



No. 8B

N° 8B

ISSN 1180-2987

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)**

Monday 24 October 2005

Lundi 24 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
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 24 October 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 24 octobre 2005

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 19, 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): On the last occasion, the member from Erie-Lincoln had completed his comments. We now have questions and comments.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to see you here tonight.

In truth, I wasn't here for the comments made by the member, so I was just talking to him, as he sat down, about some of the comments he made. I know that if he had had a chance, he would have talked about the fact that under this government we have lost some 42,000 manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario. I'll bet, given the riding that the member from Erie-Lincoln represents, that a couple hundred of those at least are in your riding, in your region or in your area. We have seen nothing from this government with respect to a strategy to deal with those good-paying, probably good pensions, good benefits—all those jobs that have been lost from the economy, not to mention the spinoff jobs that have been lost as well from those companies, small and medium, who would be supplying some of the bigger companies that have gone down.

He said to me that he also talked about energy policy, and I wasn't quite sure what he could have said because, really, I've got to tell you, member from Erie-Lincoln, your energy policy—well, it's the same as theirs. There has been no change. Private hydro brought in by the Conservatives is the same energy policy that has been kept by the Liberals. People are going to get their third hydro hike in April 2006, and what are they to do? We're already hearing from people who can't afford to pay for the two hydro hikes that they have already suffered under this Liberal government.

What is different between the Conservatives and the Liberals is that it was the Liberals in the last election campaign, Dalton McGuinty in particular, who went out with an election promise that said, "We would keep the hydro rate cap in place until 2006." That's what they promised in the last election. I recall, in the fall of 2003,

that one of the first pieces of legislation that went through this House was the Liberals taking off the rate cap a little bit and driving those prices up a little bit more instead of doing what really had to be done, which was to say that private power is an abysmal failure in the province of Ontario, as it has been in so many other jurisdictions, and we should get back to public power: power provided at cost that's affordable not just to ratepayers but to some of the big industrial consumers who are feeling the pinch right now.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I'm delighted to make a few comments regarding the throne speech. I'm going to touch on a few basic issues, because I'll have the opportunity later on this evening to speak in more detail on the throne speech.

One of the things to remember, after the throne speech was made in this House a couple of weeks ago—some of the comments we've heard from the opposition were, "Well, there's nothing new." I'm not so sure what they expected to be "new." I guess the point I wanted to make in that regard is the fact that if we did have to shift gears and have something new, that meant that the road we're going down wasn't working or wasn't quite achieving what we committed to do.

When I address the House later on this evening and speak to some specifics on those things, you will see that what the throne speech really did is reaffirm the commitment that the Premier and this government made some two years ago, or prior to that, in our platform, that we wanted to see better health care, better education, prosperous communities. It took two years. That's not a very long time when you talk about initiatives that governments do, and we are reaping some of the benefits today.

1850

The messages we heard, mostly from the opposition, "There's nothing new"—I'm not sure what they were expecting. What we did say is that we're on track, we're going to keep on track and we're going to deliver on the commitment we made just over two years ago.

I'm delighted by the message that the throne speech gave Ontarians, and we're going to stay on target.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my pleasure to comment on the speech made by the member from Erie-Lincoln on the throne speech. I know that the member from Erie-Lincoln is concerned with the average Ontarian. The average Ontarian is facing increased taxes and increased things they have to pay for, like chiropractors, physio, eye tests. He brought that up.

This throne speech we witnessed recently was just full of reannouncements and reannouncements. In fact, one that sticks in my mind is the 1,000 police officers that were reannounced again. By now, we should have about 5,000 new police officers since 2003, since the current government came to power, because they keep reannouncing these 1,000 police officers. In fact, we haven't seen any new police officers. In light of what has happened this weekend in Toronto with three more people who died, I think it's about time they started to hire some of these police officers they keep announcing.

I know the member from Erie–Lincoln has been concerned with the average Ontarian who is facing increased taxes, increased gas prices, increased oil and heating costs, natural gas costs.

This throne speech we saw—it's bad when the most notable part of it is a 15-day money-back guarantee on your birth certificate. All I can say is, based on the experience we've had in our constituency offices with trying to look after people to get birth certificates filled for them, that's just going to create more work for us. Because, now not only will they not get their birth certificate in 15 days, we're going to have to be getting their money back for them because they didn't get their birth certificate in 15 days. So it's going to be more work for the constituency offices as we try to fulfill yet another Liberal broken promise, which I'm sure it will turn out to be.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I love the opportunity to talk about what throne speeches do. More specifically—I've said this once before and I'll repeat it—in my research on throne speeches in the past, we looked at the directions or the changes that are going to be proposed by a government. What we're proposing and making is quite clear is that our priorities are staying exactly where we were when we first got elected: education, health care, better communities, healthier communities and getting rid of the deficit that was left for us. Those are the priorities that we said in this throne speech we're going to do. We made it quite clear that education is still the priority, that health care is still the priority. We continue to announce some of things that we've already done.

We've already made one major investment on hospices. That's a fantastic announcement. That, to me, is continuing where we want to move in health care.

Smaller class sizes: continuing where we want to move. All the research points us in that direction, and we know that that benefits our kids.

Best Start: The Best Start program is an intelligent way of dealing with making sure that kids are ready to learn before they even get to school. These are the types of programs that we've been instituting since we were elected.

In the throne speech, we're reinforcing what direction we're taking. We've got the ship moving and we're going to make sure it stays there. So what's so hard to understand about a throne speech laying out clearly that that's what we're planning to do?

What we need to have is an understanding from the public out there that we want to be judged on the outcomes of these programs that we're proposing. We've made it quite clear that, in 2007, let's line up and find out whether or not we've taken care of waiting times. We've set the foundation in this new announcement on the Web site and the reality of the complex problem of what wait times are all about. Now that the foundation has been established for what the minister is talking about, you can start looking at whether or not we've brought the wait times down. Quite frankly, that's what we want to be judged on, and that's what the Premier has said right from the very beginning. Take a look at the outcomes at the end of the day and find out if you want us back in office. I'm sure you'll say that you want us.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Erie–Lincoln has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I say to my colleagues opposite, if the throne speech, in the Dalton McGuinty dull Liberal vision, is just a reiteration of old promises, why do you have a throne speech? If you're saying the same thing over and over and over again and saying, "There's really been no progress, but we're really going to try to keep our promises," why have a throne speech? If there are no new ideas, if there's no bold vision of how you want to take on the problems affecting the province of Ontario today and for the next two years, then why do you have a throne speech?

My friend from Northumberland said, "Well, what did you want us to talk about in there?" aside from the dull, drab material we did. Well, how about gun violence in the city of Toronto? How about the summer of the gun? We saw more attacks last night. Not a word in the throne speech. How about the hydro supply debacle that increasing members of your cabinet are presiding over? There was no plan for new supply. Your projects are way behind. Why wasn't there something in there about the plan for the hydro supply that's impacting directly our pocketbooks and new jobs in the province of Ontario? How about the decline of our cross-border relationship? I know it's important to my colleague the Minister of Tourism, but there were no plans in there to try to address that. You talked about some old announcements you made a couple of years ago about Windsor and Niagara Falls, but nothing new about a major issue that affects us in Niagara and in the province as a whole.

What about the behemoth, this Toronto garbage issue? It continues to be trucked into Michigan with no plan, despite my colleague's description of the "amazing" plan. It's only that the emperor has no clothes in his amazing plan, no plan for Toronto garbage, except that in Michigan, Mount Trashmore grows taller and taller by the day. I think they should carve Dalton McGuinty's face into Mount Trashmore to commemorate the lack of decision-making, the lack of leadership and the lack of preparation for when that border closes.

Instead of talking about gun violence, the decline in our cross-border relationship and the decline in the economy, we find ourselves talking about birth certificate

gimmicks, pit bulls and junk food—a dull, drab lack of vision.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It's a pleasure for me to participate in the debate tonight. I want to begin by saying that my view is that the throne speech was underwhelming in its support and content, and that's about as generous as I can get in terms of my view of what I saw. I really wondered why the government even bothered to have it in the first place. All I saw was a rehash of promises that have been made and have yet to be kept. I saw some promises that have been made and aren't going to be kept under any circumstances. I guess the best that can be said is that some of those few new commitments, like the money-back guarantee for birth certificates, that the government focused on really now have an opportunity to become more broken Liberal promises. So if that's what the value of the throne speech was, I guess that's what it will prove to be.

I just want to start by talking about northern Ontario. My colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka is here. I see some other northern members. Here's what the government had to say about northern Ontario on page 15: "To further enhance the northern economy, the government is supporting economic development through grow bond loans...."

Let me deal with grow bond loans first. They were announced at least one throne speech ago, maybe two, and at the time—I don't have the press release; I wish I did—the government set an amount that they hoped to raise in northern Ontario through the grow bond initiative. The reality is that the government has raised less than half the amount of money that it wanted to raise in the first press release it issued on grow bonds when it was first announced probably two throne speeches ago. You know what? Just because the government announces it again in this speech doesn't make it any better and doesn't get any more money in. People are not enamoured of grow bonds. They're not interested; they're not participating; they are not there. You've got half the money that you said you were going to get, or that you hoped to get, when you talked about it in the first place. Why are you talking about it again? It didn't get any better the second time.

What else did the government say? "[We're] supporting job creation through the northern Ontario heritage fund...." Governments have been supporting job creation through the northern Ontario heritage fund for as long as I can remember—for as long as I've been a member, for goodness' sake. It was started under the Liberals, it was continued under us, these guys did some different things with it and it went back to the Liberals. The northern Ontario heritage fund has been in existence for as long as I've been a member, and that's 18 years. So there's nothing new there with respect to some new, bold, dynamic, creative idea to deal with dramatic job loss in northern Ontario.

What else did the government say? "Attracting anchor investments through the GO North strategy...." Now, that's an advertising and marketing program. I think it

was announced two throne speeches ago, maybe a budget ago, but it certainly isn't new and isn't innovative. I don't know how much money the government has actually invested in this. They wouldn't want to be marketing and advertising our forest industry in northern Ontario these days, because it's nothing to write home about. I'm going to get into that a little bit further on in the throne speech. This GO North strategy: We've heard about that. Been there, done that with this government, and I don't see much in the way of dramatic change.

1900

Investing in northern infrastructure: Let me start there. I can only assume, because the government didn't expand on it any further in the throne speech, that they might be referring to the money that the Minister of Natural Resources has announced on two different occasions for the forestry sector. The problem is that the government is completely out of touch and missing in action when it comes to the devastation in the forestry sector in northern Ontario right now.

Let me just give you an idea of the devastation so far. This comes from the minister's own council, the Minister's Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness. What's clear from the report is that literally thousands of jobs have been lost. A total of 2,200 direct jobs have been lost over the past two years from northern Ontario forest-dependent communities, and further mill closures will be economically devastating on top of the losses to date. The report says, "Some 12 mills across northern Ontario have been identified at risk. The loss of these production facilities would reduce employment in the north by 7,500 direct jobs and 17,500 indirect and induced jobs." Further, "Southern Ontario would lose an additional 13,000 indirect jobs." That's because much of the engineering work, information technology and supply and financial services work is done in southern Ontario for the northern forestry industry.

Let's just look at some of the communities that have been affected by this devastation under this Liberal government.

Neenah Paper, Terrace Bay: 130 jobs gone. Abitibi Consolidated in Kenora closed, this weekend, paper machine number 9: 150 jobs gone. Paper machine number 10 is now idled indefinitely as the steelworkers—not this government; the steelworkers—are in negotiations to try to find a buyer to run those two machines. It should be the job of this government to be on top of that, and it's the steelworkers who are moving and shaking now to try to save jobs in this community. Cascades in Thunder Bay: 150 jobs gone. Norampac in Red Rock: 175 jobs gone. Columbia Forest Products, Rutherglen veneer plant: 63 jobs gone, beginning October 17, 2005; gone. Weyerhaeuser in Dryden: 385 jobs gone, including the ones at the sawmill. Excel in Opasatika: 78 sawmill jobs gone. Domtar in Chapleau: 67 sawmill jobs gone. Cornwall, southern Ontario: 390 jobs gone.

Do you know what? This government is missing in action. Thousands of people are going to lose their jobs in northern Ontario, and this government does nothing.

When I was Minister of Northern Development and Mines, 21 sawmill companies came to us in 1993 at the height of the recession and said, "Our loans are going to be called from the bank because the economic situation is so critical. We're going to be in a position pretty soon that we're not even going to make payroll."

Some 21 sawmills, almost 21 communities—in some communities there were more than one at risk—and our government, through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp., put money on the table to save those 21 companies and to save all those jobs. Where is this government when it comes to all of the mills that are going down and all of the communities that are going to be devastated?

Here's the government's response. The minister in June, when he released the competitiveness paper, announced about \$350 million in loan guarantees for mills so that they can modernize their mills and respond to the challenges.

The challenge facing the forestry industry is not their mills. So many of these mills have modernized because they were trying to get their product out the door. The problem is the high hydro rates that are choking them, and this government doesn't want to do anything about it.

