It didn't work. It was impossible. It was not, is not and maybe for 100 years will not be a city, and they voted to de-amalgamate. It wasn't a landslide, but they voted to de-amalgamate. In fact, more people as a percentage voted to de-amalgamate that city than the number of people as a percentage who voted in Newfoundland to join Canada.

Today, we all think that because 52% of the people in Newfoundland voted to join Canada and 48% voted not to join, that was a bloody good vote, that there was democracy. We recognized it and we welcomed them, but the people of Kawartha Lakes had the same kind of a vote. It was about 52% to 48% to de-amalgamate, but we don't recognize that. This government doesn't recognize that. That's democracy that doesn't work because you don't agree with it. You have ignored that.

I have to tell you, when Dalton McGuinty says—and I quote him on several of these quotes:

"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."

"... Ontario Liberals believe in local democracy. We believe the best solutions are local solutions and that local residents should have the right to decide on the future of their municipality."

"... Ontario Liberals will place the decision-making power where it belongs—with local residents. I hope this clears up any misunderstanding."

"I and my caucus are still interested in what the people have to say."

"We're committed to the referendum."

I have to ask you—there are two lines of lofty goals to change how people vote. You want to change how this Parliament operates, and at the end of all of that, do you know what you say? You're going to hold a referendum. You're going to listen to the people. Why would I, why would the people of Kawartha Lakes, why would any other democrat, why would any other citizen believe that if you will not bind yourself to the binding referendum of the people of Kawartha Lakes; that you will bind yourself to change how this Parliament operates, that you will bind yourself to change how the electoral system works or that you will bind yourself to anything the people have to say? I have to tell you, those are very hollow words.

They are very hollow words. Until this government and this minister and this Premier change how they look on the city of Kawartha Lakes and those people who continue to fight for what they believe is just and right, then nothing else you have to say on your referendum, nothing else you have to say on democracy holds any sway with me or with them or, I will tell you, with hundreds of thousands of people in this province.

I have to look too at issues that were not in there. One of them that is very dear to my heart is that of autism and the plight of those poor autistic children. We remember what the Premier had to say in the throes of the election, how he was going to make sure that every single autistic child was looked after. We have brought them into this Legislature, young autistic children and their families, to plead with the Premier to keep his goal and to do what he promised. I know it's expensive. You know it's expensive. In fact, the Conservatives knew it was expensive. John Baird, who was then the minister, made no bones about it. He wasn't going to do it because it cost too much money. But I will tell you, I think it's worth every penny that needs to be spent. For every child you save from a life of autism, for every one who doesn't end up in an institution, for every one who learns enough to be able to be a contributor to this society, you have done a great thing. Yes, it's going to be expensive, but what is the alternative? Is the alternative to put them in homes for the rest of their lives? Is the alternative to lock them away? I don't think so. I don't think that's what you want either. But if you look at your throne speech, where was the reference to autism? Where was there any reference to people with disabilities? Where was there any reference to the things you had promised to do?

This is what makes me sad. This is what I think makes a lot of people unhappy with politicians. It makes them wary of them. It makes them not want to vote. It makes them think their vote is useless. It makes them think that politicians are perhaps not as truthful as they should be. If you really believe those things, then they should have been in your throne speech, they should have been a direction you want to go, because when they are not there, when all of these things are not there, when all of these things are left out, then one has to think that they are left out on purpose.

It was a sad day to listen to the Lieutenant Governor. It was a sad day, not because—he is, in my mind, one of the truly remarkable people of this province. What he has done in his lifetime is amazing, coming from his life, coming from the aboriginal community, overcoming huge obstacles even to this day. He is honest and open. But he read out a speech that I do not think reflected where this province should go and where I do not believe the majority of members of your caucus on that side of the House want to go. Do not pat yourself on the back for what you promised in the past. Pat yourself on the back for what you're going to do in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise this evening to speak on the issue of improving health care for our people, which was highlighted in the throne

speech, of which I'm proud and passionate as an MPP, as a Bramptonian and as an Ontarian. The throne speech reinforced our government's dedication to education, health care and the economy.

Tonight, I'm particularly proud of one specific area of investment in health care in Brampton, particularly in Brampton Centre, of which I am the representative. We had an announcement quite recently on the redevelopment of the William Osler Health Care Peel Memorial Lynch Street hospital, an existing hospital that needed to be renovated. Minister Smitherman came out to talk about the redevelopment project, and I can't tell you how lucky I feel as the member. I have an existing hospital that has seven cranes working on-site, and now I have an additional project of a redevelopment for continuing care beds to be brought to my hospital and my health care community. So I'm particularly proud. The redevelopment project at the former Peel Memorial Hospital site is scheduled to be implemented in 2009-10. It's a pretty short timeline for my hospital board. They're incredibly excited. I know they're going to be working with our community and asking them what they'd like to see in their new, redeveloped Peel Memorial Hospital site. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care had previously approved a \$9-million grant to help us design and work with the costs associated with the planning process and the conversion of the space at Peel Memorial Hospital.

2030

As I said earlier, I feel very lucky. I have a 608-bed hospital underway, with seven cranes. It's a wonderful site. It makes the hair on the back of your neck prickle to know that we're building something so magnificent, one of the biggest construction projects anywhere in Canada. I'm particularly proud.

Mr. O'Toole: I think back to the comments made by the member from Beaches–East York. I know he means well. I think it's like a strong economy argument, that you have to have the economy to generate the revenue.

But if I listen to my constituents, which I do on a very regular and committed basis in the riding of Durham—I just want that on the record clearly. I work for them. Now I'm getting a lot of calls, as you probably are, Mr. Speaker, on MPAC. I try to help people, saying this government promised change. There really is no change occurring, and it's unfortunate.

