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Thursday 24 November 2005

Jeudi 24 novembre 2005

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 24 November 2005

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 24 novembre 2005

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT
(COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT), 2005

LOI DE 2005
MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION
(PARTICIPATION COMMUNAUTAIRE)

Mr. Fonseca moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to community involvement activity hours and board support / Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation à l'égard des heures d'activité et de l'appui des conseils au titre de la participation communautaire.

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

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Volunteering is an incredible experience, where we share and learn from others and we all grow.

I have to say that my personal experiences with volunteerism have been some of the most rewarding in my life. I can recall a time when I was invited out to a community, a community that didn't have very much in terms of things, material goods; it was a lower socio-economic community. I was asked to come out and work with a running group and take a bunch of little runners out for a jog and talk a little bit about track and field. I remember arriving there with my equipment, putting my bag down and seeing about 40 eager little runners coming toward me and asking me all sorts of different questions, many not dealing with track and field or with running; they were more to do with my personal life: where I grew up and what I like to eat and what I like to do etc. Anyway, we went out for this little run, and when we came back—I was asked by a community volunteer to come out and provide this workshop. We had a whole lot of fun. There was a whole lot of learning there, and I learned so much from them.

At the end of this workshop, once we were done, I was packing up my bag, and one of those little runners came to me and put out his hands with a T-shirt that he had been wearing. It was a T-shirt from the club, and he was offering it to me. I thought, "Wow, this is amazing." This

little runner probably didn't have a lot of T-shirts in his closet, but for him to be giving me that, I felt that he must have got something from what I did for him that day, or for the group. I accepted it, and grabbed a shirt from my bag and gave it to him. That was a volunteer experience that was so rewarding. From that young gentleman I've got back tenfold what I put in. This was about 15 years ago, so I'm sure he's very successful today. I saw great leadership skills and great enthusiasm in that little runner.

All other experiences I've had with volunteerism have been rewarding. I was working with the air cadets, and going out and doing the poppy drive and gathering funds for our veterans. Working with the Special Olympics has been so rewarding. That is why I have asked to amend the Education Act and provide that the program where today secondary school students must now put in 40 hours of volunteer time to be able to graduate be increased to 60 hours. That is because I've done much consultation with the community. In this rewarding job that we have as MPPs, and where much of our work takes place in our community—in my community of Mississauga East, having gone to schools and hospitals, the Salvation Army and seniors centres, all of these different organizations really need those volunteers to survive, to thrive, to be able to be the best that they can be.

They've all told me that it has been unbelievable to have all these young volunteers come and work with them, but there have been some challenges. Those challenges have been around the number of hours and also the policies, the procedures, the process that is involved in this program from school board to school board and school to school. Here's what they said: Today it's 40 hours, and most students do get the 40 hours done and the volunteerism is a rewarding experience to them. But some students wait until the last minute, procrastinate somewhat, and then put in all 40 hours in the last couple of months. When you do that, you may be doing it for the wrong reasons.

Yes, this is a terrific program and I think we should increase the hours. I've consulted with many students, and those who start early, in grade 9 or 10, and get a few hours in, do well beyond 40 hours. Many of them that I've spoken with have put in 200 and 300 hours. They find that this has been incredible. The people they have met, the skills they have learned to make them successful citizens, to get a better understanding of the community, to be that glue in the community, have been wonderful.

We do know that those who start early do a lot more than 40 hours and get a much more wholesome experi-

ence, and that is why I've asked that we build in, that we increase it to 60 hours to help groups with volunteerism and to provide policies, procedures and process to the school boards to get those students started earlier and to build linkages with the community.

1010

Often students will find that the barriers are, "Well, I don't know what I can do. Where can I volunteer?" I want to make sure that those barriers get taken away, so that the student knows he can volunteer with something like—it could be a one-off, like tsunami relief, or it could be something like helping a senior in their neighbourhood in terms of going to get groceries for that senior, or maybe at this time of year, shovelling their walk or their driveway or doing some leaf raking—

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Putting up their Christmas lights.

Mr. Fonseca: Putting up their Christmas lights, yes, as the great member from Peterborough has just recommended. We have to look at many of these things, all the opportunities that exist out there in the community. They don't have to think just about traditional volunteerism. Many volunteers do it also through their church, their temple, their mosque or their synagogue. There are so many opportunities. The thing is that we have to make sure that students are aware of those opportunities as soon as they come into grade 9, and that they get started early so that they get that full experience from volunteering.

I can go through a number of endorsements from people who have spoken very positively to this change: From Her Worship, Mayor Hazel McCallion: "Volunteerism is a vital part of our society and it is especially important to get this message across to young people. For youth, volunteering brings a sense of confidence and enables them to develop their communication and social skills that will be invaluable to them later in life"; from Peel Senior Link; from the past president of United Generations Ontario, who says, "By providing these opportunities to our youth and them being able to interact with our seniors, there is a way to fill that gap between generations," which sometimes is difficult, because we don't understand each other when there is that generational gap; from Michael Bator, director of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, "Our schools provide a setting within which volunteerism can be nurtured, not just as a natural and logical extension of good learning, but rather as an integral part of our community development."

It's about good citizenship, about being selfless, about understanding others. Many times, there are those who live in a different socio-economic strata, different neighbourhoods, and we don't understand each other. Wouldn't it be great to break down those barriers, to have somebody go into a community that they don't understand, work with a different ethnic group other than their own, and be able to get a flavour for other neighbourhoods, for the world? These are all invaluable experiences that cannot be gotten without volunteerism.

Often when we go into a regular job, we're doing that job and we're in a setting that we may like, or not, and we're there to raise some funds. But with volunteerism, the world is your oyster. You can do anything you'd like to do. You're able to find what you're passionate about. If you love sports, go volunteer with a sports group, a recreational group. If you love to bake or cook, do so with a food bank or provide some food. Whatever you desire, you can find that opportunity through volunteerism. That's why I've asked all our members here to support this change in the legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's my pleasure and privilege to rise today to speak in support of Bill 19 by my colleague from Mississauga East. Many of the members here today will speak to their legislative colleagues to ask support for the bill or to suggest areas in which it might be amended. I'd like to speak to the many thousands of young men and women who will be affected by this bill, if it is passed, and who today are working to get their 40 hours of community service accomplished before graduation.

Earlier this week, I visited Erindale Secondary School in Mississauga to speak to a grade 12 business class about leadership and teamwork. Today's teens want to make a difference, just as they did when I was a teen or when my parents were teens.

Between 1994 and 2003, I had the pleasure of teaching in the school of business studies at Ryerson University in Toronto. There I taught the 20-somethings. Students at all levels are concerned with doing well as they move forward in life. Anyone who works with today's young people knows that we're leaving our future in the hands, in the hearts, and in the minds and consciences of an outstanding generation of young people.

How do we help young people get a good start in life? One way is to show by example that learning is a process that happens outside the classroom and that learning is a lifelong process that should be an essential part of the lives of concerned and involved citizens of tomorrow. Volunteerism is one of the strongest of those lifelong learning habits and principles. But even good habits have to be learned, and every skill worth having needs to be practised over and over in many settings through the years.