The minister comes forward in June and, as a response to this crisis—it shows you how out of touch he is—announces \$350 million in loan guarantees so that companies can go out and borrow even more money and rack up even more debt for a modernization they don't need.

My leader found out in estimates less than three weeks ago that this government hasn't even got an application form in place for this so-called loan guarantee program, hasn't even established criteria for any one single company that might want to apply if modernization was really their problem, and indeed it's not. But this government, five months later, after announcing \$350 million in loan guarantees—this government's Ministry of Natural Resources hasn't even put together an application form for a company that might want to apply to increase their debt even more. I can't imagine which company that might be, but that's how far the ministry has gotten on this.

Then a couple of weeks ago, the minister goes to Thunder Bay and announces a second package. Well, the first package we don't even have an application form for; the second package doesn't respond to the critical problem that is facing our industry in northern Ontario, and that is a problem of high electricity prices. Let me give you an example. I'll use the mill in Kenora—the mill in Kenora that was just shut down this weekend, paper machine number 9, OK? Kenora has no fewer than five power dams surrounding it. Some are 20 kilometres away, some 40, one 50. All of these dams, all five, produce electricity for under \$20 a megawatt, and yet as a result of McGuinty government policy, these mills are paying \$80 a megawatt for that electricity—four times the cost to produce that electricity on those dams that are within 20, 30 and 50 kilometres of that particular mill. So what are these companies doing? They're going to Manitoba and they're going to Quebec, because there they can

be sure of getting a hydro rate that is reasonable, that actually reflects what it costs to produce, not that reflects the cost to produce plus the cost that the private sector wants to add in order to get as much money as they can out of it.

Meanwhile, Michigan and Wisconsin are paying \$40 and \$45 a megawatt. The mills in Quebec that I referred to are paying about \$35 a megawatt. It's no wonder that we have a crisis in northern Ontario. The wonder is why this government doesn't want to understand, refuses to understand or maybe understands and doesn't want to do anything about it. It is their policy of high hydro rates that is driving the northern forestry economy into the ground. I say to this government: Money for loan guarantees—the industry didn't ask you for that, because that's not what they need. What they need is for you to do something about high hydro rates.

It's interesting—I got a letter from the chamber of commerce. The chamber of commerce in Sudbury is not known for usually supporting New Democrats, but I got this interesting letter from the chamber of commerce—a copy of a letter that was sent to Dalton McGuinty on October 11. It says the following:

"On behalf of the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, I wish to express our concerns with recent announcements regarding the state of the forestry industry and its future. Municipal, industry and union leaders agree that, for many reasons, the future of the forest industry is uncertain at best. Some issues are beyond the control and influence of industry management or local governments and can only be rectified by a change in provincial government policies and decisions.

"Forestry is the province's second-largest industry and source of employment. It has grown to that level without government financial aid, incentives or tax breaks as have been provided to other sectors.... The forestry industry is not requesting financial aid, but is asking for decisions which affect the industry to be made in a timely manner, energy solutions to be identified and implemented and fibre commitments to be made."

They end by saying: "The recommendations from the Minister of Natural Resources Council on Forest Sector Competitiveness require the support and action of the provincial government to ensure there is a future for many communities. The impact of a crumbling forestry industry will not only cripple many northern communities, it will be devastating to the province's economy as a whole."

I agree with the Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, and I call on this government to look at the real problem facing the industry—that is, the problem of high electricity rates—and, for goodness' sake, to respond in a positive way before we lose more mills, more jobs and before more northern communities are put at risk because of this government's private electricity scheme.

Let me look at the government's promise around birth certificates, if I might, for a moment. Our office is now spending as much time dealing with birth certificates as we have with the WSIB or the Family Responsibility

Office. That is nothing to write home about, because I can tell you we spend inordinate amounts of time dealing with the WSIB and the FRO. For the last two years now, our volume of work related to birth certificates, delayed birth registrations, name changes—the whole nine yards—has consumed the work of one of my full-time staff; almost consumed her work entirely. This government comes forward in the throne speech, promises us a money-back guarantee—let me just read it into the record: “Later this year, Ontarians who fill out birth certificate applications on-line will get their certificate within 15 days—or they will get their money back.” Do you know what? This government is going to rue the day that it made this promise. This government is going to regret that they made this promise in this throne speech, because this government cannot deliver on this promise. This will be another broken promise, and God knows the Liberals don’t need any more broken promises; they’ve broken enough.

1910

This government is going to lose even more money trying to refund the money that they can’t get to people in the first place because they can’t get their birth certificates on time. This government is going to lose money on this scenario, because we have seen in our office no positive change whatsoever to indicate that the government is in any way, shape or form capable of getting birth certificates back to people who go on-line to file for them. We’ve seen no change. It remains the highest volume of caseload in our office.

This begs the question, what about the second-class service that people who go don’t have access to the Internet get when they have to file longhand and file a long form? How come they can’t get their birth certificates back in 15 days when they Purolate their package to Thunder Bay? What’s wrong with the folks who don’t have access to the Internet and can’t file on the Internet? Are those folks in my constituency somehow second-class citizens because they can’t file that way? They need their birth certificates too. They need to get the birth certificates for their newborns. Some of those people are looking for birth certificates because they’re going to work outside of the province and need them to get other licences somewhere else. How come they don’t get 15-day service too, if they are not lucky enough to be able to file on the Internet? That’s a huge problem in Thunder Bay. We know that. Anybody who has an office that does any work in this regard knows that. So how is the government ever going to be able to clean it up for those people who file on-line, and if you can clean it up for the folks who file on-line and get them their birth certificate in 15 days, how come you can’t do something about all the other folks who don’t have the luxury of filing via the Internet?

I hope the government can live up to this promise. It might ease some of the workload in my office with respect to this issue. But I’ve got to tell you that I see nothing in what’s going on right now in our office with respect to this to give me any hope, any inkling of

confidence that this might be cleaned up, at least for people who are applying on-line. So we wait to see what will happen.

The government just referenced very briefly in the throne speech its ReNew Ontario program. I want to focus on this for one second: “Your government has launched a five-year, \$30-billion infrastructure investment plan called ReNew Ontario.” Of course, part of ReNew Ontario is for this government to ask the private sector to do some private financing of hospitals in the province. Indeed, this government has been out making announcements that a number of hospitals in Ontario, including my own Sudbury Regional Hospital, are now going to be privately financed.

I am opposed to private financing of hospitals. And do you know what? Dalton McGuinty was opposed to private financing of hospitals before the last election too. This is what he had to say—I think it’s worth repeating—from the Ottawa Citizen, Wednesday, May 28, 2003, before the last election: “What I take issue with is the mechanism. We believe in public ownership and public financing [of health care]. I will take these hospitals and bring them inside the public sector.” I thought he meant public sector financing of these projects too, but, oh, no, no. But let’s go on. What else did Dalton McGuinty say in the Ottawa Citizen, same day, May 28, 2003? “Mr. McGuinty warned recently that if the Liberals are elected in the provincial election now expected in the fall, they will stop private sector financing of hospitals, the so-called P3s, which the Conservative government is pushing as the way of the future.” Key words: “stop private sector financing of hospitals.”

It went on to say, “Mr. McGuinty believes that public-private sector partnerships in health care would ultimately cost the province more money than traditional arrangements.” And Mr. McGuinty is absolutely right. He was right before the election; he’s right now. The question is, why is he breaking this promise and why isn’t he publicly financing these hospitals and hospital redevelopments just like he promised?

This is what he said during the election. So we’ve got some quotes before the election; now we’re right into the middle of the election—pretty close to the end, as a matter of fact: September 24, 2003. He told the Ottawa Citizen: “Ontario Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty has said that the ROH”—the Royal Ottawa Hospital—“expansion will go ahead because Ottawa needs a new psychiatric hospital, but a Liberal government would cancel the deal with the private consortium because public-private partnerships are a waste of money.”

He is absolutely correct. They are a waste of money, because when the private sector goes out to borrow, they have to borrow at a higher interest rate than the government gets. So through the life of that mortgage, be it 20 or 30 years, we are paying more each year, every year, in and out, for a higher mortgage rate than if the government went and did the borrowing. Secondly, the private sector factors in its profit margin. It’s not doing this for free; it’s doing this to make some money. Of

course that's why they're interested. Of course that's why they're going to line up at the door. So factor in their 15% profit margin and now the price is really starting to jack up over a 30-year mortgage. Then this government says it's going to also add in a risk premium, and that's going to ensure that these projects are delivered on time and on budget.

So now we have three factors that are driving the price up far more than the price would have ever been driven up if the government itself, in the traditional way, had gone and financed these projects and paid off those costs over a 30-year debenture.

I've heard people talk about the 407. Our government borrowed the money for the 407. It was not privately financed. It was not. And here is this government moving on this scheme not only to have a private sector consortium involved in the management but in the financing as well.

Dalton McGuinty was right before the election; he's right now. Our hospitals should be publicly financed, not privately financed. I wish he'd live up to his promise soon.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm honoured and privileged to stand up again to speak in support of the throne speech tonight because the throne speech is about strengthening Ontario's economic advantage so we can meet the challenges and seize those opportunities. I hope that I get a chance later on tonight to speak in detail on why we are supporting the speech from the throne. It's very important because it outlines our priorities. People are talking about "nothing new in it." That's correct. We don't want anything new in it, but to maintain what we said when we got elected, what we said in the past, what we've been working on for the last two years.

I was listening to the member for Nickel Belt talking about so many different issues, talking about people who went away from the province, not creating jobs, not creating opportunities for young people to work. As a matter of fact, there are many statistics showing that unemployment in the province of Ontario is lower; it's at the best stage. As a matter of fact, the employment rate is the best ever for the last 10, 15 years. It's a good indication, because our government is investing in and creating jobs, investing to support and maintain the job opportunities in the province of Ontario, from the auto sector to small manufacturers to small agencies to help people find a job. I think it's a good indication.

Also, I heard her talking about the birth certificates and our promise to give people birth certificates as soon as possible. I know from our office that it's a lot different since we got elected until now. The process is going faster and quicker and people are happier because they receive their birth certificates faster and quicker and they're getting good service in our offices.

Talking about the Web site: Certainly, we have a Web site, we have a computer. If someone doesn't have access to a computer, doesn't have access to the Internet, our

office is open for them to help them out to file their applications. That's what we were elected for, and hopefully we'll continue to do the same job to help our constituents.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I wanted to just say a few words following along on the comments of my friend from Erie-Lincoln, because he mentioned that there's nothing in the throne speech on crime. What a sad commentary it is today, when we've had three more young men shot dead over the course of the weekend. Today, in the city of Toronto, we had a shooting take place at the intersection of Bloor and Sherbourne in morning rush-hour traffic—people in their cars having to dodge bullets—and on it goes.

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It came to my attention that maybe there was a typographical error in the throne speech in that His Honour was reading something that didn't say what it meant to say. It said that we are going to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Based on all the neighbourhoods I visited this summer, which were many, and listening to the people, what's really going on here is that when Dalton McGuinty is being asked to provide more police so that they can spend some time in the neighbourhoods forging proper relationships with the young people, the people from the Liberal government, including Premier McGuinty, are saying, "Tough; tough for you that there are no police officers"—not a hundred, not a thousand, not one. When it comes time for the people in those neighbourhoods to say that they want the justice system fixed, as they've been saying to me, so that people aren't arrested one day and back in the neighbourhood the next morning, or allowed out on bail so that they're back in the neighbourhoods causing trouble again—on bail and on parole, the parole board we're going to give away to the federal government—Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals say, "Tough." When it comes time to have a really thorough, comprehensive, coordinated youth strategy, not the little smattering of projects that were referred to today in answers to questions—non-answers to questions—Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal Party say, "Tough."

So that's what they're saying; it's correct. Actually, the word "tough" should have been in the throne speech. They just should have put it forward the way they're putting it forward to the people of the city of Toronto and every other community in this province, like Hamilton, where they had a shooting over the weekend: "You care about crime; you want more police; you want to fix the justice system; you want more programs for kids? Tough; you're not getting them from Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal Party."

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to rise tonight to make a few comments on the fine speech of the member from Nickel Belt.

I just want to say that if there's anything good about this throne speech, it's who was actually in attendance that day. I do want to compliment the fact that someone had the common courtesy to invite someone with the

influence and respect that Major-General Richard Rohmer had when he was here. He's become a friend of law and order in our country, he's a spokesperson for the armed forces in many cases and he's a World War II veteran. Of course, this being the Year of the Veteran, it was nice to see that Major-General Rohmer was invited here and acknowledged in the throne speech. I also want to point out that it was interesting to see him because, just a few days prior to that, I had met him at the commissioner's mess dinner up at Base Borden. He was there with his OPP mess uniform on and spoke about his time here at Queen's Park, his values as a veteran and the respect he has for Ontario.

I will be speaking on the throne speech a little bit later on this evening. I wanted to put out my positive things about the speech now, because they're the only positive things I've seen in it. All I've really seen was a government that had made, I think we calculated, 60 reannouncements in the speech. As the member from Erie-Lincoln said, why would you have a throne speech if it's only going to be reannouncements? Why would you do that?