I was talking to the Minister of Municipal Affairs just a few minutes ago, and he seems to be receptive to some things and not receptive to others. There are home heating issues, electricity issues, gas, gas tax. These are also additional taxes. They are Liberal taxes by any other name. I said earlier in my remarks that recently the health tax, which is costing the ordinary family, with two parents working and a \$60,000 income—they're paying close to \$1,000 a year, \$1,200. That's \$100 a month. So now we've got the health tax, we've got the municipal tax, we've got the electricity, we've got the natural gas, we've got the gasoline. These are treacherous ways to put more tax burden on the hard-working people of Ontario.

This throne speech talked about economic advantage. Be warned, voters of Ontario: This government has

raised your taxes and increased spending. The revenue in the last public accounts went up by \$10 billion. Do you know what happened? Their expenditures went up by \$5 billion. Ask yourself the question, are you any better off after the heavy tax burden of this Liberal government? I think you'll find that the answer is no.

Ms. Horwath: It's my pleasure to make some comments on the debate that was brought forward by my colleague and friend from the Beaches–East York riding. I'm always impressed by the way that Michael is able to set, in a very clear outline, the failures of this government, doing so in a way that is so meaningful for the real people of Ontario. Once again he proved his ability to grasp not only what the hopes were in 2003 but what the disappointments are since the restating of the government's agenda, or lack thereof, in terms of solving some of the problems that were foisted upon us by the previous Conservative regime. I'm looking forward to making my own comments on the throne speech in a short time, later on this evening.

It's a huge responsibility that elected officials have, or that people have who put their names forward to represent others in elected capacities during the time of a campaign. Although Michael spoke of some specific campaigns that he participated in, during the last campaign in which I ran, people in Hamilton East were already seeing that the government was failing dismally in the promises they had made, and they thought they would be able to send a message to the government. Unfortunately, the government has become—well, I don't know what they've become, but they've certainly become deaf to the pleas of the people of Ontario, who have asked them to really take note of the serious concerns that are out there. Some of those concerns I'll be outlining a little later on.

Mr. Patten: In response to my colleague from Beaches–East York who, by the way, I think is one of the more thoughtful members in this House; I acknowledge that. I work with him on committee, and I see the degree of homework he puts in. But I do want to take him on on one thing that he talked about: that we didn't talk about poverty, we didn't talk about poor people, we didn't talk about people who are at the lower end of the low-income level.

I would say, listen and reflect upon this. We said—and if you look at it, you will find numerous opportunities on the positive side—for example, that we will fund 25,000 new child care spaces and assistance for thousands of low- and middle-income families; we will introduce Best Start, which will ensure our children arrive, on the first day of school, prepared to learn; that 2,100 schools now have smaller classes in junior kindergarten to grade 3 because of hiring 2,400 new teachers. And when you talk at the high school level, we're introducing counsellors at every particular high school to help those kids who are having trouble with their studies and who will be able to move through in their education. Reaching Higher, \$6.2 billion dollars in helping students, provides grants for lower-income youngsters who otherwise might not be there. “‘Accessibility’ means ensuring no qualified

student is denied a higher education because of his or her financial resources.”

“Where you start out in life should not determine how high you can reach,” nor the wealth of your particular family.

Throughout this speech, I would advocate that it's positive. It's not digging in the mire of depression and discouragement. There are numerous opportunities in education, in employment in the medical field and in the environmental field that say we can create a better opportunity for everybody in a universal fashion.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Beaches–East York, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Prue: I'd like to thank my colleagues from Brampton Centre, Durham, Hamilton East and Ottawa Centre. You all talked about things—I only had 20 minutes. I could have talked much longer.

I wished I could have talked about the P3 hospital in Brampton. I wish I could have talked about how it's no different than what the Conservatives offered you, and in fact it is identical to what the Conservatives offered you. Tony Clement, who is no longer with us in this particular House, commented that he couldn't see any difference and, quite frankly, I can't either. But congratulations for having a hospital. I only wish it was a public hospital and that we weren't spending the 20% to make people rich.

Mr. Patten: It is a public hospital.

Mr. Prue: Privately financed and—OK.

I'm not going to talk about raising taxes—and thank you to my friend from Hamilton East—in the minute that's left.

I did reflect and I didn't talk about the education system, because I have to be quite frank: I think the government, in some respects, has been doing, not an admirable, but at least a decent job on education. There are a whole bunch of things that you could have done better. I think my colleague from Trinity–Spadina has outlined how it could have been done better. But the throne speech did deal in great part with education. Education is important, but you have to understand that the kids from poor communities—

Ms. Horwath: They can't learn if they're starving.

Mr. Prue: —can't learn if they're hungry. They cannot learn if they don't have opportunity, if they don't have books, if they don't have decent clothes. They can't learn if all the money is being clawed back from their parents. They can't learn if everything is desperation so that they go out and buy guns.

I'm from Regent Park. I know how valuable an education is, and I think it's a great thing when you give equality of opportunity for education, but it cannot be apart from everything else. You cannot make them hungry, you cannot make them poor, and you cannot send them to school in lousy clothes. That's where you have failed.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Leal: It's a pleasure for me to have an opportunity to provide a few remarks on the throne speech. I will be sharing my time with my good friend the member

from Thornhill, Mr. Racco, who is celebrating his 20th anniversary of serving in public life in Ontario.

2040

I'll start my remarks by congratulating an institution in the city of Peterborough, the Peterborough Petes, who will be celebrating their 50th anniversary this year—it's their 50th anniversary season—under the directorship of coach Dick Todd and general manager Jeff Twohey. A little-known fact is that Scotty Bowman started his illustrious coaching career in Peterborough in 1959, when the team was owned by the Montreal Canadiens. He got his upbringing and background in Peterborough and went on to be one of the most successful coaches ever in the National Hockey League.