Right now, high school students require 40 hours of community time before they graduate. The member from Mississauga East proposes that today's 40 hours of community time be 60 hours of community time. One may ask, what difference would an extra 20 hours of volunteer community service make? It brings to mind the old story about the young boy who stops a man in downtown Toronto asks him, "Sir, how do I get to Roy Thomson Hall?" The man looks at the young boy and replies, "Practice, my young friend, practice."

That is the difference those 20 hours will make. Those extra 20 hours are the difference between scrambling in the closing weeks of a student's final year and learning to plan for an activity that needs to be a part of the life of

every involved and concerned Canadian. Those extra 20 hours represent the practice that might change the student's perception of volunteering from an obligation or chore into a vocation that's intrinsically rewarding and one that the student looks forward to rather than shies away from. More importantly, the larger challenge for high school students is also a vital and precious treasure of time that our community-based organizations can call upon to make those very communities better.

When I'm in Mississauga classrooms talking about our communities and our neighbourhoods and I ask students who in their lives, outside their families, do they look up to as a role model, we normally find that most of those teenage and childhood role models were volunteers. They were coaches. They were people who taught skills in the arts: dance, music and language. Each year in Mississauga, we host the annual Ontario volunteer awards, and it has gotten so big that we've had to split it over two days rather than one. We've rewarded hundreds and hundreds of men and women, many of whom have served upwards of 20 years in volunteer capacities in our community. Some have served five years. And it's very rewarding to see that each year we begin to recognize more and more young people.

Volunteers serve in public safety within our police forces. Volunteers serve aboard our transit systems. Volunteers keep heritage languages and cultures alive through their service in ethnocultural organizations. Volunteers also make our political organizations function.

One day at the Mississauga annual volunteer awards, I asked what was the aggregate total of volunteer years that the people being awarded would contribute, and the aggregate total, if you could imagine it as an imaginary tunnel in time, would take you from today back into the days of ancient Rome. That's the sheer scale of the contribution that volunteers have made.

There are challenges inherent in Bill 19. Right now, the onus on doing 40 hours rests largely on the student. Few community organizations plan for the available time that students have to offer; fewer still have assigned tasks and jobs that can be delegated to students who are making up their community hours.

In rural areas, the fabric of social services is often spread thinner than it is in densely populated areas. In some areas, people have observed that opportunities are fewer. As well, within some families students need to convert some of their time into cash to help make their families go or to save for their education. The proposal put forth by the member from Mississauga East in Bill 19 is good news. It's one that I think deserves consideration in committee, and it's one that I urge in second reading.

1020

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Bill 19 requires that students in the senior division complete no less than 60 hours of community involvement before receiving their secondary school diploma. Bill 19, as proposed by the member from Mississauga East, is laudable. I listened with great attention to what he had to say and I'm totally convinced that Bill 19 is good for Ontario students.

As we know, on December 5, which is just nine days away, the United Nations will recognize International Volunteer Day, so this bill comes in at exactly the right time.

What does this bill actually propose? We know that to develop skills and gain some experience in real life—some kids in my neighbourhood, for instance, are born entrepreneurs. I know that the majority of the members here had either a paper route when they were 14 or a part-time job when they were 15 or some such experience that developed skills. You were telling me just now that you were 16 when you took your paper route—

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I was six.

Mr. Ruprecht: Six years old; can you image that? That's just great. The major point in all this is that skills have to be developed, and this is one of the biggest and greatest ways in which skills can be developed by young people.

We should ask ourselves, with Bill 19, this question: How do we best prepare our kids for the future? That question has been answered in a great book. It's called *The New Psycho-Cybernetics*, and it's by Dr. Maltz. He asks in this book, what's the best indicator for the future success of the child? What's the best indicator that the child will be well developed, will be healthy and will be successful in the future? Do you know what he comes up with? It boils down to a question of self-esteem, a sense of confidence that the child can do something well. That is a great indicator. I know as well it involves the love of parents and the appreciation of the community. It indeed takes a community to raise a child, and what better way than Bill 19? What better way than to ask our children for 60 hours of community service, to volunteer, which is one of the greatest Christian virtues that we take from our own tradition here?

When we look at the indicators of why a child is successful, in this book Dr. Maltz says it isn't race that makes the big difference between the success of a child in the future and depression or an unsuccessful future; it isn't necessarily parent education that's the big indicator; it isn't even the income that makes the difference between a child's future success and future failure; and it isn't even sex, that is, whether a child is male or female. What it boils down to is a sense of confidence that the child can do something well. What better way for our children to experience that wellness than in providing either some sense of help to senior citizens or some sense of help in our community? Therefore, I'm convinced that Bill 19 is good for Ontarians and certainly good for our children's future.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I'm delighted today to get up and speak to the idea and the notion that volunteerism in our youth is an important concept that we need to encourage and nourish in our society.

In my riding, we have a number of students who volunteer wholeheartedly in the program that is offered through their high school. As you know, Mr. Speaker, and as many in the House know, I've spent a lot of time

working in long-term care over the last two years. One of the things that I've learned in my time in long-term care is the importance of this program to our long-term-care homes across the province. Through this program, we are able to attract youth into volunteer programs in our long-term-care homes and really improve the quality of life for our seniors. As many people in this chamber know as well, the volunteer award program that the government has instituted, where we recognize each fall our volunteers across the province, has a special component for our youth, where we again recognize those youth who have contributed so much to our community.

In my community of Nipissing, I have instituted an award, and it's based on the fact that our students are required to provide 40 hours of service. What I've done is gone and sought out through the guidance counsellors those students who have really devoted themselves to the program, who have contributed above and beyond the 40 hours and have really shown a commitment to volunteerism and to community service. I've instituted an award in my riding, which I present at all of the graduations in my community. It's the Dick Smith award. It's named in honour of my father, who, as you know, was a member here in this Legislature for 12 years and contributed a great deal to the community. I know that for him, volunteerism was a really important notion. He certainly encouraged us as children to volunteer in a number of different activities and was very committed to recognizing the volunteers who worked so hard in our community, the unsung heroes. I think those unsung heroes don't actually just spring up, but have to be encouraged and have to be recognized.

In my community, in 2004, I recognized the following students who, instead of 40 hours toward their volunteer service program, had in some cases contributed over 1,000 hours of volunteerism: At Scollard, we recognized Tara McKay; at Widdifield, Amanda-Jean Beschamps; at West Ferris, Kurtis Robinson; at F.J. McElligott, on the English side, Ashlee Edmonds, and on the French side, Robyn Bangs; at Algonquin, Nathalie Desrosiers; and at Chippewa, Sarah-Jayne McKenzie.

This year again, in June, I was delighted to be able to recognize the 2005 award winners: at Scollard, Darren Daniel Louis Jobin; at Widdifield, Kaitlin Merritt; at West Ferris, Cheryl Zinn; at F.J. McElligott, on the French side, Kevin Gendron, and on the English side, Melissa Graham; at Algonquin, Emilie Vezina; and at Chippewa, Stewart Everitt.