I can tell you why. When they adjourned the House, they got rid of nine question periods—nine question periods where Dalton McGuinty didn't have to face John Tory, nine question periods where they didn't have to face the opposition. That's actually why they delayed it nine days. That is the real reason there was a throne speech this year.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): It's my pleasure to join the debate this evening. The last evening I stood up and spoke on improving the health of our people, and that was in the throne speech. Tonight I take pleasure in speaking about the highlight, the education and skills of our people, and I wanted to talk about something I'm very proud of in my community of Brampton Centre. On October 14, I went to the Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, where they officially opened their doors to the Sheridan Centre for Advanced Manufacturing and Design Technologies. This is an 18,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art centre which will train students and workers in the latest design and manufacturing technologies and help address the shortage of skilled labour in Ontario.

The manufacturing sector is tremendously important in the GTA economy. One out of every six jobs in Ontario is related to manufacturing, and in Brampton that number rises to almost one out of every three jobs. This new facility will play an important role in keeping the GTA manufacturing sector competitive by ensuring they have access to the ongoing supply of highly skilled workers that they need. Having the centre in Brampton will go a long way toward supporting our local manufacturing sector.

This centre was built with \$2.9 million in support from our government's Ministry of Economic Development and Trade's strategic skills investment program. Some \$2.5 million came from the city of Brampton, \$1.5 million in grants from local manufacturers and a long-

term commitment by Sheridan College and its students. Its mission is to help and keep the current and future needs of the GTA manufacturers in mind by providing them with skilled workers.

Dr. Robert Turner, who is the president and CEO at Sheridan, believes this centre will provide some of the most skilled and capable workers and graduates in Ontario. The centre represents an innovative solution to a growing problem and is a testament to the shared goals and co-operation between Sheridan, the two levels of government and local industry.

We expect this centre to be a catalyst, and I look forward to speaking about it again in the future.

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

Ms. Martel: I want to thank the member from London-Fanshawe, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, the member from Simcoe North and the member from Brampton Centre for their contributions.

I just want to follow up on one thing that was said in response by the member from London-Fanshawe. I have no problem with people coming into our office for help with birth certificates; we're doing that all the time. The issue is, why is it that people who come into our office with a birth certificate that's done in the long form are now going to expect different treatment—worse treatment—than those who have the luxury of doing this on-line? If you can generate a birth certificate in two weeks by someone doing that on-line, why can't you provide that same kind of service to someone who is sending in a long-form birth certificate to the Registrar General's office? That's the question this government has to respond to: Why is it that some folks are going to get a preferred or priority service for their birth certificate, while others who don't have access to the Internet won't? There's something wrong with that. This whole office needs to be cleaned up, not just for some, but for everybody.

Although the member from Brant didn't have a chance to make a comment on my remarks, he did say something in his earlier remarks that struck me. He said that—I'm going to paraphrase, and he's going to correct me if I'm wrong—essentially a throne speech outlines the direction that the government is proposing; it's an indication of where they want to head. I have to assume from that that if something isn't in the throne speech, it's not a priority and the government doesn't have any inclination or desire to deal with it.

In northern Ontario, we are getting clobbered by high gasoline prices, high hydro rates and high natural gas prices. The government said absolutely nothing about any of these things in the throne speech. In opposition, the Liberals had no less than seven private members' bills to do something about gas prices. Two of the people who had those bills are in cabinet now. The Liberals have now been in government for two years, and we haven't seen hide nor hair of any of those private members' bills. This government has done zero on gas prices. I wish the throne speech had said something about that, because

now I really know you have no intention of doing anything about those high gas prices.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Rinaldi: As I indicated before, it's certainly my privilege to take part in this debate, and I'll be sharing my time with the member from Sault Ste. Marie.

I think we need to remember some fundamental ideas. When we were elected to this House, we had a vision. We found some challenges at the outset, and that is certainly no secret. In just two short years, when you look at spans of governments, I think we've made some drastic changes. As I indicated in my comments before, I'm going to expand on some of the things I touched on in the short two minutes.

Just to reiterate some of the highlights of our speech, to reinforce our message for the well-being of Ontarians, we want to strengthen the education and skills for the people of Ontario. It's very important. We were falling behind. We are in a world economy today.

Smaller class sizes: When you talk about how huge the education sector is, in just two short years I can tell you I get teachers in my riding calling me, or when I meet them in the streets and in the shopping malls they're saying, "It's great. Now I have more time to spend with those kids." It was a wonderful initiative we started. The fact that some children who went through the education process—I mean, we're not all the same; I can speak from experience. Some kids are not all that academically astute, and we left them by the wayside. We are going to have alternative diplomas so that those kids can excel in what they're good at. I could go on and on.

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The investment that we committed when it comes to higher education, the Reaching Higher slogan that our Premier uses over and over again: an investment in post-secondary education that hasn't been seen in this province in years—\$6.2 billion.

The other sector that is probably one of the—I should go back a bit. Two things inspired me to run for a position as an MPP: health care and education. I just briefly spoke about education. The other one is health care. It's something that's drastically needed in our communities.

The legacy of the previous government was to close down hospitals. I happen to live in a riding where that happened, and I know the hardships some of those folks went through. But I can tell you that today, once again in the very short time that we've been here, we've seen increases in CAT scans, cancer surgeries and cataract surgeries. I have a hospital in my riding, and I'm very proud today to say that from the Web site, the Northumberland hospital in Cobourg is fourth in having the shortest wait times. It's the one that has the shortest wait time in the central east LHIN area. We just committed to give that hospital another \$75,000 to provide 100 more cataract surgeries for our community. Those are the initiatives that were lacking and that fell behind.

The creation of family health teams: I'm going to talk about that a little bit later on, because I have some first-

hand experience of the benefit that those family health teams have generated in our community.

Most important, we have a commitment that we know prevention—what's the saying? An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of gold, or whatever the saying is. And we've committed. In public health, we've uploaded some of the costs that those municipalities have been faced with. Having been in municipal politics for 12 years, I know the hardship we were faced with. I tell you, it's the first sign of uploading by our government, and that's to prevent people from going to the hospital so that people are healthier.

Those are just some of the highlights of the throne speech, amongst many others, that are so vital to our communities.

One of the comments I'd like to make in general before I talk about some specifics is getting the fundamentals right. In just two short years, Ontarians have worked very hard to help this government reduce the provincial deficit from \$5.6 billion to \$1.6 billion, and we need to thank the hard-working people of Ontario who have seen the vision of this government and put their right foot forward to make that happen.

The province for the first time ever had some vision. I was honoured, as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, to launch a \$30-billion infrastructure investment in Ontario, ReNew Ontario—the decrepit roads, the 100-year-old water pipes that are underground in some municipalities that we're dealing with. We have a \$30-billion plan so that the sectors can serve the people of Ontario along with this government.

In just two very short years, we brought over 2,200 megawatts of new power into the grid, and it's green energy, something we've been starving for in this province. Before our mandate is over by 2007-08, we'll have 9,000 megawatts of new energy in the grid, something that wasn't thought of in the last 15 years. We just sat on our laurels and let the infrastructure disintegrate.

In the energy sector again, I know I can tell you that people are telling me they are looking forward to smart meters, where they can manage energy use in their homes. That is coming in very short order.

We're hearing a lot of rhetoric from previous speakers about the guarantees we made on birth certificates. I tell you, it's about time that governments put their right foot forward. The private sector has been doing that for a long time. How often do you go and buy something, and if you don't get it in time, you don't take it and you get your money back. This is what Ontarians are accustomed to right across the private sector. They buy something; they want delivery of their goods.

I can tell you, the workload we had in my office in the riding of Northumberland to deal with the backlog of birth certificates when we first took power was scary. It was huge. But now we are delivering, and we are putting our seal of approval that in 15 days if you don't get your certificate, you will get your money back. Some people might think this is a joke, but it's an innovation on how

we deliver government and how we deliver services from the public sector.

We've worked very hard, and the private sector is reacting. I'm going to quote from one of the media here in Toronto, the Toronto Star. It says, "Wind Industry Putting Down Roots." I think that you will get the gist of it, when I read some of these quotes, why I believe the private sector is putting a lot of faith—

Interjection.

Mr. Rinaldi: I only have one minute left? Wow, time goes flying.

I'll just read quickly. This was an announcement made just last week about DMI Industries setting up shop in Ontario, in Fort Erie, to manufacture windmill towers. This is a brand new industry, not for Canada but for Ontario, and it will benefit all of us. Some of the comments that were made: Why did this company come to Fort Erie? Because they had confidence in the provincial government of the day to set some standards and to show some initiative that this is a place to invest.

In just two short years, regardless of what you hear, we've created close to 200,000 jobs in the province—and, I must say, good-paying jobs. When you get people, for example—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Rinaldi: Let me tell you, and this is a quote: "The fact that manufacturing is coming here is definitely a sign that Ontario is moving in that direction," said Deborah Doncaster, executive director of the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association."

As you can see, we set up a climate. Sure there are going to be ups and downs, but just look at what this government did. The throne speech of a couple of weeks ago just reaffirmed that we're going in that direction. Let me tell you, we're committed to staying in that direction. I know my friend from Sault Ste. Marie wants to continue this debate, and I thank the House for allowing me the time.

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): I thank the member from Northumberland, who led off our 20 minutes for this evening.

To pick up on a number of priorities in the throne speech, Strengthening Ontario's Economic Advantage—although some of the opposition members have criticized the throne speech, it's obvious that they refuse to recognize some of the major achievements that our government has made in the past two years. So I want to focus on a few of those for the time remaining, particularly in health care and education.

Today, as you know, we launched the new provincial Web site on wait times. For the first time ever in the province, Ontarians have the opportunity to take a look at where the hospital in their particular community stands in providing MRI scans, CT scans, hip, knee and joint replacements, and can get an understanding of how long the wait might be and whether services may be provided more quickly in another hospital. This transparency and accountability in launching this particular Web site

allows all Ontarians to see how their health care dollars are being spent.

We're not going to, like the past government has done, simply throw money at the health care system and say, "We'll see you next year at the next budget. We hope things get better," and nothing much changes. What we're doing is focusing on five key areas: cancer treatment; cardiac treatment; cataract surgeries; hip, knee and joint replacements; MRIs; and CT scans. Those are all very, very important services for Ontarians, and we want to make sure Ontarians see the improvements we are making in these areas. I know that in our particular community of Sault Ste. Marie, we announced today that CT scans in Sault Ste. Marie have virtually no wait time attached to them. We're making progress. We can all see the areas that we need to improve on as a benchmark to move forward, and we're going to do that.

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For the first time in many years, hospitals have received multi-year funding. Hospitals, for many years, clamoured and argued their case to the past government to no avail. They wanted multi-year funding to properly plan for services for Ontarians, and we've provided that. It's making a difference. You simply have to get out there and talk to some of the hospital administrators and some of the people who work at our hospitals, and they'll tell you that that makes a difference.

When it comes to physician supply, we're making significant efforts to undo some of the damage and some of the lost time on this file, where the past Conservative government—the government prior to that actually took the step of cutting seats in medical schools, one of the reasons why we're suffering from some of these lacks of physician supply today—dithered for eight years on this file and did very little to increase physician supply. We've gone from 90 to 200 seats for international medical graduates, and we're moving to fill those seats year after year. We've also increased medical school enrolment in the province of Ontario by 15%. We have funded and opened the first medical school in more than 30 years in the province of Ontario at a cost of about \$95 million, adding 56 additional medical school seats. We're hopeful, and I am, certainly, as a representative of a northern community, that some of those physicians are going to stay in northern Ontario. Overall, by 2007, our government will have increased the physician supply by about 23%, which is significant progress in my books.

When it comes to the file on nurses, while the past Conservative government referred to nurses as Hula Hoop workers, we now have 3,000 new jobs for Ontario nurses. We're repatriating nurses who left the province for other jurisdictions because of a government that did not believe the nursing profession was valuable to the people of Ontario. We are hiring additional nurses, and we're well on our way to our targets there. In fact, when it comes to full-time nursing in the province of Ontario, we've gone from 51% to 59% of nurses working full-time now.

When it comes to nurse practitioners, only 75 seats existed under the past government, and now we're at 150 new training spaces for nurse practitioners. Our government believes that nurse practitioners play a very valuable role in our health care system.

When it comes to family health teams, a \$600-million investment toward the creation of 150 family health teams in the province of Ontario is a tremendous step forward in leveraging the power of physicians to work in these teams and actually be able to meet with more patients and provide greater services to Ontarians. At present, we've got 69 of these family health teams in the first phase up and running, with more to come.

This family health team initiative, I know first-hand, is modelled after the Group Health Centre in Sault Ste. Marie that has existed for over 40 years—a family health centre that has had a history of using nurse practitioners and appreciating their services, that has had medical records for patients for a number of years. I know that after the election, one of the health minister's very first visits on the health care file for family health team development was to Sault Ste. Marie to meet with representatives at the Group Health Centre and learn more about that particular centre.

I think the shame in the whole Group Health Centre file is that under the past government, for nearly five years they had no contract: The government didn't believe in it, didn't want to work with them and was, in essence, attempting to dismantle the Group Health Centre. Our government has provided them with a new \$26-million contract, with a \$4-million increase to provide these services, because we know that the Group Health Centre in Sault Ste. Marie and family health teams all across the province of Ontario, in leveraging physician capacity, is the way we should be going. The Group Health Centre was also the recipient of a northern Ontario heritage grant to expand that particular centre, and also \$744,000 for vascular research intervention, because this is a centre that provides great research capacity. Our government believes in the centre and has put additional funds behind the research capacity of it.