I hear the doom and gloom from my friends opposite. I pick up today's Report on Business from the Globe and Mail. The headline is, “With Economy at Top Speed, Bank of Canada Hits the Brakes.” And a quote: “The Canadian economy now appears to be operating at full production capacity.” Well, that is good. But let me say how that impacts in Peterborough. Quaker Oats, one of the leading manufacturers of cereal products in North America: at full capacity, three shifts. Quickmill Machine, a company that produces large gantry machinery for the mining industry in Canada, has a full-page ad in the Peterborough Examiner virtually every other day looking for new people. Numet Engineering, an engineering company in Peterborough, has another full-page ad in the Peterborough Examiner every other day looking for people. If that's a sign that the Ontario economy is weakening—well, I think it's an indicator that things are going pretty well in Ontario, reinforced by the outline we provided recently in the throne speech.

I want to talk about health care for a moment. My good friend from Brampton here—we all know that that hospital is a publicly owned facility in Brampton and will do a wonderful job serving that community for many years to come. In my own community of Peterborough, on June 20 I had the pleasure to announce that the riding of Peterborough will get a new hospital. On June 27, we started construction. Ellis-Don won the successful bid. I know that a couple of weeks ago, my friend from Durham, a good friend of mine, Mr. O'Toole—his mother-in-law, Madge Hall, I hope is getting better; she broke her hip. Mr. O'Toole said in the estimates committee that he was at the new Peterborough hospital site and couldn't see that anything was going on. I suggested in estimates that perhaps Mr. O'Toole's glasses need to be looked at, because at that time, two weeks ago, we had two cranes on-site. We now have four cranes on-site. The hospital construction will be completed in October 2007 and fully operational by the spring of 2008, and it's a fully publicly owned hospital.

Let me tell what you else. We talk about the health care premium. Well, the health care premium is providing those essential dollars to invest in health care in the province of Ontario. I want to remark that when Mr. Romanow did his royal commission, he said the biggest enemy of public health care in Canada is the status quo.

This is not a status quo government. This is a government that is challenging the health care system. This is a government investing in health care to make it the best in Canada by far.

In my own home town of Peterborough, we have five family health teams. In fact, I'll pay tribute tonight to the team that put it together. Dr. Don Harterre, Mr. Bill Casey, Councillor Bernie Cahill and his counterpart in the county, Deputy Reeve Jay Murray Jones, who head up the Greater Peterborough Health Care Alliance, put together this template for family health teams in our community, which now is being used by other communities across the province of Ontario to set up their family health teams. By providing the necessary dollars, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Honourable George Smitherman, was making these health teams a reality in Peterborough.

I want to talk about education. My good wife, Karan, is watching tonight. She's a grade 8 teacher at St. Teresa's school, and a very good teacher, I might add. I hear all this talk that the only people we helped out were the big union bosses and the teacher unions. Well, I challenge the members of the opposition to take some time to go to Tim Hortons, spend a few bucks to get some doughnuts and coffee, and sit down with rank-and-file teachers in their community, and what is the story that they will share with them? They will tell you that for the first time in not eight but in 13 years—because they went through the social contract, which was really difficult for them, when the NDP and the Hampton-Rae government opened up those contracts and took away things from the teachers' unions—there is peace and stability. When you talk to those rank-and-file teachers, those folks who are in at 7:30 a.m. and who leave perhaps at 6 p.m. at night, they'll tell you that for the first time in 13 years it's a positive learning environment in the province of Ontario. It's important to get those things right in their classrooms. By lowering class sizes we're providing the foundation for the future which will be directly linked to our economic success. That's the good news that was in our throne speech.

To continue, one of the things I'm particularly excited about—you talk about addressing people who have difficulties. The dropout rate in Ontario has been about 30%. By designing a new diploma for those individuals who had dropped out previously, those individuals who are not quite adapted to the academic stream, we're going to provide an alternative diploma for those individuals to help them with the skills training and to actually give them an opportunity and the hope they really need. That's a very important point in our throne speech that we want to pursue.

There's additional good news: health care, education and our investment in the economy. I think of the \$6.2 billion we're going to put into post-secondary education—for the first time in 40 years, a substantial investment in that area. How do we prepare our economy for the future? By making investments in post-secondary education. I read that in 2003 when we looked at the jurisdiction of Ontario in comparison with states in the

United States and other provinces in Canada, we were virtually at the bottom of the heap in the investment we were making in post-secondary education. The Premier recognizes that to have a prosperous economy, to build a foundation for the future, we've got to make those investments. Frankly, in 2007, that will be the yardstick we're going to be measured by.

In other areas, I want to talk about our investment in the auto strategy. Minister Cordiano deserves a lot of credit. In fact, he terminated the Terminator, because he went head to head with Governor Schwarzenegger from California. When he went to Japan, along with Prime Minister Martin, we were able to make that pitch for Ontario to prove that this is the place for auto investment. It's the first time there has been a greenfield investment in this province in over a decade, because we have certain economic advantages that they don't have in other areas. By sustaining our publicly funded health care system in Ontario, it provides us, depending on whose statistics you want to take, between \$1,200 and \$2,000 per vehicle manufactured in Ontario. In fact, General Motors operations in Canada, in Oshawa, are recognized as some of the leaders within the General Motors family; again, public health care gives us a significant advantage. I'm told now that Honda is looking for another investment here in Ontario. What does that say? It's more than just Woodstock. Those kinds of investments give a signal to the world that says there is a confidence in doing business in Ontario. That's what those investments mean. I could go on and on and on, but I want to give my friend from Thornhill an opportunity to put his views on the table.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I want to thank the member from Peterborough for sharing the time with me. I want to assure him, this House and the people of Ontario that the prosperity he described in Peterborough is equalled, if not bettered, in my riding of Thornhill, where, since our election, we have opened the biggest mall in this province of Ontario, Vaughan Mills, where thousands of students have jobs, and where every day you see industrial building. I must also say to the Conservative side that the only area that went down is new housing, which is exactly what the people of Thornhill have been saying for years: "Slow down the housing, because we cannot afford to have that amount of housing in our community."