All of those students have contributed so very much to our community and have really created a sense of community through their involvement in the volunteer program.

I know that 40 hours is a huge commitment for some of our students. For some of our students, especially in the rural communities, there is a challenge. But I think we have to work with our school boards in order to recognize some forms of volunteer work that may be broader than the definition that we now have for volunteer work. I think it is important that we nurture this pro-

gram and encourage our students to link into their communities and contribute wherever they can, be it a fall fair, an agricultural fair. At home we have the heritage festival in the summer over the August long weekend, where we have so many students who volunteer and put in 40 hours just over that weekend, because they spend so much time at the heritage festival contributing to the safety and well-being of all of our guests. We invite so many people to the heritage festival; there are thousands who attend every year.

There are a number of opportunities for our students to achieve the hours that they're required to achieve now, and I'd just like to take this opportunity to commend all of those students who throw themselves wholeheartedly into the program and encourage them to keep contributing to their communities. It's a good foundation, and it makes great citizens of the future. So I commend my colleague for this bill, and I am delighted to be able to speak to it today.

Mr. Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 19 this morning, brought forth by the member from Mississauga East, I believe.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): Yes.

1030

Mr. Yakabuski: Thank you very much. I can't find it, but I rely on my memory from time to time, and it does actually work sometimes.

I support the bill that the member has introduced in the Legislature. It was the PC government that introduced the concept of volunteer hours, community service hours, as a part of achieving a secondary school graduation diploma. We have seen the importance of that initiative, and the member's interest in increasing that to 60 hours is something I support.

The importance of volunteerism has been touched on by both the member from Mississauga East and the member from Mississauga West. It is something that cannot be overlooked, and we support that tremendously. When you look at all our communities, they simply wouldn't exist, or they would look vastly different, without the efforts of volunteers and the contributions they make. The idea of introducing young people to the practice of volunteerism at an earlier age is something that needs to be encouraged. You are far more likely to be an adult volunteer if you've been involved as a volunteer as a young person than if you are asked at the age of 30 or so, "Would you like to join one of our volunteer organizations?" The likelihood is far greater if you've been involved as a young person.

As was said, it is a challenge for so many people to continue to be volunteers, but the number of volunteers we have in our community today and the number of ceremonies we have honouring them are very important: an indication of the number of volunteers and the importance of their service to the community. When my daughter Emily went into grade 9, she completed her 40 hours of volunteer community service before the year was halfway finished. But she had a lot of opportunities to do so. We encouraged her, and she wanted to do it on

her own as well, and she has continued to work in that capacity.

However, there are some rural challenges that make it more difficult for people to get to those places that can offer them the opportunity to fulfill this obligation. The member said that school boards have to be supportive with programs and policies. That's easy to say. But what we're not getting is support from the Minister of Education and the ministry with regard to rural support. Five rural schools have been closed in my riding this year, and the transportation issue in my riding is becoming more critical every day. The people who operate buses are even concerned that they can no longer stay in the business of getting our children to and from school safely. So the challenge of volunteerism for these people grows ever greater.

I would say to the member that the pressure has to be put on his Minister of Education to support transportation in rural areas and to stop dithering. He's had two years to deal with this. He promised to keep rural schools open. He broke that promise. He has promised to support them in the transportation issues, and he is breaking that promise as we speak. Every day, the circumstances surrounding rural transportation become more and more desperate in ridings like my own of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

While there is great reason to support this bill, and I think communities as a whole will benefit by it and the students themselves will benefit by it, we have to understand that every area is not exactly the same. The circumstances that volunteer students trying to achieve those community hours have to face in ridings like mine of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke are different from those in Mississauga East or Mississauga West. The minister, who has been missing in action on the file with regard to support for rural schools, had better show his face and show it soon and show some support for those people.

Ms. Scott: I'm very pleased to speak in the Legislature today in support of the bill presented by the member from Mississauga East, the Education Amendment Act, which would increase the number of volunteer hours required of high school students from 40 to 60 and also require school boards and schools to take a more active role in assisting young people in completing their volunteer hours.

I represent the very rural riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, with a number of organizations, charities and foundations. I know first-hand the value of volunteering. In my household, volunteering was a way of life; I just didn't know it was called volunteering. We all participated in all our community events and gave our hours. It was a great building block for any young person.

Since I've had the opportunity to be the representative from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, I'd say my favourite job is going out and thanking all the volunteers for the many, many hours of time and the effort and energy they put into various organizations within the riding for worthy causes.

Every year, the majority of Ontarians are compelled to donate canned goods to our local food bank, drop off toys

at the children's charities and run or walk in fundraising events. These are tiny gestures when compared to the significant commitment made by the diverse community we have of dedicated volunteers throughout our whole province. Really, they are the true unsung heroes, these volunteers. The toy drives they organize, the sleepless nights they spend staffing arts and cultural festivals—they're people who interact with community leaders to bring together the funding, manpower and resources that are necessary to launch the ambitious fundraising events. It can be selfless and, at times, thankless, which makes the introduction of volunteering to young Ontarians all the more important.

I commend the member from Mississauga East for his efforts to uphold the tradition of giving back to the less fortunate in our communities. This is an invaluable lesson to teach young people that cannot be emphasized enough. When I go to the high schools, sometimes they give me a hard time about the 40 hours they have to do before they leave. But 10 hours per year is not a lot. We need to really re-emphasize that to our young people.

The bill would incorporate volunteer activities within the instructional time on a school day. If a class should wish to adapt their educational lessons into a clothing drive, a fundraising project or a community cleanup assignment, they are free to earn the credited volunteer hours to put toward their high school diploma. I think that's a brilliant idea. The ones I just mentioned are only a few of the many inventive examples that high school students across the province are devoting their free time to.

We have to encourage more young people to volunteer in their community. It's not only the less fortunate who benefit. Many studies have shown that connecting youth with non-profit charitable organizations brings out the best qualities in young people themselves: Improvements occur in their academic performance, there's an increased level of self-esteem, and social skills are enhanced, not only among their peers but with adults. The most important improvement in the life of young volunteers is the invaluable lesson they receive in empathy.

"Experience learning," as this is, is often used to describe non-traditional learning strategies and settings. Volunteering is the ultimate opportunity for this type of experience learning. The enriched experience of young people in a volunteer environment helps us to build healthier, safer communities.

Family Services of Haliburton county, in my riding, offers an impressive, up-to-date on-line system that lists volunteering opportunities. The training, supervision and support staff services provided by the staff of Family Services of Haliburton County are exhaustive. Those staffers ensure that all volunteers are well trained and entirely comfortable with their volunteer responsibilities.

I know the young people have busy, busy lives, but I think there's a lot of enthusiasm. If we can educate them to the benefits—I tell them, "It's great networking; you get to meet great people. Don't pass up this opportunity. Yes, it's mandatory now, but it will come back to you tenfold within your community."