To continue, public health care is another area that our government has shown its support for. The past model of the municipality funding 50% and the province funding 50% is strained. We have incredible new challenges with the types of health emergencies that we have been challenged with in the past in Ontario—SARS and West Nile—and we need to continue to be vigilant to ensure that we have the capacity in the province for our public health institutions to be able to respond in a timely way to meet these challenges. So we've increased our funding for public health from 50% to 75%, which is being phased in at present. If you talk to municipalities, they're certainly appreciative of this step forward.

When it comes to community-based health care, for too long we have spent time trying to invest in our hospitals and surgical procedures that are really at the outer end of the health care continuum. We need to try to provide more funding for community-based health care

organizations. Some of these health care organizations have not had base funding increases for 12 years. I ask the opposition, why have you overlooked these very important health care services in communities all across Ontario? Our government has risen to the challenge, and in two years, we've had significant investments in these areas of community-based health care: long-term care, home care, mental health services, supportive housing and the like.

We also introduced a \$156-million immunization program, because we think it's important that we vaccinate children with three additional vaccines. This is saving parents approximately \$600 per child. We on this side of the House think that's a good investment.

When it comes to the importance of our people and our resources, we've made some significant strides in education, such as four-year contracts for the first time ever in the province of Ontario. While past governments have chosen to pick fights with our teachers and challenge the education resources in this province, we're working with those individuals and our stakeholders to make education front and centre of our government's platform: smaller class sizes, the creation of a Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, learning to age 18 and over a billion dollars back into the education sector.

In northern Ontario, we have seen some significant investments, certainly in my community, with the announcement of a new hospital and \$26 million for the new Group Health Centre; a new truck traffic route to the international bridge, solving a problem of about 40 years of having transports come through the downtown of our community; \$1.5 million for the new Flakeboard plant; \$3 million for the new Sutherland Group technical centre, employing 1,200 new people there. The list goes on and on. I don't have enough time to continue to elaborate on these things, but I'm very proud of our government's record in the last two years and I look forward to the next two years of continuing to move this agenda forward.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): Tonight we're debating the throne speech. I don't know where they got this throne speech. The member across the way said they had a vision. I wonder what you were smoking or drinking the night that you had this vision, because obviously you didn't know what you were talking about.

You had about an hour-long speech, and most of it was about all of these wonderful things you've done in health care, but chiropractic services—gone, physiotherapy—gone, optometry—gone. That stuff's all gone. You forgot to mention that you took that away from the people so you could give something you wanted. You just wiped it out. Then, all of a sudden, you said, "We can't afford all that so we're going to tax you. Even though we said we wouldn't raise taxes, we're going to put more taxes on the people." What have you done now? You've taxed the people.

Then you got into education. Yes, you've done a very good job, and I'll give you credit for that, but that's about it, guys. It doesn't go anywhere else.

You forgot about rural and northern Ontario. In an hour-and-a-half-long speech, you mentioned rural and northern Ontario for maybe three minutes, if that's all we got. Where are all the rural members over there? Where are you? Do you not have any input into this government? Obviously not; obviously large urban Ontario has taken over this government and you forgot about rural and northern Ontario. There's nothing in it for them. They didn't even want to talk about farming. Oh, no, "The feds are going to look after that for us; they'll do that for us." So you just forgot about us.

Then you go on about how the taxpayers worked hard—yes, they did—and then you took their taxes to do all your little schemes. That's what you guys love to do: tax and spend, spend and tax. That's all you had. And then you got into your throne speech and told us about all your promises that you haven't kept, 60-some old promises in there. You will never get to keep all these promises. You've shown us that very well so far in your two years of doing basically nothing. So, folks, this is one of the worst throne speeches I've heard in 15 years.

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Ms. Martel: In response to the comments made by the members from Northumberland and Sault Ste. Marie, I have a couple of points. With respect to the birth certificates: I could be wrong, but I think this is a promise you're going to regret you made in this throne speech. I haven't seen a significant improvement in Thunder Bay. Despite the efforts of all the staff who are there, we have not seen a significant improvement in their ability to get birth certificates or name changes or anything like that out the door. I don't know what new technology the government is suddenly bringing in that is going to allow the government to now generate birth certificates, if they come in via the Internet, in two weeks. I don't know what this is all about, but I will be amazed to see it. I wish the government had been applying that technology long before now. That would have reduced a lot of the casework in my office from folks coming in, who phone, who fax, who mail, who do whatever it takes only to find that their cheque has been lost and their application form has been lost.

For goodness' sake, as I said earlier, it's now the issue that has as much volume in our office as the FRO and WSIB. Things haven't changed, and if you're going to make things so much better that you can get out birth certificates in two weeks' time, then you should do that for everybody who's applying for the birth certificate, not just those folks who are lucky enough to be able to do it by Internet. I don't know why you want to have two different sets of access, or two-tiered access for those folks who can apply electronically, because they have the luxury of doing that, and for those who still have to send in a long-form birth certificate application.

There was one small paragraph with respect to northern Ontario. It talked about three initiatives that

have already been announced—one that's been in place for over 18 years now. There was nothing new in this budget for people in northern Ontario. I wish that this government had something to say in the throne speech about high gas prices and how those are affecting people in the north, or high hydro rates and how those are hammering industry in the north, or high natural gas prices and how those are impacting residential consumers in northern Ontario. The government had nothing to say about any of that.

The Acting Speaker: There's a lot of conversation here, it's very hard to hear those who wish to be heard in this House because we can only hear you.

The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): I just want to carry this conversation about the throne speech that bit further. The throne speech certainly talks about how we want to advance our plan for education and health care, our plan for infrastructure renewal, reduction of the deficit, innovation for this province and the profitable future and diversity of this province. But one of the things that was mentioned in the throne speech that we haven't heard a lot about is reform of the Drive Clean program. I had a constituent who, long before I was elected, was already telling me that there were major problems with the Drive Clean program. He told me that only one out of every hundred vehicles tested actually fails the test. What he was saying to me was basically that this was a waste of our resources, it was a waste of the \$35 that everybody pays every two years to have their vehicle tested, only to find out that it would pass anyway, and it was a waste of the resources of the dealerships and the garages that were doing the work.

That has come to a point where now, even the Provincial Auditor has said to us that this is a program that is not working properly and needs to be reformed. That is why in the throne speech we have said, and we have made a commitment, that we are going to do that. I applaud our government for taking that one on. It certainly is an issue in the dealerships where they have laid out major dollars in order to provide equipment that I'm told tends to break down quite a bit. I'm told they don't really trust the test.

So we now need to see that the program is working properly. This program was initiated in 1999 by the former government. I'm sure that the intent was good, but the fact is that the program is not working. As a government, in our throne speech, we said that we are going to reform that program. I'm glad to see we are doing that, and I know my constituents will certainly be happy about that.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Is that a prop?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Yes.

Mr. Yakabuski: Well, it isn't anything else. Thank you very much. The member for Perth–Middlesex has

confirmed that this is in fact a prop. The throne speech is a prop, because it wasn't much good for anything else.

I did want to comment on one little thing in the throne speech. They rolled this thing out like it was the reinvention of the wheel. They're going to have a money-back guarantee in this province. Isn't that wonderful: a money-back guarantee. If you don't get your birth certificate 15 days after applying on-line, you get your money back.

Here is the catch. The people out there should really be—it just adds to the cynicism. You can only apply on-line for a birth certificate if you're eight years of age or under. That's the only way you can apply on-line, because there are security concerns. You have to be eight years of age or under to get a birth certificate on-line. Those are not the people who are in a helter-skelter rush to get a birth certificate. When people are getting birth certificates for their children, they're not in that big a rush. I'll tell you who is in a rush: the person who needs a birth certificate so they can get a passport or they've got to travel or so they can get work. If you're getting work, do you know what? You're over the age of eight; you can't apply on-line. It's such a farce that you would waste people's time to put something like that in this prop. That's what it is, a prop.

They went even further, to have the member for Huron–Bruce ask a lobbed question in the House a couple of days later so the minister could say what a wonderful thing they were doing with birth certificates. It's a load of bunk.

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

Mr. Rinaldi: I thank the members for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Nickel Belt, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I'm somewhat confused because both members from the opposition referred to our commitment regarding birth certificates. I'm just wondering, when we're sitting in this room here, how much our memory shrinks, because I remember when I first got elected just over two years ago—

Mr. Yakabuski: Are you sure you remember that?

Mr. Rinaldi: I remember the person I beat. Having said that, I can tell you that my staff was inundated trying to deal with birth certificates. I'm just wondering where their memory has been. I remember the minister at that time had to hire all sorts of extra people to deal with the backlog.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): A roomful.

Mr. Rinaldi: A roomful of people. So we've made extreme headway. If that's all they can talk about, the only thing I can conclude is that they really like the rest of the throne speech. That seems to be a real hang-up. We committed ourselves, even if we have a good service, to making it better by giving people their money back if we don't deliver. I guess they're against good government.

In my last 30 seconds here, there's something that I didn't have time to address, and that was the family health units and the commitment we made to the im-

provement. In my riding, there were two family health units announced in the first round. Both are making great headway. In one of them, there are two new doctors. Why? Because of the family health team concept. The other one is in the process of hiring a nurse practitioner. Why? Because of the family health team concept. I don't have people calling me at home right now who just moved into the community and who can't find a doctor. Those calls have almost depleted.

Thank you once again for the time.

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The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Dunlop: I'm extremely pleased to be able to rise this evening and take my turn in the rotation on the throne speech. There's not a lot in the throne speech, but I do keep a copy handy. I really thank the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for allowing me to use his tonight.

There are a lot of things in the throne speech I wanted to zero in on, and there are a lot of things that aren't there. Some of the key things that I'd like to discuss tonight are environment, policing and rural Ontario, along with some of the things that are happening in my riding.

To begin with, I'd like to talk a little bit about the environment and what I don't see in the throne speech and how many things are being impacted here in the province of Ontario.

The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex made some comments about Drive Clean. What she said is exactly correct: It was introduced in 1999. It was always the intention, upon the introduction of the Drive Clean program, that after five years there would be a complete review of that system. Some people felt that after five years it could be eliminated; other people thought it could be expanded upon or reduced or the types of vehicles changed. That's exactly what's happening today. Probably a lot of the newer cars, cars within three or four years old, don't need Drive Clean. It's an expense and probably a waste of time for the owner to take it to the unit, and it's probably a waste of time for the garage. But there are older cars, of course, that do need that, and some heavier construction equipment. It may even apply at some time in the future to some construction equipment and agricultural equipment on farms as well. We don't know where we'll go with that, but there was always the intent to review it. If it's a positive thing that there is a review, if there are changes made, I would agree with that. I think we do need a review of it, but it was always the intention after five years. I wanted to put forward the former government's position on that.

I hope you don't eliminate Drive Clean, personally. I think the Drive Clean program is a great program. I can tell you one thing: I very seldom see cars running around the highway any more with a lot of black emissions coming out—the little diesel cars and that sort of thing. I just don't see nearly as many as I used to, and I think that's positive.

On the environment, one of the key areas the government has moved in is the introduction of the greenbelt

legislation. Now we understand that there's an expensive type of propaganda program—I think it's \$25 million, someone mentioned—by which the government is actually promoting the greenbelt.

I'm concerned about what's missing from the greenbelt legislation and where the government has what I consider to be a key role to play in the future, and they never mentioned anything in it.

One of the truly jewel lakes in the province of Ontario is Lake Simcoe. Many of the members in this House have ridings abutting Lake Simcoe. It's a key economic project. It plays a strong role in the economy of all our regions. Nothing will be impacted more by the greenbelt legislation than Lake Simcoe, as far as I'm concerned. We have tremendous growth in Durham region, all around York region, up to the cities of Barrie and Orillia. All through that area, we have strong growth—not as strong as it might have been in the GTA. But certainly source water protection, sewage disposal and storm water management will all have a huge impact on Lake Simcoe.

We had a Lake Simcoe event here the other night with a coalition and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. There was a group there—a lot of them are from my riding—called Ladies of the Lake. They have promoted a calendar. I think they've raised \$230,000 with that calendar to try to save the lake.

My problem is that in the throne speech, as we're talking about the direction that the government is going in next two years, I see nothing that would have anything do with saving some of our valuable resources like Lake Simcoe. The government mentioned a lot of specific programs and projects and stakeholders in the throne speech. Nothing was mentioned about Lake Simcoe. I'm going to tell you, it's going to take a lot of money to save that lake. It's going to take the resources of not only the Ontario government, not only the municipalities, but it's going to take the resources of the federal government as well.