I'm pleased to be here as the member from Thornhill to lend support for last week's throne speech. The October 12th throne speech, appropriately entitled Strengthening Ontario's Economic Advantage, was well received by the majority of Thornhill residents. The key to Ontario's continued success was made clear: A prosperous Ontario is a successful Ontario. We are part of an Ontario that encourages and supports continued education, fosters innovation and promotes small businesses, while improving the health of our people. Our government is determined to consider all Ontarians, from students to teachers to seniors, and provide the necessary programs and funding.

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The results are in. We have seen progress over the past two years: higher test scores, shorter wait times and over 193,000 new jobs. In education, we have seen smaller class sizes and improved test scores. New textbooks and other learning resources are replacing worn, outdated textbooks. New library books will stock school shelves thanks to a \$61-million investment. Every school, regardless of size or geographic location, and every student will benefit from this investment. Our children will also see better conditions in which to learn. Our Good Places to Learn initiative will support school construction, facility repairs and renewal projects, which is worth \$4 billion over 3 years, which will benefit over 1.5 million kids.

New legislation is on its way making it mandatory for young people to keep learning until they are 18 years old. Also, a new alternative high school diploma will recognize the importance of learning a skill or trade. We are implementing our Reaching Higher plan for post-secondary education, which will invest \$6.2 billion more over five years in universities and colleges, apprenticeships and skilled programs. Our Best Start plan enables Ontario children to begin their school days fully prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

Children's health is a top priority for this government, as was demonstrated with the recent announcement of new funding for student nutrition programs and the implementation of a minimum of 20 minutes per day of physical activity in schools. I went to one of the local schools to make this announcement, because it is something I strongly believe in. These programs are a wonderful investment in our community and our children. In York region alone, 36 schools will receive a total of \$113,686 from the McGuinty government to go toward ensuring that children have proper nutrition.

As part of its commitment to the health and success of children and youth in Ontario, the government has nearly doubled its investment in nutrition programs, from \$4.5 million to \$8.5 million annually. More than 2,500 student nutrition programs across the province will receive funding. Under this revamped program, a healthy breakfast, lunch or snack will be provided each day to approximately 67,000 students in elementary and secondary schools.

In health, we have seen dramatic increases in the number of CT scans, cancer surgeries, cataract surgeries, cardiac procedures and hip and knee replacements. MRI scans continue to produce shorter wait times for patients, and of course York Central Hospital and Markham Stouffville Hospital are benefiting from this program. This means that the people of the region of York will enjoy shorter wait times and potentially improved prognosis of illnesses caught by MRIs in the early stages. Family health teams feature doctors working alongside other health professionals. The McGuinty government is improving patient care in York region by investing \$12.9 million for new and modern medical equipment in 27 long-term-care homes, as well as the three York region hospitals. The funding is part of the government's \$340-

million investment to update and increase diagnostics and medical equipment in hospitals and long-term-care homes across the province. Also, \$221,800 was given to York region hospitals to enhance infection control capacity to ensure that hospitals are better equipped to prevent and control infection rates.

We are focusing on protecting the health of Ontarians and we are investing in public health by combating smoking, requiring daily physical activity in our grade schools, introducing legislation to protect drinking water and reducing smog by replacing coal-fired electricity generation systems.

Our province is rich in diversity and welcomes the best and brightest from all over the world. My riding of Thornhill is in the region of York, which celebrates the fact that it is one of the most diverse areas in Ontario. At least 40% of us are new immigrants in Ontario. The government is expanding training programs in English-as-a-second-language instruction. Ontario will ensure timely access to professions and trades for qualified professionals trained outside of Canada by ensuring that regulatory bodies create a fair and transparent registration and appeals process.

The government's drive to form effective partnerships with the private sector and other levels of government includes less paperwork for small business, gas tax money for public transit, 1,000 more police officers on the street, the introduction of a new City of Toronto Act and legislation that would treat all municipalities with respect.

We are also looking into the future to ensure Ontario's place in the world market as a leader in innovation. Our government is boosting research and development while investing in key sectors, such as the auto industry.

We have not lost sight of the fundamentals. Ontarians have worked to reduce the provincial deficit from the \$5.6 billion that the Tories had left to \$1.6 billion, the last figure the Minister of Finance indicated. The province has launched a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure investment plan, including roads, public transportation, hospitals and other infrastructure. This government is reducing traffic and greenhouse gas emissions by reaching an agreement with the federal and municipal governments to invest \$1 billion in GO Transit and \$150 million for Viva, the York region transit system. In York region we look forward to more investment in the eventual extension of the subway all the way to York University and, of course, into my riding of Thornhill and the Thornhill Corporate Centre.

In just two years, the government has created a plan to deliver a reliable supply of clean energy at a reasonable cost. Consumers can look forward to getting smart meters that will help them save money by telling them when they can pay less if they choose to.

The government will offer Ontarians the first public service money-back guarantee through changes to the birth certificate program.

This government remains committed to continuing our work and staying focused on what is important to the

people of Ontario. We have work to do, and we are here to listen to what our constituents have to say and address their issues.