I'm very happy to support the member from Mississauga East's bill today, and I'm sure all members of the House will do so.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I am certainly going to support the proposal made here. But what I am not sure of, Speaker, is whether, at the time the previous government introduced the concept of mandatory community involvement, the honourable member's party supported that. In fact, my recollection—I'm checking with the table to see what the vote was at the time. I stand to be corrected, and if so, let the record so show. There was considerable debate at the time, you will recall, because you were part of the debate, and I do believe the Liberal caucus at the time voted against the concept of community volunteerism on the part of our young people. The idea at the time was very simple, and that is to get young people familiar with the concept of becoming involved in their community and doing their part.

1040

There are really two aspects of this legislation. One is the idea of increasing the required number of hours from 40 to 60. The second is to provide resources to ensure that students have the opportunity to become involved. I'm not sure about the increase from 40 to 60 hours, frankly. I'm not going to struggle on this one, but if the idea is to engage young people in the concept of volunteerism, to introduce them to the concept of volunteerism, whether an additional 20 hours really makes that much difference or not, I'm not convinced.

Here is something that is not in the bill that I think perhaps should be in the bill, now that we've had some time to contemplate the practical implications, and that is that, right now, school time or instructional time within the school day is not allowed to be considered part of the volunteer activity. In other words, if an activity was to arise within the community and that activity happens to be during instructional time, it doesn't qualify for this volunteer time. I think that would be a legitimate amendment to the proposed legislation and perhaps something that could be considered by the minister. Many opportunities would occur where, during instructional time, a community event takes place. Let's engage young people in that, enable them to participate in that and have that qualify. Right now, even with this bill before us, that wouldn't be accommodated.

Another aspect here is an issue—it was referenced briefly—particularly amongst rural students, and that is their ability to get to the place where they would volunteer. This Minister of Education is already shortchanging school boards across the province in terms of transportation facilities and accommodating resources for transportation. This would certainly be something I would support, in terms of ensuring that transportation opportunities are made available, through busing to events within a community, from a school to a public event where young people can volunteer and become engaged. That's a practical application of this, but good luck to the honourable member to convince his Minister of Education to do that, because his Minister of Education is refusing to fund even the basic shortfalls within

the transportation requirements of our school system in rural schools.

In the final analysis, I will of course in principle support the bill, because volunteerism is good. It's appropriate for young people to become engaged in volunteer activities. It's appropriate for the school boards to encourage that. I'm very pleased to say that the York region school boards, both the public and the Catholic boards, have been engaged in this for many years, even before the legislation made it a mandatory requirement. So with regard to this proposal before us, I would say that I welcome the new-found faith that the Liberal caucus has in volunteerism. I'm glad they have seen the light, and I will support them in ensuring that we can make this more accessible for young people, that we can overcome some of the barriers that may well be in the way of young people becoming more actively engaged in their community.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins—Baie James): C'est le fun d'être ici avec vous ce matin pour débattre cette résolution. Je veux dire premièrement que la résolution telle que—sur le principe, je pense qu'il n'y a pas un député dans la Chambre qui va dire, « Je suis contre le monde qui fait du bénévolat. » Je ne pense pas que c'est quelque chose qu'un député veut se mettre sur le record en disant qu'il est contre. Mais il y a un couple d'affaires, et on a besoin d'être clair avec ce projet de loi comme on a eu besoin d'être clair quand les conservateurs ont introduit la notion—je pense en 1996 ou 1997, quand ils l'ont fait la première fois—de forcer quelqu'un à faire du travail volontaire.

Premièrement je pense que, aujourd'hui, la plupart de nos jeunes sont très respectueux, ils travaillent fort, ils sont sérieux et ils veulent avancer dans la société. J'ai une grosse confiance en la jeunesse d'aujourd'hui. Il y a beaucoup de monde qui disent des fois, quand ils deviennent un peu plus vieux, « Les jeunes d'aujourd'hui ne sont pas comme ils étaient dans le passé. » Non, ils ne sont pas comme ils étaient dans le passé. Je pense qu'ils sont plus éduqués, qu'ils sont plus éveillés et qu'ils comprennent mieux leur place dans la société, même jusqu'à un certain point plus que nous autres on a compris quand on avait 15, 16 ou 17 ans.

Le point que je veux faire est que la plupart de ces jeunes-là sont déjà engagés dans leur communauté. Ils ont fait parti des scouts; ils ont fait parti des cadets de l'armée, de la marine et de l'air. Ils ont fait parti de différents groupes dans leurs communautés. Donc ce n'est pas comme les jeunes d'aujourd'hui : les jeunes d'il y a 10 ans n'ont jamais fait du travail volontaire. Je veux mettre ça sur le record parce que c'était une partie du débat qui m'avait un peu ennuyé quand on l'avait eu la première fois, quand les conservateurs ont introduit les changements à la Loi sur l'éducation, je pense en 1996 ou 1997, où ils ont dit, « On va forcer les jeunes à faire du volontaire. » Nous, les néo-démocrates, tels que les libéraux de la journée, disions, « Écoute, on n'est pas contre l'idée de mettre un mécanisme en place pour aider les jeunes à faire du travail volontaire quand ils sont en secondaire, mais on a un problème avec la question de

forcer le monde à faire quelque chose.» Une société libre, quant à moi, est une société où on donne aux individus des choix et où on essaie de renforcer les choix d'une manière positive. Je pense que c'est le point que je veux faire.

On va supporter la motion parce qu'on pense, à la fin de la journée, que ce n'est pas une méchante idée de trouver des manières pour augmenter les mécanismes nécessaires pour faire cet ouvrage volontaire—ça fait partie de la motion que le député a soulevé—mais, comme je le vous dis pour le record, je veux faire un couple de points.

Premièrement, sur la question des jeunes faisant du travail volontaire : ce qui manque présentement dans nos écoles, c'est le mécanisme pour aider les jeunes à faire leur placement de volontaire. Comme on le sait présentement, il y a deux manières du programme dans le secondaire. Il y a premièrement les programmes coop, où les jeunes vont travailler quelque part pour une période de temps et rechercher des expériences de travail pour les aider à faire un choix de, en 11^e ou 12^e année, où qu'ils veulent aller quand ça vient au postsecondaire; s'ils veulent aller à l'université ou au collège—quel choix ils veulent faire comme job.

Le programme coop fait, dans mon opinion, beaucoup de bon sens. Une lacune qu'on a dans le système, quand on connaît tout, est que le système d'éducation, les écoles secondaires et les commissions scolaires, n'a pas la capacité, n'a pas le financement nécessaire pour vraiment mettre en place toutes les opportunités possibles pour permettre aux jeunes de faire des choix quand ça vient au programme coop. Je sais que, par exemple, dans notre communauté on a du personnel qui est très dévoué, comme Marcel Camirand et autres, qui travaille dans la commission scolaire pour être capable de mettre en place ces programmes coop. S'il y a une plainte que j'entends dire par les jeunes, par le monde comme Marcel et aussi par le staff à la commission scolaire et par le secteur privé, c'est que des fois on n'a pas le financement nécessaire pour être capable d'assister les employeurs à faire de la place dans leur milieu de travail pour ces jeunes-là.