I want to put it on the record, because I think we haven't heard the end of Lake Simcoe. I think it's going to be what I would consider one of the top environmental priorities that the government will face in the province of Ontario, not only this government but governments in the future. If there's anything we can do—if you're going to fed-bash over the \$23 billion, fed-bash and get the federal government to help out with Lake Simcoe and the Trent-Severn waterway. It's a heritage river in the province of Ontario and the lake is one of the most valuable lakes; the economic spinoff is about \$250 million a year on Lake Simcoe. We need help, or before long we're going to be able to walk on that lake. That's not a good sign. Not to blame you folks in particular, but in the throne speech there was nothing about Lake Simcoe.

That brings me to another area that I know has been a problem with the government: the Toronto garbage situation. I know the question has come up a few times in the House, but we absolutely have to get a plan in place in case the border is shut off. Since the throne speech

came out and since there have been some questions in the House, when I've gone out over the last couple of weekends, I've had a lot of folks ask that question of me: What is the government going to do? What is the plan?

I can tell you, they don't want Toronto's garbage in all the different counties, filling up the few landfills left. In fact, they don't want more landfills; they want to plan for an innovative new way of dealing with our waste management in the province of Ontario, whether that's some form of incineration or whether it's—I don't even know all the names of the different proposals that could be out there. We absolutely have to have that plan in place and brought to the floor of the Legislature.

That's just about as important as water source protection legislation. I know the minister has promised water source protection legislation for this fall. I hope there are complete public hearings. I see the parliamentary assistant over there nodding his head. We've talked about the problems with nutrient management regulations; we've talked about the problem with—last week I complained to you about the security guards' bill. Let's do something really good; let's make sure that this House, and not a bunch of bureaucrats, approves the regulations around water source protection. Let's make sure the public gets an opportunity to have committee hearings on the regulations around water source protection. You can't saddle the people with a huge expense in this case, because I think it's going to be an area we have to deal with.

I wanted to put those two issues regarding the environment out there in particular. We have a lot of work to do in the area of waste management, and the throne speech really didn't deal with it whatsoever. They talked about a clean environment and water source and all the nice cuddly, cozy things that people want to mention. But the citizens of the province of Ontario today—I think landfills are a thing of the past. I don't know how many times in this House I've read petitions on the site 41 proposal up in Tiny township. You know what? The ministry doesn't want to approve that, the county really doesn't want to approve it and the community doesn't want it, but there has been so much money spent over the past 20 years getting it to this final stage—

Mr. Wilkinson: Weren't you the warden then?

Mr. Dunlop: Actually, I can give you a little background on site 41. It was actually turned down by the original approvals branch in 1990, and the minister of the day—I believe it was Jim Bradley—reversed the decision to go back to that as the site. I was the warden in 1998 when one of the conditions came on. I know you'd like to blame it on me, but I can tell you that I am absolutely opposed to that site—water is bubbling out of the ground. There's a test well out there, and it would make you sick to think that somebody would ever want to put a landfill in that particular area. There's so much water in the ground bubbling out at that point.

2010

I've mentioned a number of times in this House that site 41 and other landfills like that across the province are

a thing of the past. I hope the minister, Ms. Broten, with the assistance of her parliamentary assistant, will get behind those communities and support their endeavours to not allow those types of landfills to go in where they could actually have an effect on the groundwater and contaminate the groundwater of those communities.

Mr. Wilkinson: The Adams mine.

Mr. Dunlop: Maybe that's true. I heard the parliamentary assistant mention the Adams mine. That was an alternative for Toronto's garbage. It was an approved site. I can tell you, if we're going to go down this road and start heckling over the Adams Mine Lake Act, when they excavated the mine, it filled up to a certain level with water. The minister called that a lake; that's what she described as a lake. I can tell you right now, if she would go up to site 41 in the township of Tiny and I excavated a hole five feet deep for two acres and it filled up overnight, would she call that a lake? She should call it a lake if she's putting on the same conditions that she did on the Adams mine lake. She won't listen to that. In fact, they won't make a decision on whether or not to approve it. They apparently are still fidgeting around with the final design. But I can tell you, the folks who live in the township of Tiny absolutely do not want site 41 approved.

When you get up here, your time sometimes goes very quickly. I've only got eight minutes left, and I've only got about a third of the things done that I wanted to talk about.

The other thing I did want to mention is the police file. I'm going to go back to the fact that I know Minister Kwinter and the Attorney General are under tremendous pressure to make cuts in the justice ministries. People in the ministries tell me that you're trying to cut \$300 million. So it's going to be hard to hire new police officers; it's going to be hard to fight gang violence and gun violence and all those things. But the bottom line is that we're in a time frame right now where we need a strong ministry more than ever, and I can tell you that the cuts we're seeing are not helping the police.

I know the minister mentioned again today that we're going to hire 1,000 new police. If we had started with the plan originally back in October 2003 and actually made some announcements and trained some cops in the first few months, even the first six months or eight months of the mandate, there would have been a good opportunity to have 300 or 400 police officers on the streets today. I'm wondering what the impact would have been on areas like crystal meth operations, gang violence, gun violence, the grow-ops, Internet luring and child pornography. I wonder where we would have gone with all that, if in fact we had more police today, as opposed to saying, "They're being hired and trained today. We might get them on the streets next summer. We'll start building for them next fall," or whenever it's going to be. I don't know what the situation is right now, but I can tell you that every day I open up a paper, especially on a Monday morning—it's a sad situation for a Canadian city to have to see the kinds of headlines we see almost every

Monday morning now. Today we've added, I guess, our 44th homicide of the year due to gun violence in the city of Toronto.

I've got to give our leader credit. John Tory has been nagging the minister and the Premier for the last nine or 10 months, trying to get some kind of summit, trying to get as many people as possible involved in this and to make some very positive steps, possibly calling a debate in this House for an evening, to do nothing but debate gun violence and gang violence, so that we can get behind this and try to come up with some solid recommendations that can be possibly financed partially by the province but be turned over so that our police services and our community leaders can actually take those recommendations and work with the government to save lives. I don't know how much longer we can go on with this. If we've got 44 lives now and we still have two months left in the year, are we going to see 60 or 70 or 80 young people lose their lives because of these terrible ways of dying? I'm behind my leader 100% on this, and I wish the Minister of Community Safety and the Attorney General would show that same kind of support.

One other thing on the 1,000 police officers that the province announced: I'm very disappointed in the fact that the Ontario Provincial Police, in general, received none of those officers—only those municipalities that have contract policing. So all the specialized units of the Ontario Provincial Police, like Project P, the Internet-luring areas, extra cops for highways and all the specific areas that the Ontario Provincial Police operate—none of those areas of the OPP received any additional funding.

A quick comment on the OPP: I want to put on the record, and I may ask to do it in a statement as well, that there is a new president of the Ontario Provincial Police Association. His name is Karl Walsh. He started last Friday. Karl will be responsible for all of the uniformed officers and all the civilian officers of the OPP. I wish Karl very well. It's a very difficult job. I thank former president Brian Adkin for a job well done. I believe Brian had the position for about 11 years and took the OPPA to one of the most respected police associations not only in our country but in North America. I wish Karl all the best, and I thank Brian for a job well done.

As I get toward the end of my time, I want to say that as a member of the opposition I'm disappointed in the throne speech. As I said a little earlier—and maybe I'm partially wrong on it, but I don't think I'm too wrong—I think part of the reason is that it avoided a few question periods. I think it was a total of nine when you do the leadoffs etc. I think that was an area where we should have been back here on September 26, but we weren't. With those dates we missed all those opportunities for question period, so I think that's one of the key areas for the throne speech. A bunch of reannouncements, that's for sure; there's no question about that.

I come from a rural municipality—rural/urban with lots of little communities, one city and a couple of towns. I can tell you that one of the things we are so concerned about in our area is the loss of jobs at the Huronia

Regional Centre. Mr. Speaker, I know that you, as a member, have visited the Huronia Regional Centre in the past and know the types of services that are provided there. I am extremely disappointed, as the member for Simcoe North, that without the proper services being in place, we're going to move, in my particular community, 331 of the most vulnerable people in our society out of a facility that has state-of-the-art care, state-of-the-art conditions, state-of-the-art health care professionals and employees, and we're going to move them to areas where the parents and the family members are not happy. Not only were they not consulted, but they don't agree with any of these moves. I still think this whole process should be reviewed.

I think there's a real problem in the fact that, yes, we've closed them down in the past, but the people we've discharged into the communities through previous institutional changes and closures certainly have not had the severe conditions, both mentally and physically, that the folks have who are in the three remaining facilities today. So I want to put that on the record.

I know this is a prop, Mr. Speaker, but the family members of the Huronia Regional Centre, the Huronia Helpers, are selling calendars. They're trying to pay for their legal costs. They are challenging the government on this move, and I fully support them because I don't think the services and the funding are in place to help these people. I wanted to put that on the record tonight.

As we wind down, I thank my colleagues for allowing me to have this part of the rotation. I look forward to further debate on the throne speech. Of course, our party won't be supporting the throne speech, but we are here, as the opposition, to bring out the positives and the negatives that the government is proceeding with.

I thank you for this opportunity and look forward to any comments and questions that members in this House may have tonight.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: Let me say a couple of things with respect to the remarks that were made by the member from Simcoe North.

Let me deal with the environment and garbage first. It won't be any surprise to him that our party was very much opposed to the proposal that was actively considered under his government to ship Toronto's garbage to the Adams mine in northeastern Ontario. It was our view that the environmental assessment that was done on the site left a lot to be desired, and maybe that's the best description I can make of it, that there was from our perspective a great deal of political influence in the scope and shape and form of that particular environmental assessment, and we were very concerned, extremely concerned, about the possibility of that site actually being used for Toronto's garbage.

2020

Having said that, I look at the world today and see that we have a serious issue with respect to the possibility of other borders being shut off for Toronto's garbage, and I don't see a clear strategy on the part of this government

to deal with this issue. I can say very clearly that if the proposal is going to be to recreate or bring back the Adams mine site as a possible dumping ground for Toronto's garbage, we will be very vehemently opposed to that again. I hope that is not at all what the government has in mind, and I'll say now that that's where we would be. However, if that's not what the government has in mind, it would be good to know exactly what you are going to do. This is a serious issue.

Mr. Wilkinson: It is.

Ms. Martel: I don't have to tell you that, Mr. Wilkinson. I'm sure you're hearing about it on a regular basis. I remain very concerned that I don't see a very coherent, coordinated strategy to deal with what is a very, very serious environmental issue. I hope that strategy is coming very soon.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I rise today in support of the throne speech, and I'm delighted to focus in on one area where I think we've made great strides and where our government has certainly shown real, positive change across the province, and particularly in my riding, and that's the area of education. We see an unprecedented investment over the next five years of \$6.2 billion in post-secondary education, which is only good news for Nipissing University and Canadore College in my riding of Nipissing. These two institutions are important institutions in my community and add so very much to the diversity and depth of my community.

I also want to talk about the secondary and primary schools in my area. We have been privileged to have the Minister of Education visit us a couple of times over the last year, and we've celebrated the hiring of 25 new teachers over the last two years in our four school boards, which is just great news for all of our students. It means smaller class sizes, it means more attention to the students and better outcomes for all of our students. We've also seen an investment of over \$500,000 dollars in textbooks and library books in our schools in the last two years, a huge improvement over what we've seen in the past.

I would just like to address for a moment the proposal in our throne speech of an alternative diploma. In our area, that's going to mean so very much. Last spring, I had the privilege of meeting with the Minister of Education with a class at West Ferris Secondary School, a shop class. There were about 24 students in that class, 24 guys. Many of them said that they would not still be in high school if it wasn't for that shop class, if they didn't have that alternative, that opportunity. Of that class, about seven of them were going on to Canadore College because they'd had the opportunity through a partnership with Canadore College to see what the college had to offer in the shop area, in the trades area. Canadore is investing greatly, and we're investing through Canadore greatly, in our apprenticeships, in our trades programs across the province, and the students of Nipissing and the students of my area and all of Ontario are benefiting from those investments. I'm proud to serve in a government that's investing in our future, in our children.

Mr. Yakabuski: I want to comment on the address of my colleague from Simcoe North, and I want to comment on a specific portion, and that is crime here in Toronto. You know, what you had here all summer long was the David and Dalton dance, where they skirted that issue. They don't want to talk about it. First of all, "It's the Americans' fault; the guns are coming from the United States." Then they got on this social thing, "We can heal all that if we have some sort of a program." The problem is they just don't want to face the facts about crime and the reasons for crime here in Toronto. They feel that they can hide behind the sociologists who tell them, "It's really society's fault. We've got to somehow do something." What we want to do is give these criminals excuses for continuing to break the law. That's what this government and the mayor of Toronto would really like to do on crime in the streets of Toronto.

What they're failing to face is that if you want to deal with crime you must deal with the criminals. They've danced all around that. They don't want to face the truth about dealing with criminals here in the city of Toronto. There was a record number of murders here in Toronto in 2005, but they want to just tread easy all the time. You've got to send these thugs, these criminals, to minimum sentences of 10 years in jail and throw away the key. "We don't even want to talk about your excuses or your reasons or your problems." If you do a crime with a gun here in Ontario, you should be in jail for 10 years. That's the problem in this city: They want to find a reason to blame somebody else for these—they're not kids; they're in their 20s. They're hardened. Their life is going out and intimidating people and taking what they've got and, if necessary, shooting and killing them. And this government doesn't want to do anything about it.