One such issue is safety. In light of the series of shootings in the GTA, our government has taken the lead to keep our cities safe. From marijuana grow-ops to gang violence, this government is getting tough on crime. In addition to the commitment to hire 1,000 new officers across the province, hospitals are now required to report any gunshot wounds. We are appointing 29 new judges, 50 new crown attorneys and 56 new probation officers to help ensure that cases are dealt with effectively. We've established anti-gun and anti-gang units to make it easier for law enforcement agencies to work together to combat violence. We are not only getting tough on crime, but we are also providing alternatives for at-risk youths. Keeping kids in school is one way of keeping them off the streets. We are also investing \$1 million to fund five pre-apprenticeship training projects, helping approximately 100 youth. These programs are designed to give at-risk youth the opportunity to develop their skills and make the right choices in life. By investing in health, transportation, education and community safety, we are strengthening our communities.

To conclude, let me tell you that the economy is doing very well, and hopefully we will even be able to improve our performance. But one thing is clear: The people of Thornhill do not wish to see this government continue the deficit that the Tories left us. They want to see the deficit ended and potentially paid down—what the Tories accumulated in their nine years of administration. But at the same time, they also want to make sure that we pay enough taxes to make sure that the quality of life, such as health care, education, public transportation and so on, is kept at the level that Ontarians expect from this government. We are doing that. The throne speech indicated that. We are on the right track and I hope that the NDP in particular, and the Tories, will see the light and will support what we are doing, because it's the right thing to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

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Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): In the few moments I have, I'd like to just make a couple of comments with regard to the information that has just been given.

The member for Thornhill talked about a number of different topics, but I think one of the things that characterizes the throne speech that we're debating is the number of reannouncements that were present. I think that, historically, the notion of a throne speech is to be looking forward, and the idea of presenting a plan for the future, but even in many of the topics that the member opposite referred to there was a question of the reannouncements. I found a particularly good example in the question of community safety, where the member opposite refers once again to the 1,000 police officers, which of course was part of a platform commitment two years ago. I think that one of the characteristics of this throne speech, then, has been that question of reannouncing platform items from over two years ago.

The other thing is, of course, some very significant omissions. While going back to their platform on the issue of 1,000 police officers, they chose not to go back to the platform commitment with regard to autism. So there's no message of hope for the parents of autistic children who have reached the age of six, despite the fact that they have the pieces of paper in their hands, signed by the now Premier, establishing his commitment to follow through on that commitment.

Ms. Horwath: It's interesting to hear the honourable member talking about there being light and us needing to see the light. From my perspective, I see a great deal of darkness, and that darkness is named "Liberal" these days in Ontario.

Nonetheless, I find it interesting and actually quite galling to hear the talk about some of these accomplishments, when all you need to do is scratch the surface very lightly to see that they're either the same kinds of things that the previous government was doing, or in fact the accolades that the government is giving itself are not anything that's going to be realized in real life, by real people, in some cases for decades. In my riding, I think of Best Start specifically as a program that tends to get a lot of attention in terms of rhetoric. But in terms of actual on-the-ground changes for parents of young children today, those children will probably be well into grades 8, 9 and 10 before they come anywhere near getting access to affordable, licensed and qualified daycare for their children. Unfortunately, the government continues to spin and spin, but what they are not doing is providing on-the-ground solutions to the real problems that face people in Ontario.

You can brag all you want about things like this great economy. I got a letter today about some serious concerns that are happening in industry in Hamilton. Industry is suffering significantly because this government has refused to come up with a hydro policy that's decent, that's affordable for industry, that will maintain a decent manufacturing base in this province. Those are good, decent jobs that people are not going to be able to go to any more. Those are good, decent jobs that are not going to be there to support families, that are not going to be there to maintain a backbone of thriving communities. This government is failing miserably in that regard.

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): First, let me congratulate the members for Peterborough and Thornhill, who once again have done an outstanding job representing their constituents.

I want to talk about Ontario, and in direct contrast to the previous speaker, I think there is an air of hope and optimism in this province that there hasn't been probably since the last time the Liberals were in government. Ontario is far better off today than it was just two years ago.

I've only got time to touch on a few things; I'm going to do my best.

Class sizes are smaller today than they were two years ago; 1,200 class sizes are smaller. We've got special ed. teachers in the classroom. Junk food is out and exercise is

in. We have peace and stability in the classrooms. We've frozen tuition for the last two years in post-secondary, and for the first time in 10 years, low-income post-secondary students are getting grants, not loans, to go to university and college.

On the health care front, we've got 69 family health teams, and 50 more coming this year. Wait times are finally being managed and coming down. We've got new and better hospitals coming across the province, including in my riding of London North Centre. More doctors are being trained, with twice as many spots for international medical graduates. That's real progress in two years.

On the social assistance front, what's closest to my heart: We have restored fairness and dignity. We have stopped treating our RESPs as assets so that people can save for their kids' education. We've stopped putting liens on people's homes. We restored the nutritional supplement for pregnant women. We allow kids to earn and save money without jeopardizing their social assistance. We've lowered the barriers to employment. We've reformed and simplified earnings exemptions, so the more you work, the better off you are. We've extended health benefits, after people leave, for six months to remove that barrier to employment. We've increased the maximum deduction for child care, and we have a new \$500 payment to recover the cost of work. We've done a lot in two years. Stick around for the next two.

Mr. Hudak: Certainly, if we've seen 50 broken promises in the first two years, I ain't looking forward to the next two, let me tell you. With all due respect to my colleague from London, whom I have great respect for—

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): No, you don't.

Mr. Hudak: I do, as well as my friend from Brant, whom I'm looking forward to spending some time with tomorrow.