Je pense qu'une affaire que j'aimerais faire est que le gouvernement provincial fait tout ce qui est possible pour assurer que les employeurs sont accommodés pour donner une chance aux jeunes de rentrer au milieu de travail. Par exemple, supposons qu'un jeune veut devenir électricien. Il y a très peu d'opportunités parmi les employeurs chez nous pour faire un coop pour ces jeunes-là pour aller travailler dans une mine, dans une scierie ou au moulin à pâtes et papier parce qu'il y a certaines accommodations qu'on a besoin de faire dans un moulin. On a besoin de s'assurer avec le syndicat. On a besoin de s'assurer que les affaires sont faites d'une manière où la convention collective est respectée. Deuxièmement, il y a toute la question de sécurité. On a besoin de s'assurer que les jeunes-là sont bien entraînés, avant de rentrer dans le milieu de travail—au danger du milieu de travail. Numéro trois, il faut préparer les jeunes pour ce qu'ils vont expérimenter une fois qu'ils sont rentrés dans le

milieu de travail et qu'ils commencent à travailler sur la machinerie. Imaginez-vous un jeune de 17 ans qui rentre dans le moulin à Kapuskasing ou dans une scierie à Hearst ou dans une mine à Timmins, et que tout à coup il regarde un morceau d'équipement avec un moteur de 2 000 forces. C'est pas mal grave; c'est pas mal dangereux. Il faut s'assurer que ces jeunes-là sont préparés pour cette expérience.

1050

Une affaire que je veux voir est qu'on met emphase sur supporter nos commissions scolaires pour être capables de mettre en place ce qui est nécessaire pour aider ces jeunes-là à faire l'expérience du programme coop. Je pense, comme dernier point que je veux faire sur le programme-là, qu'il faut aussi reconnaître que c'est une excellente initiative pour aider nos jeunes à faire un choix qui fait du bon sens. Une partie du problème est que, comme on sait—quand j'avais 16 ans, 17 ans, je voulais être astronaute, ingénieur, en avion, je voulais faire bien des affaires, mais les moyens, la capacité, n'était pas là. Je n'avais pas les capacités financières, au moins l'éducation, pour le faire. Un peu plus tard—

Mr. Fonseca: You're a pilot.

M. Bisson: I'm a pilot now but that's a different story. I was forced to fly. That's another issue.

Ce qui arrive, c'est qu'on devient plus capable de faire des décisions sur où on veut travailler si on a des expériences à travers notre secondaire dans un placement coop. Je pense que le coop ne doit pas arriver qu'une seule fois. Je pense qu'on doit avoir un programme coop qui commence en neuvième et finit en douzième pour que les jeunes puissent avoir de différentes expériences. Possiblement, le coop de la neuvième année est moins intense que celui de la douzième, mais cela donne aux jeunes—j'ai vu le sciage, j'ai vu les métiers, j'ai vu la technique, l'ingénieur et différentes affaires qui donnent aux jeunes l'opportunité de faire un choix.

Les mêmes principes ont besoin d'être appréciés et, je pense, acceptés quand ça vient au programme de volontaires. Une affaire qu'on entend très bien auprès des étudiants c'est que les commissions scolaires, les secondaires, n'ont pas la capacité parfois de les aider à faire des choix pour le programme où ils veulent faire du bénévolat. Par exemple, il y a beaucoup d'opportunités de faire du travail volontaire dans une communauté qui n'est pas reconnue dans le programme présent. Des jeunes qui veulent aller faire du travail volontaire dans certains domaines ne sont pas vus comme pouvant le faire—contre le caractère qu'ils sont supposés avoir. Je pense qu'on a besoin de faire une expansion d'où on peut faire du travail volontaire. Quant à moi, le travail volontaire doit être bien proche, n'importe où, si ça ne marche pas sur les droits de la personne et que ça ne fait pas d'affaires négatives.

Par exemple, j'ai parlé aux députés. Dans la dernière élection, en 2003, on a eu pas mal de jeunes, une vingtaine de jeunes, à Timmins, et d'autres à Kap et à Hearst, qui sont venus faire du travail volontaire dans la campagne chez nous. J'imagine que les libéraux et les conservateurs ont eu la même affaire. Je pense que c'était

une excellente opportunité pour un jeune d'être capable d'expérimenter un peu ce que c'est, la politique, comment c'est organisé, comment on écrit des dépliants, comment tu fais les médias et comment tu prends contact avec le public. Ça donne aux jeunes une opportunité excellente d'apprendre un peu plus sur leur communauté et d'apprendre plus sur la question de comment ça marche, la politique. Dans ce cas-là, ces heures de volontaires ne peuvent pas être comptées, ce qui est triste, parce que la dernière fois que j'ai vérifié, il n'y avait rien de mal dans le fait d'être un politicien. Ce n'est pas une méchante affaire. Deuxièmement, le processus politique démocratique n'est pas une méchante affaire. Pourquoi ne compte-t-on pas notre expérience pour avoir nos heures de volontaire?

L'autre point que je ferais est sur la question de s'assurer que les commissions scolaires ont la capacité et le financement nécessaires pour aider les jeunes à faire leur choix et à les supporter dans ce choix. Par exemple, parfois l'école secondaire n'a pas le personnel nécessaire pour aider les jeunes à faire des choix sur où ils peuvent aller pour rechercher leurs heures de volontaires. Je pense que c'est triste, parce que ça minimise jusqu'à un certain point les choix que les jeunes peuvent prendre sur ce point-là. Je veux dire aux députés libéraux qui ont mis cette motion en place que je n'ai pas de problème avec le concept, mais je veux être clair pour le record : je ne suis pas bien d'accord avec l'idée de forcer quelqu'un à faire quelque chose dans une société civilisée. Mais on comprend ce qu'ils essayent de faire et on ne va pas s'opposer à ce point-là.

Deuxièmement, on a besoin de donner, puis je vois dans ce projet de loi qu'il essaie de s'adresser à ces questions, directement au staff des commissions scolaires la capacité financière pour accommoder les jeunes.

In the last couple of minutes I've got, I want to find out if my good friend Andrea wants four minutes on this.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): No, that's fine.

Mr. Bisson: No, she doesn't, so I'll do it for her in English because I know what she would say.

Just to say a couple of things very quickly for the record and for those who were watching and didn't get chance to pick up the translation, just to be clear, on the surface of this, I don't have a problem supporting a bill that assists kids when it comes to volunteering in their communities. No MPP, no politician wants to stand against that train. But I think a couple of things need to be said.

One is that I have great confidence in the youth of today. I know we sometimes hear people of our generation talk about kids, "Oh my God, they aren't like we were when we were kids." I'll tell you, I was a lot worse than any of you. I admit that freely. I grew up at a time when it was pretty wild and woolly at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. I have ultimate confidence in the generation of today. I think kids are probably more aware of what's around them than we were. I think socially they're probably much more progressive than we were, to a certain extent. I think they're much more serious than

we were. That's the thing that strikes me. When I was in grade 7 to grade 12, I'll tell you, I wasn't very serious at all. As a matter of fact, I was so unserious that I quit in grade 11 to go into the army because I thought that was a great adventure. I took off to serve my nation for couple of years in the Canadian armed forces.