Mr. Levac: I listened carefully to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I'll get to him in a second, but I want to deal with the member for Simcoe North, who gave us a reasoned response to the throne speech. One of the points he brought up that I totally agree with him on is his acceptance that we're heading in the right direction when it comes to taking care of the environment—the greenbelt legislation—and the environment in general. The fact that we're going to have watershed management, water protection at source, the fact that we're taking a look at what really does pollute our water from the source, which feeds into the lake that he's talking about, is a very reasoned approach. I'm glad that he pointed that out.

As far as the previous member's two minutes, when we talk about crime, it's rather interesting, the characterization that he makes of the people who have made solutions part of their mandate. To characterize the mayor of Toronto as somebody who doesn't care is not very fair and not very gentlemanly, nor with any government that has done any work in the past with trying to root out the causes of some of these problems. It's not very fair at all. To characterize sociologists, I think he said, as somewhat namby-pamby or whatever, again,

does discredit to the work that they do with trying to root out the cause of these types of problems.

One of the things I think we had better start focusing on very clearly is that there is a two-pronged approach to this, and that this is the actual crime itself, where we want to get hard on those who use weapons in the execution of crime, and also the causes of those particular uses.

We have offered in the throne speech, and with other policies, those wonderful—putting the schools back to use and within reach of the organizations that helped get to them off the street in the first place. The previous government took that away and we're putting it back. I think that's a good response, and it's an intelligent and measured one.

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

Mr. Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond to the members from Nickel Belt, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and Brant on their responses.

Again, the throne speech covers a large area, and there are so many things to comment on, whether you agree or disagree. Obviously, that's why we're in the House as opposition and why the government supports its throne speech. I just want to say again, a lot of my time today was spent with my concerns over the future of Lake Simcoe. As a responsible MPP for a community on Lake Simcoe—a large portion of Lake Simcoe abuts my riding; I think it's somewhere around 95 kilometres from the city of Barrie limit right around to Cambridge—I've got a lot of concerns. A lot of my businesses are marinas, cottages and resorts, and our communities want to be part of the future of Lake Simcoe. We know that a lot of strong development on the lake will have a major impact on it unless all the precautions are put in place.

What I'm asking the government to do, as you're dealing with the environment, is to look very seriously at that lake in particular. Deal with it like the International Joint Commission deals with hot spots on the Great Lakes. It's just too important to the future of central Ontario to ignore. It's going to take a lot of funding, as I've mentioned earlier. It's going to take probably hundreds of millions. And it's not just a provincial responsibility; the federal government has a responsibility here as well. The Trent-Severn canal goes right through there, and we need to have the federal government involved in the safety and the quality of our lakes as well.

2030

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Sandals: I will be sharing my time with the member for London–Fanshawe.

We've had various interpretations of what's in the speech from the throne. I think it's important to note that when we were campaigning, we actually campaigned on a four-year plan, and what we are seeing here in this year's throne speech is a confirmation of what we have done in the first two years of our plan and a reaffirmation that we are going to continue with that four-year plan. Our priorities for the remainder of our term, as they were in the first part of our term, are to improve health care, to

improve education and to focus on getting the economy going and having a strong, prosperous economy in our province.

So from my point of view, it's very good news that we are going to continue to focus on our priorities. That's very good news for my riding of Guelph-Wellington because, as we've focused on health care, we've focused on delivering service to people in the community and on making sure that health care services are available in the community. We've had some announcements in my community and my riding that have made a huge difference.

For example, in August I was able to announce the creation in Guelph of something called an assertive community treatment team. For the folks out there who aren't familiar with this term, this is a very intensive treatment team that works in the community with people with serious psychiatric problems. We, in fact, have quite a number of those people in Guelph, because we happen to have an excellent psychiatric hospital in Guelph, the Homewood. We have lots of people who have come to our community for treatment and remain there when their acute treatment is over. A lot of people who have problems, perhaps with schizophrenia or with acute depression, need to be supported in the community to make sure that they stay on medications. The assertive community treatment team can provide a psychiatrist, nurses and counsellors who deal with people in the community and make sure that they can maintain an even keel and can thrive, despite their psychiatric challenges. That is very good news for my riding.

We made another announcement—I think it was in September. We celebrated the opening of an HIV/AIDS clinic. Did you know that there was no HIV/AIDS clinic in the county of Wellington, no clinic in the county of Waterloo, no clinic in the county of Dufferin, no clinic in the county of Grey and no clinic in the county of Bruce? The clinic in Guelph is going to serve five counties. We estimate that about 400 people who are HIV-positive or suffering from AIDS in those five counties will benefit from the creation of this HIV/AIDS clinic in Guelph—the first one in five counties. That's good news for my community: that we are bringing those health services which have not existed before into our community to assist people who have some really serious challenges.

What about education? Good news on the education front as well. In the first part of our mandate, we focused on literacy and numeracy, because we understand that the absolute foundation of all education is the ability to read and the ability to master basic numeracy concepts. We have reading specialists and numeracy specialists now in every elementary school in our province. With the recent EQAO results, the provincial tests, we are seeing that we are making real strides forward. In fact, in my constituency again, good news: The two school boards in my community have grade 3 and grade 6 reading, writing and math results that are above the provincial average, and that's because of our government's focus on literacy and numeracy and the fact that it's working.

We have smaller class sizes. We said that, as a four-year program, we would roll in a program so that by the end of the four years, primary classes in the province of Ontario would be 20 children. That would be the standard class size. We are halfway there. We've had two years of government; we will continue to roll that policy in for the remaining two years.

We're now beginning to think more about secondary education because the secondary curriculum that the previous government brought in did some serious damage for those kids who need a more skills-based education. It really disenfranchised those students; worked well for university-bound students, but did serious damage. In fact, when we look at the dropout rate for kids who need skills-based education, it rose dramatically. That's not just Liberals talking; that's not just politicians talking; that's Professor Alan King from Queen's University, who has been studying this issue since the onset of the new curriculum and has identified a number of problems in the new curriculum which we are in the process of fixing.

Last year we fixed the single biggest problem that Professor King identified, which is the grade 9 applied math credit. We rewrote that credit. It's beginning to be offered in the new format. That was the single biggest obstacle to graduation.

We're doing some other things as well that are highlighted in this year's throne speech. We are going to be bringing in a new learning till 18 program because we want to make sure that students are staying and learning—not necessarily staying in conventional academic programs. We're not saying to kids, "You have to sit in this academic classroom that isn't working for you." What we are saying is that students either need to stay in high school till they complete a diploma or till they're 18, and if they're not of an academic inclination, they need to have some sort of skills training experience that will help prepare them to go out to the workplace. We can no longer have our students dropping out before they complete their diploma, and we're going to address that.

We are also going to address an issue which the school boards and the education community have been proposing for years and which, quite frankly, the previous government would do nothing about. We are going to do something about introducing an alternate high school diploma that will recognize that skills training is a legitimate form of learning, and it will give a route to high school graduation to those students who were blocked by the previous government. I am very proud that our government has adopted this proposal because, quite frankly, back in the days when I used to be an educator, it's something that I advocated for. I'm absolutely delighted that we announced in this year's throne speech that we will be moving forward with that alternate high school graduation diploma.

The good news for education doesn't end with elementary and secondary. My constituency includes a university, the University of Guelph, my alma mater, of which I am very proud. I have a lot of university students

who are my constituents. We have good news for university students because we have invested and are in the process of investing \$6.2 billion in post-secondary education—the biggest investment that we have seen in decades in post-secondary.

One of the things that we're doing is making university and community college education much more accessible for students. We have reintroduced the idea of a bursary that is not a loan but a guaranteed grant for tuition for low-income students. Low-income students will now be able to receive up to a \$6,000 non-repayable grant in their first year and up to a \$3,000 non-repayable grant in their second year. That is very good news in getting low-income students into university, because we know that tuition has become a significant disincentive. In fact, we have also expanded the loan availability for middle-income students, because tuition fees got so high under the Conservatives that tuition fees were also a disincentive for them.

So all around, great news in this year's throne speech, and I am very happy to support it and turn the floor over to my colleague.

2040

Mr. Ramal: It's an honour and privilege to continue the debate which my colleague just started a few minutes ago in order to continue to explain to the people of Ontario the goodness and the beauty of the throne speech, which details our agenda for the next two years, which many people from both sides of the House talked about in detail—some for and some against. Some said, "Nothing new in it." As I mentioned before, we don't want to add anything to it. What I maintain, what we have said in the past, is that we're going to implement what we promised when we got elected two years ago.

We're talking about strengthening the economic advantage we have in this province. We cannot do this without investing in education, in health care, without strengthening our communities across the province of Ontario. In terms of education, we believe that investment has to go from the beginning: We have to make the size of kindergarten classes smaller to give teachers the ability to teach better and so that the students can benefit more. We also want to make sure that all kids across the province below the age of 12 are able to read, write and do math. Also, we don't want any students to leave school before the age of 18 because we believe that by educating people, we can have enough skilled workers and talented people in order to advance us in the future, especially in a competitive world.

We all believe in technology, techniques and all this technological machinery and equipment. Life needs very skilled and very advanced, educated people. That's why our government invested a lot of money in education. We invested \$6.2 billion in post-secondary education because we believe that the future is about research, about innovation, about creativity and about technology. So without investing money in the research departments, in post-secondary education, we cannot advance, we cannot

maintain our position in the competitive world, as I mentioned at the beginning.

We didn't forget our colleges, because our colleges play a huge role in providing us with the talented and skilled workers we need, especially now in Ontario, because our investment as a government became the number one jurisdiction in the world in terms of the auto industry and auto manufacturers. We invested a lot of money in many different companies, from Ford to Toyota, to open factories in Ontario in order to create the jobs, in conjunction with colleges and universities. We're working together to create the skilled, talented and educated people to fill those positions.

This is the first part of our plan. The second part is health care. We don't want to forget health care, because health care is very important. You cannot have a strong community if that community is not healthy. When you create a healthy community, that means it has to be able to deliver the plans we want for the future. That's why we invested lots of money in health care: completing hospitals, building hospitals and infrastructure, lowering waiting times and investing more money by hiring more nurses, because nurses play a pivotal role in health care delivery. We also strengthened the ability of hospitals across the province to do more surgery, from cataract surgery to hip and knee replacement surgery, etc.

We can feel the positive improvements when we go to the hospitals, the improvements by allowing many people to practise in the field. We are trying to attract and recruit more doctors, who departed this province for many different reasons, to come back because we're creating more and better environments for them to practise and work in Ontario, deliver good service and help their people where they were educated and where they prefer to work.

All these positive measures in health care are because of our government initiatives. The Minister of Health is working very hard in every corner of Ontario to link all the health providers together, without forgetting the people who work in long-term-care facilities, because they also play a pivotal role, to connect them with the acute services, with hospital centres, to help lower the pressure in the acute services we have in the province.

Besides that, our government increased the medical spots for foreign-trained doctors from 90 to 200 and created double the residency spots in Ontario in many different cities and many colleges and universities. This is going to create more doctors and also open more spots to lower the demand on doctors and also have more doctors available to serve our communities across the province of Ontario.

When we got elected, we had almost one million Ontarians who had no family physician to go to. All these initiatives are in order to create availability of doctors for the people who need family physicians, plus the health team networks are playing a good role in many different communities. All these initiatives are to help us deliver good health care for all the people of this province.

Besides that, in the throne speech we talk about diversity. Ontario believes in diversity. We believe that

diversity is a source of our strength. We welcome people from 200 different countries who speak more than 130 languages, who practise every religion. We embrace every culture.

In order to maintain this diversity, in order to maintain our ability to connect with every customer around the globe, we need some kind of plan, a program with the federal government. That's why our fight and our struggle with the federal government to narrow the gap between what we give and what we get back in services—to give us some kind of ability and economic strength to deal with the people who choose Canada as a country, as a final destination, to help them get accredited and integrated, to help them fit into the community and get training, all the ways to fit into the community and make them able to benefit Ontario and to use their talents and their skills. They decided to come to this country to give this ability, these skills, this talent, to be part of the builders of this nation.

Those are our government's initiatives, and we'll keep working in order to narrow the gap, because narrowing the gap is very important to every Ontarian, for all of us who live in this beautiful province.

We were talking about infrastructure. I heard my colleague when he was talking about infrastructure. Our minister and our government put in a five-year plan and invested \$30 billion to renew our infrastructure across the province of Ontario. As you know, we have to invest by rebuilding the bridges, by widening the streets and the highways, by fixing the hospitals, by fixing the schools, by fixing many different infrastructures which have never been touched for years and years. That's why, as a government, we believe it is our duty to have a strong and good environment for the people of Ontario to connect them together by building good infrastructure.

So from the \$30 billion, \$5 billion went for hospital infrastructure, which my riding of London–Fanshawe, and London and Ontario in general, can benefit from. We have two hospitals. The administration of the hospitals have been trying to build for a long time. They didn't have enough funding until the ministry of infrastructure stepped in and supported the completion of both sites, London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's, in order to provide Londoners and the surrounding area with good health care services.