Do you know what? I don't believe what you said. You've got a long list. Do you know why? Because if it came from Dalton McGuinty's pen, it ain't worth the paper it's written on. Never before have I seen a politician who has been equated with the "L" word like Dalton McGuinty. When you ask somebody—look at the SES survey—the first word that comes to mind when people hear the words "Dalton McGuinty" is "liar." It's the first word that comes to their mind in the SES survey.

The Deputy Speaker: I'd like the member for Erie-Lincoln to withdraw that.

Mr. Hudak: Withdrawn, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Colle: He's so eloquent.

Mr. Hudak: My friend from Eglinton-Lawrence taught me eloquence.

You'd think he'd be standing up on his feet and doing something about gun violence here in the city of Toronto. It was not even mentioned in this so-called throne speech. It was the summer of the gun, and all we heard from Dalton McGuinty was the summer of silence: not a word, not a plan, nothing in the throne speech. The member for Eglinton-Lawrence is quiet now because he

knows that his leader has no backbone when it comes to fighting crime. Some soft solutions—we've seen nothing come out of it. I heard the Attorney General talk about raiding the gun shops to make sure the guns are all locked away. This is akin to raiding pharmacies to fight a drug battle. I haven't seen these raids take place, despite his claims. His so-called amnesty for guns: no results from that. I'd much rather have seen the Premier stand up and fight crime, to actually demand tougher sentences, to say that this is wrong, to not stand for it, and to make it a highlight of the throne speech instead of—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Peterborough has two minutes.

Mr. Leal: I want to thank the members from Thornhill, York North, Hamilton East, London North Centre and Erie-Lincoln for providing comments this evening. I think the Premier, the Attorney General and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services have been leaders in moving forward to deal with the gun situation here in Toronto.

I just want to read a letter I received:

"I was most pleased to read in the paper that several services have been increased, among them orthopaedic prostheses, cataract surgery and others. This change reflects the recognition by your government to respond to the truly needy in our society. I wish to thank you for your efforts in this regard."

Lena Powell, who is a constituent—

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. A point of order?

Mr. Prue: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think that the member is reading from a prohibited device in this Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: I didn't see it, but if that's the case, I'd certainly request that the member set it aside.

Mr. Leal: I just wanted to make sure that the members here got an opportunity to hear what people who go to Tim Hortons every day, who talk about issues of the day, think about some of the things that we're certainly doing in the fields of education and health care.

In the eulogy at his brother's funeral in 1968, Teddy Kennedy said, "Some people go around and ask the question, 'Why?' My brother went through the United States and said, 'Why not?'" That says a lot about this government. We're challenging the status quo. We're saying, "Why not?" to make changes in the health care system, "Why not?" to make changes in the education system and, "Why not make Ontario a better place to live, work and play?"

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The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Hudak: I appreciate the wrap-up comments of my colleague from Peterborough, who I always enjoy listening to. He referenced Teddy Kennedy and he talked a bit about John F. Kennedy as well. John F. Kennedy talked about building the shining city on the hill. That's what a throne speech really should be about. It should be the government's vision on how you're going to build that shining city on the hill. Instead, we had the most bland, vanilla, dull, lacklustre, meaningless piece of

puffery that I've ever seen in a throne speech. There was nothing there. We basically had 60 old warmed-over promises reannounced. We heard about a couple of Web sites and we heard about plans to hire lots more bureaucrats and expand the size of the civil service. But that vision of the shining city on the hill, what Dalton McGuinty wants to make the province of Ontario into down the road—nothing. Nothing compelling there. Nothing to sink your teeth into. It was about as exciting as leftover meatloaf.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I know my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs is heckling a bit there and I think I can understand the strategy, when you guys are there in cabinet: "Let's not make any waves. Let's just not cause any problems. Let's not make any controversial decisions that might actually cause some debate in this province and actually get us somewhere if implemented. Let's just go into quiet mode." That's what we saw in the throne speech—about as exciting as leftover meatloaf.

Mr. Levac: What do you have against meatloaf?

Mr. Hudak: It's just not exciting.

Mr. Levac: It is.

Mr. Hudak: Well, see, maybe that's why you're on that side of the House and I'm over here, because you think meatloaf is exciting. Then you'll like this—the Niagara Falls Review editorial of Friday October 14, 2005, I guess two days after this infamous throne speech: "McGuinty's Thin Menu Leaves That Hungry Feeling."

"With no real shining moment or truly memorable announcement in the speech"—not my words; those are the editorialists at the Niagara Falls Review—"Erie-Lincoln's Tim Hudak might be closer to the mark when he compares it to warmed-over meatloaf (though his wife might not like the comparison)." They go on to say, "But when a '15 days or free' offer to people who apply for birth certificates on-line is one of your highlights, you're working from a pretty thin script"—if that's one of the highlights.

Mr. Levac: Not if you need a birth certificate.

Mr. Hudak: But you know what? They want the birth certificate on-line on time. They don't want their money back; they want the birth certificate. Right now in the province of Ontario, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, it takes you longer to get a birth certificate than it does to have a baby. We're talking about people who have had birth certificates more than nine months delayed. But we're not here to debate the merits of the 15-day money-back guarantee. The main point I'm trying to make is this is pretty thin gruel. The Niagara Falls Review: "But when a '15 days or free' offer to people who apply for birth certificates on-line is one of your highlights, you're working from a pretty thin script."

It goes on, "No doubt, Dalton McGuinty's government was blindsided by the unfortunate timing of Treasurer Greg Sorbara's resignation (due to a criminal investigation of a company he is part owner of).

"But never mind the meatloaf—where was the meat?"

"Ontario citizens would probably like to have heard more about what the government will do to reduce their tax burden, which numerous reports predict will get a lot more onerous in the next 12 months.