My point is that back then, for whatever reason, we didn't take things as seriously as kids do today. I think partly it's the economy and partly it's that our values have changed somewhat. When I grew up, there was lots of employment. If you knocked at the door of one employer that gave you a job tomorrow, you could quit in the afternoon and get another high-paying job the next day. There were a lot of industrial jobs out there where you didn't need to have university and college to make a very good living. I think kids recognize today that it's not the same game any more. If you're going to succeed in this world, as far as having an income to be able to support yourself in the lifestyle you want as you get older, it's going to take post-secondary education. I think most kids understand that far more than we did. I've got ultimate confidence that the young generation of today is going to leave this world a better place than we left it. I want to put that on the record.

Number two, to recognize that kids—

Mr. Delaney: We left it better than our parents.

Mr. Bisson: We left it better than our parents, and they're going to leave it better than us. But our parents didn't do a bad job, either, I must say. Anyway, that's a whole other debate.

The other thing I want to say is that kids do volunteer already. We need to put that on the record because there are children across our society who, from very early ages until their high school days and after, are involved in all kinds of things. They're involved in sports groups and community groups, they volunteer at the soup kitchen, they volunteer at their churches and all over. I'm always aware, as all of you are, that every time I go to most events that have to do with things in our community, there are young people involved making things happen. I think we need to recognize that it already happens and this should not be seen as forced volunteerism. We should be looking at this as how we provide the tools to the high schools to give them the dollars and the support necessary to help young people make more choices about where they can volunteer. As we know, most of you who are in the school system, there are very limited opportunities for volunteerism in the current system, and we need to expand that in some way. If we were to do that, I think it would be a better thing.

Again, I want to put on the record that I'm not for forced volunteerism. I have a bit of a problem with that concept, and I think most of us do. But I'll take this as an enhancement of what we currently have. I look forward to the work at committee to make that happen.

On the last point, I'd just say that, at the end, whenever this bill does go to second reading, one of the issues that we really need to take a look at is to try to strengthen it in ways that guarantee the author of the bill gets what he wants in the end, and that is to make sure that the

government understands that this is going to take some bucks. You can't just pass a bill and not give our school boards the kind of support they need financially to make this happen. We need to make sure that our school boards are properly funded, that they have the staff necessary to do what has to be done under this bill. Allowing this bill to pass at third reading and be enacted and proclaimed without the school boards getting the financial support they need is, I think, a recipe for disaster. We need to be very clear about that as we go into committee hearings to make sure that that part of it is done.

1100

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Fonseca, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Fonseca: I want to thank all the members who spoke to Bill 19—the members for Mississauga West, Davenport, Nipissing, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, for Oak Ridges and for Timmins–James Bay—and how they provided the experiences that they're finding in their communities when it comes to volunteerism and when it comes to our youth. I have to reiterate what the member for Timmins–James Bay said: Our youth today are so resourceful. They are amazing. They are doing extraordinary things in all sectors of our community.

This piece of legislation is about making a program better. We're going to make it better by listening, really, not just to us here in this room. I want to thank all those students, all the youth, all the volunteer groups that were able to provide me so much input into how we can make it better. It was really about taking away barriers from the opportunity to volunteer.

I actually got an e-mail yesterday from a student, Carly Carrigan, from Cardinal Carter Catholic High School. She's taking part in the CBC series Making the Grade. I love this. She has said, "I looked directly at the bill, Mr. Fonseca, that you're trying to pass and I was wondering if we could work together to make it better, to make it the perfect bill." This is what it's all about. It's about making sure that we work with the students to provide that opportunity and make volunteerism habitual, to make it a positive thing that they're going to want to do for the rest of their lives.

I thank you very much for giving me the opportunity here to speak to this wonderful part of our community, which is volunteerism.

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM
AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI
PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT
DE L'ENFANCE

Mr. Craitor moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 8, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act / Projet de loi 8, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Craitor, you have up to 10 minutes. You have the floor.

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): It's a great pleasure. I'd like to start out by introducing some special guests who have taken the time to be here with us this morning. In the gallery are Judy Cutler, Michelle Taylor-Fernandez and Bill Gleberzon of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, affectionately known as CARP. We also have Kyriacos Kyriacou of Grandparenting Again Canada and Sheila Volchert of Second Chance for Kids. In addition, we have at least 30 or more very special guests as well, and they are grandparents from all across Ontario who have taken the time to be here.

Grandparents' access and custodial rights is an issue that is not going to go away. There are some very human faces of people who care passionately for and love their grandchildren, but they have been denied visitation access or are currently raising grandchildren after experiencing a lot of difficulty establishing their rights before law. Far too often, as many of you in this House may know, in a messy divorce case, for example, access to children of the marriage has been used as a lethal weapon. Spite, hatred, revenge and anger can be an awful thing, but no child should be its weapon. Let me outline to you how I came to realize that far too often in this battleground, parents also lose access to their grandchildren.

When I was first elected, one of the first groups that came in to see me was a number of grandparents from my community. During that hour or hour and a half of our discussion, I realized the significance and problems that grandparents have. Thanks to their help and the help from grandparents across Ontario, we formulated and are bringing this bill forward. I also want to say that, unfortunately, somewhere along the line, when it comes to grandchildren, emotion clouds judgment as to what is in the best interests of the child.

Bill 8 will amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their grandparents. Specifically, the bill will require parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents. The proposed legislation contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child, including a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between the children and the grandparents. It also requires courts to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as consistent with the best interests of the child.

The legislation is commonly referred to as the grandparents' rights legislation. A modified form of my proposal has already been considered in the Yukon and in six other provinces, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

On its face, this is a very modest bill. It will cost the province nothing. The bill is simply about grandparental access and the nurturing development of their grandchildren; nothing more, nothing less. Grandparental access and visitation rights are a huge and growing problem. Boomers are now grandparents. They are articulate, concerned and committed. They have a voice and their voice needs to be heard.

I mentioned this situation when I introduced a bill about a year and a half ago. At that time, I was blown away by the number of phone calls, e-mails, letters, people visiting my office, describing pain and suffering that caring grandparents suffered as children's relationships broke down in high matrimonial conflict situations. After the introduction of the bill back then, my office received well over 2,000 contacts, again by mail, phone calls, e-mails or personal visits. Many of them came not only from Ontario, they came from across provinces in Canada, including the United States and even outside of that.

In many cases, the children were used as weapons, first in custody and then denied access to their grandparents. The relationship of a child to their grandparents can be a beautiful and self-affirming association. Not all these situations are caused only by divorce.

I was particularly taken by a case in my own riding of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Marie and Herb Lewis had written me a letter, and I will share that with you. I still remember reading the letter. I think I see it every other day in my mind—a very emotional situation. Their daughter had passed away far, far too young. The husband had remarried and, since then, has denied them access to their daughter's children. I agreed with them when they wrote me, "Nobody should have the right to deny the children the love they deserve."