This was our initiative. That's why all of us, when we talk about the throne speech, think positively about that speech because we talk about the details, how we can implement our promises, how we're going to work for the next two years, how we're going to implement the steps we said we're going to do for the next two years. I think the people of Ontario are happy about it, because when I visit schools, they tell me all the time that it is the best time ever that they are spending in the schools because our government created peace between the teachers and parents and the government. This never happened in the past.

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When you walk through the hospitals, you see the positive environment, because people know that the government listened to them, talked with them and created some kind of negotiation dialogue between them. That never happened in the past.

Also, when you go to many different municipalities, many different communities, they feel and think that they have a government working with them, talking to them and consulting with them, because we believe that by strengthening our municipalities and our communities, it strengthens our province.

The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr. Miller: It's my pleasure to add comments to the speeches of the members from Guelph–Wellington and London–Fanshawe this evening.

I also want to go back to the member from Nickel Belt, who was speaking about the north and the reference to the north in the throne speech. I've got a copy of the throne speech here and I was looking for the section on the north, and I have to say it's pretty small. As was noted by the member from Nickel Belt, it's really re-announcements of some programs that have been around a long, long time, in many cases. If you look at the northern Ontario heritage fund, mentioned in the throne speech, that's been around since the NDP years at least.

Ms. Martel: Before that.

Mr. Miller: Before the NDP, according to the member from Nickel Belt. In fact, just a couple of years ago, under the past PC government, the NOHFC was doubled from \$30 million to \$60 million a year. That's probably the most significant change that's happened in recent years.

Other programs for the north: the GO North program, which is basically an advertising scheme, was re-announced; it had previously been introduced. The grow bonds program has again been reannounced. I think there's one line here in the throne speech to do with forestry: "The forestry sector that is so important to Ontario's economy and northern Ontario, in particular, faces enormous challenges." Yes, that's fairly obvious. In fact, the minister's council report on forest sector competitiveness pointed out in June that 12 mills were in dire need of some serious help, and the government has yet to respond to the serious concerns facing the forestry sector, including high energy prices and the highest delivered wood costs in the world. This is a critical industry for northern Ontario, and the government has got to get off its back and do something to assist that industry.

Ms. Martel: I want to respond to the comments that were made by the members from London–Fanshawe and Guelph–Wellington. I guess I really want to focus on the comments that were made by the member from Guelph–Wellington when she talked about education and the promises the government made during the last election with respect to what they're were going to do with education and what the government is doing now to help those young people who don't really want to be there to look for alternatives, and trying to reduce class size etc.

I thought about the promise the government made to have IBI taught in the school system so that autistic children could actually access an education. I haven't had the opportunity to raise the subject of autistic children until now, but I'm going to do so now. I was at a rally in Sarnia last Monday. There were a number of people whose children were cut off at age six and were cut off long after the Justice Kiteley decision and have not had a chance to receive treatment, and a number of kids who are sitting on a waiting list now and are not able to access services, because one of the consequences of the decision, of course, was that the government, until the decision is struck down, cannot arbitrarily cut these kids off.

I go back to the promise that was made by Dalton McGuinty to the parents of these kids, which was a promise, first of all, that the age discrimination that was practised against them by the former Conservative government was wrong and unfair and that the Liberal government was going to stop that discrimination and provide services to kids over the age of six, and secondly—we don't focus on this promise very much—a promise that this government would work with schools and professionals in schools to deliver IBI in the system so that those kids could learn in the system too, just like everybody else. Instead of implementing that promise, this government fought these families in court, and this government is going to fight these families in court again, because they're appealing the Deskin-Wynberg case, and that appeal starts on December 8.

Justice Kiteley was right: This government is violating the constitutional rights of these children. This government is violating the Education Act. I wish the government would keep this promise that it made to autistic families.

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham–Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise and give a few comments this evening on the throne speech that was delivered here some 12 days ago. We're speaking about it tonight.

It has been my observation of throne speeches in this House that the reaction after the throne speech is that everybody wants every single conceivable issue to have been mentioned by the Lieutenant Governor in giving that speech. It has not changed; people expect hundreds and hundreds of items to be included in the throne speech. But I think that we had a throne speech some 12 days ago that did capture much of what our government is about.

There are a couple of areas of our economy that were mentioned, and I did get good feedback in my riding about these two sectors. One was the automotive sector. We know that it is one of the leading forces in job creation and wealth in the province. We know that agreements have been made with Ford, GM, Toyota and Navistar from my riding of Chatham–Kent Essex that have leveraged more than \$4.5 billion worth of investment. That's a huge amount of investment for the province.

Of course, most important in my riding, along with the automotive and other sectors, is agriculture. I know the agricultural community was very pleased that they were mentioned in the throne speech. We talked about innovation and support for research and development that will help create new markets and new ways of doing business in this new world of ours for the agri-food sector.

We talked about marketing Ontario food, a new branding and marketing strategy that is important to the citizens and the people who grow the food and those who sell and market it throughout the system; and, of course, farm income, which is something that we want to work, together with our federal partners, to enhance here in Ontario.

Mr. Murdoch: Again, we hear from across the way how wonderful this throne speech was, and it was just mentioned that agriculture happened to be mentioned, that's all. It just got mentioned. An hour-long speech, and about rural Ontario—nothing. A few seconds at a minimum there, they happened to mention, "Oh, yes, we do have agriculture, but the feds are going to look after that for us," and that was it. So I don't know whom you've been talking to who was pleased with this, because I don't know of anyone.

It's nice that they have done something for the automotive sector, but what about the forest sector in the north? There's absolutely nothing to help them out—hardly even mentioned the north, along with rural Ontario. We forgot: You're urban-driven. The rural members: You go to sleep on us over there. Where have you been? I'm beginning to think there isn't anybody in the Liberals from rural Ontario. It certainly hasn't been driving it home. They must have put you in a little room when you caucused, because you're certainly not speaking out. We're hearing nothing from this government to help us in rural Ontario.

We get criticized for talking about the birth certificates. Jeez, you guys haven't straightened that out and, as the member said, you've got to be under eight years old to go on-line to get it. That's not going to help anything. And why wouldn't you treat everybody the same? If you can't have it within two weeks, then everybody should get their money back, but you're lucky to get it in two years, let alone two weeks.

It's been one of the worst boondoggles you've had. I understand you're trying to fix it up, and that's fine, but don't build your throne speech around that. That's terrible, to build your throne speech around birth certificates. That was it. That was the most exciting thing in it. It's unfortunate that this government has come to that.

Then you start bragging about everything you did in health, but you forgot about all the things you cut and the big tax grab you took from the hard-working people, the tax money you took from them to do all these things you're talking about.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Guelph–Wellington or the member from London–Fanshawe may answer.

Mrs. Sandals: I'd like to thank the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Nickel Belt, Chatham–Kent Essex and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for their comments.

First of all, perhaps the comments from the member from Nickel Belt, who raised the issue of autism and treatment for kiddies with autism: Interestingly enough, I too just this past week happened to have a member from my community advocating on behalf of autistic children who actually was quite comfortable with what we're doing on the autism file. We have in fact increased the training for IBI therapists and the number of IBI therapists who are available. But we've done something more, and this gentleman who was representing the autism society locally was quite supportive of that. We have provided every school board in Ontario with an expert consultant on behaviour intervention therapies—not just IBI, but a whole range of behaviour therapies to assist teachers with knowing how to intervene with children who have challenges with behaviour, specifically with autistic children. I would say to the member from Nickel Belt that there are a number of parents of autistic kiddies who are, in fact, quite pleased with the approach that we have taken.

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I would challenge the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound when he says that our auto sector strategy is a purely urban strategy. I think of myself, from Guelph–Wellington, as an urban-rural member. The biggest employer in my riding is auto parts. We have a new plant in Woodstock. We have auto plants in Alliston and auto plants in Cambridge. All over southwestern Ontario we have auto parts plants. I would say that this is the engine of the Ontario economy, and we are addressing it.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Yakabuski: I'm going to begin by commenting on the comments of my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. He talked about the lack of focus on rural Ontario. I'm only going to touch on that for a second and then I'll get back to it a little later. It caused some consternation across the floor here. But the fact remains that of the three persons added to cabinet this year—the members from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Eglinton–Lawrence and Etobicoke Centre—we just took the most Toronto-centric cabinet in the history of the province and added three more ministers from the city of Toronto. If people in rural Ontario think that this government represents you or has any concerns about you, forget it.

Let me start by talking about something that overshadowed the throne speech, and that was the resignation by the Minister of Finance the day before. It was our position that the Minister of Finance should have been asked to resign, or resigned, 19 months previous to his resignation the day before the throne speech. Our reasoning was this: The RCMP had those companies that he was associated with under investigation.

The Premier says he just handed it over to the Integrity Commissioner, and the Integrity Commissioner came back and said, "He's OK." The fact is—I think people need to know these kinds of things—is that the Integrity

Commissioner does not investigate like the RCMP investigates. The Integrity Commissioner has a limited scope and a limited amount of information with which to make his rulings; it's the information that he is basically given to make a decision on. So he came back and told the Premier, "I don't have specific reasons why the minister should be asked to step down," and the Premier took that as a glowing endorsement of the Minister of Finance.

What people have to understand is that there is not a gaggle of RCMP officers at the disposal of the Integrity Commissioner to investigate what's going on and report back. The reason that the Minister of Finance was not asked to resign is simply this: the lack of leadership on the part of Dalton McGuinty—the lack of leadership to do the right thing that would have been done in the previous government. Whenever there was even a hint of a cloud surrounding or overshadowing a minister in the previous government, they did the right thing and they stepped aside. Lack of leadership on the part of the Premier on that side of it, but most important is that Dalton McGuinty was afraid; he lacked the confidence to run this province without having Greg Sorbara there to hold his hand.

After 19 months, when it became clear that that investigation was too close for comfort, finally that resignation came. I think that has to be pointed out: that it is absolutely wrong for the Premier to be hiding behind the Integrity Commissioner. He's doing it again this week with respect to the expenditures of certain ministers. He has done it before. He has done it with respect to the Minister of Transportation. He will continue to do it because he does not want to face the fact that he cannot hold up to the standards that he set.

When he was elected as Premier, in his original throne speech he talked about setting new ethical standards that would be the strongest and the most stringent ever in the history of the province of Ontario. He has failed miserably when it comes to living up to those standards that he set.

What we got in this throne speech—this one-day-too-late throne speech, if you want to call it that, because it wasn't the big news any more—is a rehashing of what they didn't do since the original throne speech in November of 2003. We got a change from those areas which they didn't want to talk about—the 50 or so promises that have already been broken. There were almost 60 re-announcements in this throne speech that was presented that day here in the Legislature.

What was the point? Was it just a photo op? Was it only an opportunity for the Premier to have some pomp and ceremony? There was nothing new in this throne speech—well, there were a couple of new things, new wrinkles, like that birth certificate fiasco I talked to you about earlier. That was something, eh? It's only good for people who are eight years of age or younger; they're the only ones who can apply on-line for a birth certificate. But this was purported to be some kind of wonderful money-back guarantee on the part of the government for the people of province of Ontario when in fact it's hol-

low. It's an empty vessel, just like this throne speech, just like this government that has run out of gas halfway through its mandate.

What did they tell us? You know what the Premier told us in the first throne speech? He told us that he wasn't going to raise our taxes. This throne speech could be called the Minus 2000. They used to have that program for homes; they called it R2000. This could be the R2, Reduce 2000, throne speech, because this government has taken \$2,000 out of the pocket of the average taxpayer since it was elected in 2003.

What do we get for that? We get a huge health tax. I'm going to read a letter from a constituent—I'm going to find that shortly, and as soon as I do, I'm going to read that, but we'll move on to something else in the meantime.

He's not going to raise your taxes, but that's exactly what he did. Even three weeks before the budget of 2004, they promised that they would not be raising taxes, and in fact, that's exactly what they did. Broken promise. That was probably the biggest one—the kind of tax, the health tax, that they placed on the pockets of the people of the province of Ontario in 2004. And people will be paying double that health tax in their taxes this year, so the whammy has just become the double whammy for the people of the province of Ontario. It wasn't enough to hit us; they had to hit us twice.

A thousand police officers—

Mr. Murdoch: Heard that before.

Mr. Yakubuski: We heard that, and my colleagues from Simcoe North and Leeds–Grenville have spoken several times with regard to the 1,000 police officers and the failure on the part of this government to hire an actual, single officer under that promise. They continue to make promises; they continue to break them. That's the only guarantee. They should have a money-back guarantee on that. A money-back guarantee: If McGuinty makes a promise and he doesn't break it within 15 days, whether he's made it on-line or live, you get your money back. That would have been the promise for this government.

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I want to read this letter from a constituent about the McGuinty health tax and all those wonderful increased services they talked about. We're hearing all about that now, when the minister is just beginning to—it might be years before we actually hear him starting to talk about this wait time strategy. Two years ago they promised that we'd have those wait times in a few months. Have we got them? They haven't even begun to devise a plan. They haven't got a clue what they're doing with regard to that. But we just keep hearing about it—announcement after announcement, media conference after media conference, telling us what a wonderful job they're doing.