"There was little to dig into and really, little to feel invigorated about in the speech. Anyone hungry for more will have to make do with McGuinty's small serving."

This surprised me. I actually thought they would have something interesting in the throne speech, something bold. I thought there might be something of the vision thing that George H.W. Bush used to talk about. It wasn't there. You know what? I was actually thinking that Dalton McGuinty was going to throw out a bunch more promises there, and probably break or not get to in the next two years.

I think we'll remember the 2003 throne speech. We all met in this chamber in similar seats. My colleague Ms. Horwath was not with us at that time, but she probably heard that in the 2003 throne speech, as one of its main visions, its main promises to the province of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty said, "I will not raise your taxes," in the 2003 throne speech, and we know what happened to that. In fact, I think there were more than a dozen, close to two dozen, broken promises and unfulfilled commitments in that 2003 throne speech—not worth the paper it was written on. In fact, they should have just taken that throne speech from the chamber and put it on the fiction shelf of the local public library. It's closer to fiction than any semblance of reality.

That throne speech in 2003 said the government would offer affordable and reliable energy, reminiscent of their campaign commitment to freeze the price of power at 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour. We all know what happened to that commitment: two big increases in hydro to date, with another big whack to the pocketbooks coming in early 2006.

Mr. O'Toole: That's actually a tax.

Mr. Hudak: My colleagues says it's actually a tax. Certainly, if you're a working family, a senior or a young person in the province of Ontario, that's more money coming out of your pocket, whether it's a tax or a hydro increase. You know what it is? About 28% has been the increase to date, despite Dalton McGuinty's solemn promise to the contrary, despite the energy minister's—now finance minister's—promise to the contrary. A 28% increase, and another whack is coming that is forecasted to be close to 30% in 2006—on top of that. Think about it.

People are going to have to deal with a significant increase in their home heating costs this winter. Whether you're on natural gas—we know the government panel approved a big increase for Enbridge; I think 125 bucks a year—or you're on oil or propane or certainly if you're still on electric heat, it's going to be a big burden on your pocketbook.

Also in the 2003 throne speech, the government made the old coal plant promise. Remember that one? That was a good one. They really got a lot of people there. Then we found out this summer, a year and a half after that

throne speech and that promise during the campaign, that the whole plan was off. They were no longer going to phase out the coal-fired plants by 2007 as promised.

Believe it or not, the 2003 throne speech said they would balance the budget. They talked about balancing the budget. What we have seen, just like the campaign, is that they promised to balance the budget each and every year, and it turns out that for each and every year of this government's mandate, they plan on running deficits, contrary to their campaign commitments.

The 2003 throne speech of the government said they would take a responsible approach to Ontario's finances, but then we saw four different estimates of the 2004-05 budget deficit. It was \$2.2 billion, then it went up to \$3 billion and at one point, \$6 billion. There's not a target they haven't missed. Now we have a new finance minister and we'll see if he's any better. But I suspect he'll have an even higher deficit figure than they finished with for 2004-05.

Here's another beauty: There will be no accounting tricks. That was in the 2003 throne speech in the fiction section of your local library. On March 18, 2005, the Provincial Auditor required Premier McGuinty to change accounting practices that would have counted long-term gains from power purchase agreements in one fiscal year. As a result, their budget numbers skyrocketed from \$2.2 billion to \$6 billion, a \$3.8-billion accounting trick. That's got to be Guinness; that's got to be hall of fame, a \$3.8-billion accounting trick caught red-handed by the Provincial Auditor.

They talked about the government hiring, not firing, more nurses. This promise was broken on September 25, 2005—actually, earlier. In January 2005, the health minister, Mr. Smitherman, provided hospitals with \$91 million, as an exclusive deal, to fire nurses in hospitals in the province of Ontario. That's not what they claimed. That's not what they said they were going to do. But \$91 million was earmarked for pink-slipping nurses in the province of Ontario. I needn't go on about that point. I think I've made my point.

Mr. Lalonde: Ninety-one million.

Mr. Hudak: Ninety-one million dollars. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of taxpayers' dollars. I can't do the calculation right now, but imagine how many taxpayers equate to \$91 million dollars. A city full of taxpayers, potentially; a town full of taxpayers. All of that money they put in from their hard-working paycheques is used to fire nurses, against what they said during the campaign and against what they said in the 2003 throne speech.

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Seeing that the campaign platform was tossed out, seeing that the 2003 throne speech is not worth the paper it was written on, I fully expected the 2005 throne speech to similarly be filled with all kinds of broken promises. That remains to be seen. What was surprising was the lack of any kind of vision whatsoever, the lack of any kind of bold agenda for the next two years. Instead, drift is all we're going to see in this chamber and in the province of Ontario.

Really, the only highlights that got any play on the radio, on television and in the media, when they weren't covering the finance minister's resignation, was this notion of the money-back guarantee for Ontarians who fill out birth certificates on-line. My colleague from Beaches—East York already talked about this and how it may not be an option for a lot of Ontarians. If you go to the Web site today, you can fill in an on-line birth certificate request and send it in electronically, if the request is for somebody who's eight or under. That's certainly helpful if you have young children, but I would think that the vast majority of Ontarians are nine and older and therefore wouldn't benefit from this. In fact, when we visited the Web site, we found it was down.

I do look forward to this. Hopefully, they'll do this, because my constituents want much better service than they're getting from this government on birth certificates and I do hope they get it in under the 15 days. But it will be curious to see how they handle security provisions as well in a day when security is a top concern and how electronically they'll be able to verify individuals and verify identification pieces. I suspect that this promise isn't going to be exactly the way they're characterizing it. I hope I'm proven wrong. My main point: It's pretty thin gruel.