I would like the House to also hear a couple of other e-mails, because that's the reality of the bill. It's about personal situations that grandparents are going through.

Here's one that I received about a month ago: "I am praying this bill passes. My son committed suicide and my daughter-in-law has become angry at him and our entire family. We live in Nova Scotia. She lives in Ontario. I have a grandson there looking just like my son who is gone. Please, please, give it your best effort and thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Another e-mail: "Mr. Craitor, Bill 8 is not only for grandparents of children involved in separation or divorce. I'm a grandparent being denied access to my eight-year-old grandson by his parents as revenge for me not allowing them to bully me into giving them half of the ownership of my house. They lived with me for the first five years of my grandson's life. I was totally involved with them on a daily basis.

"This bill will allow me to fight for the right to see him. I miss him terribly. I know he misses me. Do you not think that this is harmful to him as a child that is involved with a separation or divorce. He lost his loving grandmother.

"Please continue and ask everyone to support this bill. Thank you."

I could go on. As I said, I think I have probably over 2,000 of these e-mails and personal stories that I could certainly share.

One last one that I want to share, and this came in just a couple of weeks ago from an individual. The letter says: "I lost my daughter in a car crash on March 19. She left behind a little girl who was 18 months old. We more or less raised our granddaughter as the father of the baby walked out on her when our granddaughter was three months old. Since the day of her birth, we've been extremely close with our granddaughter. After the incident, the father took her to live with him and wouldn't allow us to come and visit him. We would have to go to his parents' house to see her for a couple of hours. We finally had to go to court to gain access to her. Right now, after a lot of fight, we have access to our beautiful granddaughter every other weekend. Although we are quite happy, but we want more access. She is ours, all we have from our daughter, and we feel she should be with us rather than her paternal grandparents. When she is with us she is so happy, she doesn't want to go back. It really breaks our hearts to see her little sad face. We wish things could be different. We miss our daughter very much and it's really hard to get by day to day. We just wait for our weekend access to see our granddaughter. We thought that we would share this sad story with you, Mr. Craitor." Signed, "Judith."

1110

These letters, these voices, these people, give me and I think this House a real testimony to the problem that exists with grandparents' rights. I want to remind you that Bill 8 is simply about the best interests of the child. I am truly convinced that with a little prodding and encouragement, the courts and social agencies can provide real leadership in providing access to grandparents and love to their grandchildren.

I'm standing here simply to say to the House, to my colleagues, to my members, please support the reading of Bill 8. In doing so, this bill will continue and will go to public hearings. I think that will really give the public the opportunity to know and understand the passion and the pain that grandparents are facing.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 8. I think everybody in this House would agree, including the grandparents who are here today, that this bill is certainly about grandparents' rights but it's always about the best interests of our children.

Certainly in my life, and I know that's the case in many people's lives and many young people's lives, grandparents are very special people. They can be very special people when it comes to the quality of life of children. I have fond memories of my grandparents. Unfortunately, I've lost most of them, but I still have a grandma who is in a home right now. For the most part, all of my memories, going back to when I was a very young child, include my grandparents and the role they played in my life.

From my reading of it, this bill basically requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles between the personal relationships of children and their grandparents. It amends a subsection of the Children's Law Reform Act to reference the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents, and it requires consistency always with the best interests of the child. I think that's a very important piece. There are other specifics around what the bill is about, but let's talk about what grandparents are all about.

Who are grandparents? It's interesting to note the statistics on grandparents: 76% of people aged 65 and older are grandparents; 90% of those over 65 who have children themselves are grandparents; 40% of Canadians whose grandparents are alive see them at least once a month; 36% of women between the ages of 45 and 54, 42% of women from 55 to 64 and 22% of women 65 and older provide regular child care for their grandchildren. Maternal grandmothers were chosen by most grandchildren as their closest grandparent, followed by the paternal grandmother, then by the maternal and paternal grandfathers as their closest relative. Children are choosing their grandparents, are self-identifying that their grandparents are their closest relatives.

It's not surprising that children would identify with their grandparents as being their closest relatives, because grandparents have a unique role in a child's life. The parents are there day to day, dealing with the day-to-day stresses and the pressures of life within the family unit in all of its forms—sometimes one parent, sometimes both parents and, unfortunately, sometimes no parents. What grandparents do is provide this extra comfort zone, this extra place where children feel totally loved and totally supported. But it's not within the context of their own day-to-day family life; it's within the context of this broader kinship with grandparents.

Grandparents not only provide that safety zone, that place of love and warmth and total acceptance, but they also have a unique role in educating or raising awareness of family history in children. Grandparents are in the unique position to not only discuss with children cultural and ethnic values and traditions, but also the basic family history. Many times my grandmother told me stories about her mother and her grandmother or her father and her grandfather, so I got a sense of the history of my family as they lived in Ontario, even as they emigrated from another country. I know some of the businesses that they were involved in. In fact, to this day I can go into a certain area of our downtown in Hamilton and identify with a particular storefront where my family—my great-great-grandparents and maybe my great-great-great-grandparents—had a small business. They had the first soda fountain ever in the city of Hamilton at the turn of the century. They were chocolatiers and they were quite famous for their provision of sweets to the community of Hamilton. But I wouldn't know that if it wasn't for my grandmother having told me those stories, and my grandmother having collected a pictorial history of that

point in time. I actually have some photos that date back quite some time ago, indicating the businesses that my various family members were involved with. Also, you get a chance to hear about things like, "You have so-and-so's ears. You have so-and-so's eyes. Your great-uncle or your great-great-aunt had the same personality as you have." These are all stories that continue to maintain the connection between children and their grandparents.

Grandparents also, as I mentioned at the very beginning, act in so many other ways as a support system for the rest of the family, but particularly for the children. So when mom and dad are needing some time away, it's usually grandparents who are turned to. When children need or just want to have some time out of the regular family routine, grandparents are relied upon for that. Grandparents often are in a role of providing some safe space for kids if things are getting tense around the house. I know I used to go to my grandparents when my parents were doing their Christmas shopping, and of course it's getting to be around that time now.

The point is that there are so many different roles that grandparents play in a child's life. It's sometimes on a regular basis in terms of formal babysitting and those kinds of arrangements, and sometimes it's an informal, spur-of-the-moment type of relationship. The problem, of course, arises when, unfortunately, for one reason or another, grandparents are prevented from keeping those relationships or maintaining those relationships or are being prevented from even seeing their grandchildren. It's an issue that's of great and rising concern, not only for grandparents but for grandchildren and for broader communities. The unfortunate reality is that sometimes decisions get made and as a result of those decisions, the grandparents are cut out of that relationship and everybody suffers. The children suffer because they lose that connection and the grandparents suffer. I think the presenter of the bill did an excellent job in describing some of those very difficult, unfortunate and frankly nasty situations that occur when grandparents are cut out of the situation when it comes to their grandchildren.