Here's a letter from a constituent of mine, a fellow by the name of Mark Gunner:

“John:

“As discussed, I'm just wondering where our new health tax dollars have gone. Ginny”—that would be his

wife, Virginia—“and I pay an additional \$1,500 in taxes now with the new health tax and have seen no improvement in the system.”

Those are his words, not mine: “no improvement.”

“I suffered a perforated eardrum two years ago. Following an appointment with my GP, I was referred to a specialist. As I had ear work done several years ago, I made my own appointment with the specialist that I had seen in Ottawa. That appointment took a few months to arrive. Following my 10-minute appointment, I was told that I would have to come back for a hearing test. That was scheduled for a couple of weeks later. The hearing test confirmed that I had a hole in my right eardrum and that I was borderline for a hearing aid. The specialist that I had seen only handled cancerous growths—so he referred to me to another doctor.

“Again, it took a few months for that appointment to arrive. Dr. Murphy saw me for five minutes but could not see the hole that I know is there (I can blow air out my ear), so he scheduled me for an MRI, which surprisingly managed to happen within a month—I got in on a cancellation. I again had to see Dr. Murphy to get the results and confirm that yes, I do have a hole in my eardrum. That appointment was in February of 2005. At that time, (again, a five-minute appointment after a 2.5-hour drive to Ottawa—why can't this be done on the phone?) I was told that I was being put on the list for surgery, with a wait time of about six months.

“I called Dr. Murphy's office last week to see when this might be scheduled, as we were now past the six-month time frame. His office tells me that he only gets two surgery days per month at the Riverside hospital and that I am number 18 on the list, meaning another eight to nine months for surgery!”

So much for that improvement: \$1,500, a real bonus for the Gunners.

“John, I am self-employed and my software training business requires that I travel for most of my work. This surgery will require that I will be grounded from air travel for six weeks. In order that I can try to plan my schedule around this surgery, I have asked for a scheduled date. They cannot give me a date, and tell me that they will call me a few weeks before the surgery is to happen. That sort of scheduling will cost me up to six weeks of income due to cancellations with unhappy customers if I cannot plan around it.

“So, John, where are my health care dollars going?”

Here's a guy who is self-employed; he travels all around the country, into the States and otherwise, on contracts. He's a software troubleshooter, if you want to call it that. He's kind of an expert in that. You see, when he goes for this surgery, he has to wait six weeks before he can travel by air; he's also a pilot. They can't give him any kind of a time. Now he's up to maybe an eight- or nine-month wait from now under this government's policy: “We got your \$1,500; now you wait.” So that's what you get out of the McGuinty government's health care policies and their health care tax.

I must say, I heard the member for London–Fanshawe, I believe it was, talk about how well they're getting along with municipalities. I'm going to tell you, that Ontario-municipal partnership fund that they lauded last year is a joke. Most of the municipalities in my riding are going to find themselves holding the short end of the stick before too long. Some of them may have seen some new money up front, but I'll tell you, as this deal progresses through to its conclusion, those municipalities are going to be in deep trouble as a result of the unfair policies of this government, the lack of consultation with municipalities and the fact that they don't care about rural Ontario.

There are three more ministers from Toronto. Any new ministers from rural Ontario? I didn't see any. "We are not going raise hydro rates until 2006." We can go on about what they've done with hydro rates, but that's clear. Everyone understands that, they know it, and they expect it now. They don't believe a word you say over there, so go ahead, say something.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: No, don't bother, because they won't believe you. They don't believe you.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Eighteen thousand dollars.

Mr. Yakabuski: They don't believe you. What about their fair electricity policy? They just thought that this was going to be the finest policy since Roman days, I suppose. You know what we're going to do? We could talk about Roman days, because it would remind me of Biblical times: It would be like the king being told by his advisers that there was a food shortage. They would go to the king, and they'd say, "Your majesty, we are short of food. There's a food shortage." It would be like the king saying, "Oh, we're short? We've got a food problem? Well, let's burn 25% of the harvest so we have less, and that would really teach the people a lesson, wouldn't it?"

That's what this government wants to do with electricity. You see, they're being told by every credible expert out there that we have a supply-demand problem. What is their solution? "Let's cut 25% of our electricity capacity." That'll really help, won't it? That's going to help the manufacturers in this province; that's going to help the lumber industry up in the north. It's going to be fantastic. General Motors' electricity bills went up \$93 million in July from the previous July—\$93 million. Say it fast; it hardly hurts. The Minister of Tourism likes to talk about small figures like \$18,000, but what about \$93 million for GM?

So where are we going to get the power? They keep talking about all of these new plants that are going to be built. Well, we're hearing some disturbing news about those plants. You know what? They're not being built. Nothing is happening. But they continue to go like lemmings over the cliff, and insist that on that timetable we will have those coal plants shut. The lights will be out, the jobs will be gone, the plants will be closed, prosperity as we understand it will be a thing of the past, only a distant memory in the province of Ontario, but this gov-

ernment will say, "We kept one promise." They're going to be so proud, because it might be the only one they keep, but it will be the one promise they shouldn't be keeping.

It was irresponsible. Even people in that caucus over there, even people from the former caucus and the Liberal Party all over the place are saying the same thing: That was a mistake. That was the wrong promise. Why are they taking us down that road? We're trying to get them steered around. There's no question that the day will come when we can move away from the use of coal as a form of electricity generation in the province of Ontario, but not in 2007, not in 2009.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: These people have no credibility on that issue. There are no credible people out there who believe you can do it. Only you people believe that.

The standard of living in the province is dependent on the prosperity of the province; the prosperity of the province is dependent on the jobs in manufacturing, and they depend on a secure supply of electricity. This government is ensuring that A won't be there: B, C, D and E will surely follow.

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Now I want to talk about another thing: MPAC. I won't have much time left, but the Premier says—isn't this a joke? He froze the assessments a year ago because, "We're going to fix that. We're the Liberals. We fix everything." They unfroze the assessments and the response is, "We didn't run on that." They didn't run on all of those broken promises either. They didn't run on taxing people in Ontario to death. In fact, they ran on not raising taxes at all. So now they're standing here and saying, "Well, MPAC's not our problem."

All you've got to do is go through this province and see increases in assessment of \$150,000, \$110,000, \$90,000 and so on, on properties across this province, and this government says we don't have a problem? They don't even want to look at it.

Now, as is the usual Liberal way, they're starting to backtrack a little bit because they're feeling the heat. They wait until somebody actually slaps them upside the head and wakes them up, and then they say, "Oh, God, maybe we do have a problem here. Maybe we do have a problem here." Well, you do have a problem. It's like all the other problems. You feel you can slosh your way around, hoping that somebody else will take care of it, but all of these problems are your creation. You're going to have to face them. You're going to have to start dealing with them.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: In response to the comments that were made by the member, I guess I want to focus on energy as one of the issues that he talked about, and I do so in the context of looking at the throne speech and recognizing that the government has said very little or done very little to deal with the fact that its energy policy is crippling the forestry industry in northern Ontario. This is a crisis that is going on right now that the government

has done nothing to deal with, has not engaged itself in at all.

We had another mill that shut down on Sunday in Kenora, paper machine number 9, throwing about 250 folks out of work. Paper machine number 10 at the same mill is now indefinitely out of commission until there's some resolution as to what will happen with that mill.

Let me go back to what the minister's own council on forest sector competitiveness said. It said, "Some 12 mills across northern Ontario have been identified at risk. The loss of these production facilities would reduce employment in the north by 7,500 direct jobs and 17,500 indirect and induced jobs." Further, "Southern Ontario would lose an additional 13,000 indirect jobs." That's because much of the engineering work, the information technology work and the financial services work that supports this sector comes out of southern Ontario.

The report also said that over past two years a total of 2,200 direct jobs have been lost from northern Ontario forest-dependent companies and further mill closures will have devastating effects.

The industry has said again and again and again to this government that the issue is not one of competitiveness, even though the Liberal government would like to make it so; the issue is your high electricity rates, which are choking the life out of this industry. It's far cheaper for these companies to move their operations to Manitoba and Quebec, because the electricity rate is three times lower.

So for goodness' sake, before we lose many more of our mills and the workers and the communities, would you do something about your high-priced electricity policy?

Mr. Ramal: I'm privileged again to have a chance to comment on the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I was listening to him carefully, and he said we have a problem. Definitely—not just one problem—we have problems, because his party, when it was in government for the last eight years, destroyed the education system, destroyed the health system, destroyed the relationship between the government and municipalities and communities across the province. That's why we're here again, to fix education, to fix health care, to fix the relationship between us and the municipalities, because we believe our government cannot grow and prosper without a strengthening between all the communities across the province of Ontario. We believe that communication is most important and vitally important in order to have a good relationship with other people in every way in Ontario.

I know he's frustrated because he sees us progressing. We're trying to fix things. We said we'd fix health care. We're working to solve the problems, to minimize the wait times. We're trying to solve the problems which you created a long time ago. That's why, for the first time ever, we are investing in green energy. We made the announcement not long ago of almost \$1 billion in Niagara stations and almost \$5 billion in the Bruce nuclear stations. We listened to many specialists and scientists from

across the globe, and they told us that what we're doing is the right thing, in the right direction. That's why we believe we're going in the right direction. That's why many factories and companies come to Ontario, because they believe we have a good education system, a good health care system, good infrastructure and a good government that listens to them and is willing to support them when they get into trouble.

That's our strategy. That's what the throne speech is all about: making the government accountable and responsible to the people of this province; a government that looks after every individual and the vulnerable people in this province. That's why we were elected, and that's why we're going to continue doing good work on behalf of everyone in this province.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): What a bunch of hooey. The education minister bragged last week about the improvement in our elementary schools, and do you know what year he started from to talk about the improvements? It was 1999. I don't remember; when was the government elected? Was it 1999? No, it wasn't. Then they talked about 2000 and the improvement went up, and in 2001 it went up further, and in 2002 and 2003. Now, who was in government for those four years when the system was turned around by the Conservative government's policies, when the education system started to become accountable to parents and children?

Interjection: What about the teachers?

Mr. Sterling: Well, the teachers performed better. The kids improved their education. The test results showed that there was a great improvement in the education system. This whole nuance by the other side that they've done something for the education system is just a nuance.

On Friday night, I was at the opening of a brand new high school in Smiths Falls, a high school which was starting construction and was promised the money in 2002 by the former government. We introduced a brand new program to replace dilapidated schools, so we gave Smiths Falls \$13 million to build a brand new high school, which has now increased to \$18 million.

We understood the needs of rural Ontario, as well as the Toronto school boards, in terms of their needs. Our government had a great record in education, and they're trying to reap the benefits of it. What a joke.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: Well, there is nobody up over there.

Again, I want to congratulate the member on his speech about the throne speech. It's just unconscionable what this government will do to take—just like the previous speaker said, all of a sudden they've solved everything about education. How many millions of taxpayers' dollars did they throw at it to try to get somewhere? We had the thing going upscale. All of a sudden, this government comes along, throws a whole lot of money at it and says, "We've solved the problem."

But to get back to what we're talking about, the throne speech, and the problems that you have with your constituent up in Renfrew, up in that area, it just goes to show that those kinds of problems are all over. Everybody is having problems. They can come in here and spend most of the throne speech talking about their great achievements in the health care system, yet they got rid of a lot of stuff in the health care system, like our—

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: Oops, somebody's upset. They hit a fly over there.

It's just unbelievable what this Liberal government wants us to believe. They come up with a throne speech over an hour long, and there's nothing in it. Their greatest satisfaction is that people under eight years old can get birth certificates, and get their money back if they don't get them within two weeks. That is really disappointing.

We all know that the government, halfway through their term, has run out of gas, as somebody said. They have nowhere to go. They have a throne speech rehash of all their old promises, which they won't keep.

Thank you for giving me this time.

The Acting Speaker: The time being—excuse me. I was thinking it was just about time, but the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Yakabuski: I could respond to so much from the member for London–Fanshawe, the member from Lanark–Carleton, the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and the member from Nickel Belt.

I really want to respond to the education side of it. The member talked about how our government—the previous

government—wrecked education and this government has saved it in just two years. Well, in my riding, this government promised to keep rural schools open, and this September, five schools in my riding did not open. This is the education minister who closes rural schools because he will not give rural Ontario the funding they so richly deserve. There's the education minister who doesn't answer letters, either to constituents or members, and closes schools. That's what you get from this government.

Many of the school bus operators in my riding are asking themselves how they can possibly continue to operate under the funding formula of this government. Oh, they send a bureaucrat to listen to them, and nothing happens. This minister does not want to face the reality of rural schools and rural transportation issues in this province; he just wants to wring his hands, do a nice photo op and do nothing about rural schools.

Five schools have closed. As we speak, there's a meeting going on in Deep River to see if they can salvage Morison school. Laurentian, Alexander Reid, Horton, Ross Mineview and Keys all closed this September as a result of this minister's neglect and indifference to the concerns of rural Ontarians, and this government's neglect and indifference to rural Ontario. So when this member stands up and talks about the previous government and compares it to the record of this government, all I can tell you is, let's do the math: Five schools failed to open this September.

The Acting Speaker: It now being well past 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow, Tuesday, October 26.

The House adjourned at 2133.

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