The other thing that got any play at all was that the Drive Clean program would eliminate the waste of testing new cars. Now, I thought Drive Clean today didn't test any cars that were three years or under anyway. I think I'm right about that. So I don't know what they mean, exactly, by testing new cars. But you know what? This wasn't new news. The then environment minister, Ms. Dombrowsky, announced in March 2005 that she would review the Drive Clean program by the end of the year. There's two months to go, and maybe the new environment minister or her parliamentary assistant will do so. I'm not going to hold my breath. But the environment minister said she would review the Drive Clean program by the end of 2005, so it's not new. In fact, my recollection—and my colleagues can correct me if I'm wrong—is that when the program was created, I think back in 1996 by the then member for Guelph—Wellington, Brenda Elliott—

Mr. O'Toole: No, not really. It was created by the NDP as a pilot in north Toronto.

Mr. Hudak: I'm being corrected. Then I'm wrong, I guess. But the point I was going to make was that when Ms. Elliott was the Minister of the Environment and this Drive Clean program was launched, I think in 1996, or at least announced in 1996, I always thought there was a 10-year review period, that 2006 was supposed to be the review period anyway. Now, I may be wrong.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: You're wrong.

Mr. Hudak: The Minister of Municipal Affairs says I'm wrong, and maybe he'll stand up and prove me wrong. Nonetheless, it was announced, I think in 1996, and it was announced by Minister Dombrowsky in 2005 that the program was going to be reviewed anyway. So there's not much here. It's about as exciting as meatloaf.

I welcome my colleagues back after facing that shortage.

We did a little looking back in time to the 1995 throne speech, the Mike Harris government's first throne speech. I'll tell you what it had in it: bold initiatives to ensure a brighter future for Ontario. We promised to cut provincial income taxes, like we said we were going to do, and we did; to reform the Worker's Compensation Board; to scrap MPP pensions, to eliminate tax-free allowances and to take responsibility for setting MPPs' pay away from politicians; to reform the welfare system from a handout to a hand up; to reform the Ontario Human Rights Commission; to restore junior kindergarten as a local option; to ensure a demanding core curriculum; regular testing of students and standardized report cards—all bold initiatives at the time. They all created a lot of debate. I know not everybody liked those initiatives. Many here in the chamber argued against them, debated against them and voted against them, but they were implemented and a lot of them carry on. They caused debate in the province because there was a vision there, whether you liked it or not. I know my colleague from Beaches—East York had some criticisms earlier tonight, which I'll respect, but I think, in turn, he'll respect that there was a clear vision in the 1995 throne speech.

In the 1999 throne speech, Premier Harris promised a 20% personal income tax cut, putting more money in people's pockets for them to spend, save or invest; reach for the top scholarships; to renew, through the Super-Build growth fund, \$20-billion public-private partnerships for hospitals, roads and other infrastructure. It created a lot of debate at the time. Many members here entered that debate. It was a heated debate, but there was a vision, and these visions are abiding. The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal's projects are not entirely different from what we did in SuperBuild. We called them 3Ps, you call them P3s, or vice versa; I'm not sure what the difference is. But there was a vision there. It was bold, and it's abiding.

I also worry a bit about what we're seeing with education standards in the province of Ontario. I thought my colleague Mr. Marchese, the member for Trinity—Spadina, made some good points in his response to the minister today, as my colleagues here on the Conservative side will do as well. The recent test results are questionable. Mr. Marchese raised some points that I think are worth investigating: unlimited time to answer questions, compared to time-limited exams in the past; tests were half as long. The tests last year went for over 10 hours, but only about six hours this year.

What I think people will find kind of amazing is that students were allowed to use calculators this year. Grade

3 and grade 6 students, in the math tests this year, used calculators for the entire test. That wasn't the case in previous years, so we're not exactly comparing apples to oranges.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: It should be apples to apples.

Mr. Hudak: No, we're not even close to apples and oranges. It's like apples to bowling balls. It's not even close. It's not even in the fruit family. I have nothing against apples. I like apples.

I should move on. I do have a concern about the dumbing-down of education standards by the Dalton McGuinty government, which I believe is purely politically motivated to try to get better test results, with great harm to the students of the province of Ontario.

I talked a bit about the guns earlier.

Here's a big concern: I cannot believe that in this throne speech there was not a single mention of one idea to help out hard-working families, seniors and young people in Ontario, who quite frankly are finding it more and more difficult to make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Think about it. The new Dalton McGuinty health tax could take up to \$900 out of the pockets of working families. Electricity costs for the average home have gone up by \$180 per year, and prices are set to go up yet again in 2006. If you're on natural gas, natural gas costs are increasing by \$65 for the average house this year, and I think even more, fully annualized, in 2006. Gasoline costs are increasing by over \$600 for the average family this year. Annual eye exams now cost \$75, because effectively you privatized eye care and chiropractic care in the province of Ontario. You basically went two-tier: Those who can afford it pay for it, and those who can't no longer receive it. They do without.

This equates to approximately \$2,000 per year coming out of the pockets of working families in Ontario, and there was not one sentence, not one word, not one thought in the entire throne speech about giving some assistance, a bit of a break, to these hard-working families. I say shame on Dalton McGuinty and shame on his cabinet for ignoring this plight.

Now we're running out of time. We want to get more to the economy and the underlying concerns in the province of Ontario: 44,000 manufacturing jobs lost in this year alone. This is worrisome. Ontario's unemployment rate is above the national average for five months running. That hasn't happened in 60 years. It's a concern, and there was no attempt in the throne speech to turn it around—pretty thin gruel.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 10 of the clock Thursday, October 20.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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