I have to say that when I initially looked at the bill, the first thing that came to mind was, well, gee, I certainly support grandparents and their rights, but we have to make sure that it's in the best interests of children. When I read the bill, I was really pleased to see that that piece is in there, because just as we talk about children being hurt in divorce situations and used as pawns and those kinds of things, we have to make sure that's not what is happening here. It certainly is my belief, anyway, from what I read, that the intention of the bill is to make sure that children's best interests are kept at the forefront.

1120

You know, it's interesting, because the government has another bill that is currently going through the process. It's Bill 210, a bill that basically looks at crown wards and tries to figure out how to make sure more crown wards can be successfully adopted. There are a number of pieces in it. Interestingly enough, one of the pieces in that bill—and I brought a little primer about it

here—includes grandparents. It includes the idea that grandparents have a role to play when a child is taken into custody by the state. It's interesting, because that role is identified in all stages of the process, so that when the necessity is identified for a child to be taken into the care of the state because of problems in their home life, it's a requirement for agencies, for CASs, to identify who might be able to be involved in the care of that child, not only through the investigative process, but also should the decision be made that they have to be removed from the home. I thought it was very interesting that grandparents are part of that kinship group that are going to be looked to under this new legislation once it gets through the process and get passed. But again, in that bill, Bill 210, the interesting piece that I found as well is it's consistent with the thought that's in this bill, which is that it is always thought to be with the best interests of the child or the children at heart. While we're making sure that we're doing the right thing by grandparents in regard to this bill, we're also making sure that the motivation to do that is the motivation of our children, and to make sure that they have the opportunity to have those relationships and to have those valuable times with their grandparents.

I thought I should raise that, because in some ways Bill 210 was a bit of an eye-opener, and the process likely of putting that together was something where people began to acknowledge, at least in this place, that this is really valuable, really important, and that we should be trying to do as much as we can to make sure that grandparents are acknowledged as an important part of children's lives in their own right within that relationship that exists. Regardless of what's happening in the actual parental zone, that grandparent zone is a zone that we have to be able to support, and we have to be able to make sure that they have some decent rights of access to their grandchildren.

I guess there are a number of different ways that those relationships break down with parents, whether it's a difficulty between the parents of children and their parents, whether it's a breakup of a marriage or a relationship, whether it's a death in the family or some of the other situations that the sponsor of the bill described in his remarks. But the bottom line in each of those cases is there are things that we need to make sure we're doing in the process of taking on that responsibility of giving grandparents the opportunity to stay connected with their grandchildren. Those things are very specific around making sure that there are no other issues out there that we need to be worried about. Again, I certainly don't want to dwell on that, but when we're dealing with situations of family violence, when we're dealing with situations of women abuse, when we're dealing with situations of violence against children or child abuse, we have to be extremely careful that the interests of the abused mother, for example, or the child are taken into consideration, because we wouldn't want to have a situation where we're reducing the support that we're giving to abused women and removing their ability to pull their

lives together and make a good home and good life for their children. If we're interfering in their right or ability to do that, then I think we have to back away. That isn't to say that at some point in time those issues cannot be resolved, but when there's an initial concern about violence in the household, then we really have to make sure that we're not doing anything to make it more difficult for a woman to be able to find a safe place and safe home for her and her children.

Having said that, again I do want to say that this bill is likely the beginning—the thin edge of the wedge, if you want to call it that. It's an initial start in trying to address some of these problems, some of these issues. I don't think it's the be-all and end-all in terms of where we need to go. Quite frankly, the person who brings the bill, the sponsor of the bill, Mr. Craiton, is acknowledging that full out. But the point is, it's a start. Combined with some of the acknowledgement of grandparents in other legislation and with this piece here today, with the acknowledgement and recognition that it's the best interests of our children that are at our heart—I certainly know, for all of the grandparents that I have spoken to and that I deal with and for my own grandparents, that's always their motivation: the best interests of the children. But we have to always ensure that that is our first level of responsibility, our first level of acknowledgement of who it is that we're trying to do well for or do right by: the grandchildren. In so doing, in ensuring that they have those relationships with their grandparents, we end up doing the right thing all the way around.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Barrie—Simcoe—Bradford.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie—Simcoe—Bradford): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to—

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I apologize to my colleague—

Mr. Tascona: My time's being used, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order?

Mr. Fonseca: The galleries are full today with a group from Wexford Public School. I just wanted to acknowledge them. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Tascona: He shouldn't be doing that when the clock starts, Mr. Speaker. I should have my time put back.

I'd just like to say that this is a serious issue that demands serious debate. It's unfortunate that the member from Niagara Falls had to come forth with what I would say is a piecemeal approach to reforming the Family Law Act and the Children's Law Reform Act, which cries out for overhaul. It has been over 20 years since the Family Law Act was enacted, and the Children's Law Reform Act needs to be changed based on the case law that's out there; it needs to be changed with respect to the changing nature of family relationships today. It's up to the Attorney General and the Minister for Children and Youth Services to start to do something. We cannot have a member come forth here, a private member's all best intentions, on a very narrow issue which deserves to be

considered, to be left away from total reform of the Family Law Act and total reform of the Children's Law Reform Act.

I think I studied the initial Family Law Reform Act when I was in law school back at Queen's over 20 years ago. Nothing has changed; there have been no major and significant amendments to this piece of legislation. It cries out for change because of what we're talking about here today.

Anyone who has practised family law knows that it's emotional. They know that it's litigious. They know that there are serious issues with respect to family breakdown, serious issues with respect to the distribution of assets, serious issues with respect to the support of the family, and also the critical issues of custody and access of the parents or the grandparents. That's something that has not been dealt with. We have case law that has been emerging, we have reality in terms of family relationships today, and yet we have nothing in terms of major reform of the Family Law Reform Act and the Children's Law Reform Act.

I would put it out to the ministers today—the Attorney General and the children and youth services minister—to listen to their member in terms of starting an approach. This is a narrow amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act. It's an important amendment, but the overhaul is necessary.

1130

I want to refer to the Canadian Family Law Quarterly, volume 21, 2003. It's an article by Martha Shaffer, entitled, "To Grandmother's House We Go? An Examination of Grandparent Access." In this particular article, she looks at a number of general trends and principles in Canadian case law:

"An examination of the case law on grandparent access gives rise to four general observations. First, despite the widely held belief that grandparent access is a problem of divorce, many of the litigated grandparent access cases were not precipitated by marriage breakdown....

"Second, two main approaches to grandparent claims are discernible in the case law. Not surprisingly, these approaches mirror the two competing background assumptions that can inform the best interests standard in grandparent access cases. The dominant approach embraces as its background norm the assumption that contact with grandparents is generally in the child's best interests." It's called the pro-contact approach.

There is a minority view, an opposing view, the parental autonomy approach, which "recently received a forceful endorsement by the Ontario Court of Appeal in the case of *Chapman v. Chapman*. Despite initial predictions that *Chapman*, as an appellate decision, would change the pro-contact orientation of Canadian courts, courts continue to make grandparent access orders in a large number of cases. Even more significantly, the 'pro-contact' strand of analysis remains strong in the post-*Chapman* case law.

"Third, as a result of this pro-contact orientation, courts tend to order access to grandparents unless the

parents have what the courts view as good reasons for ending the relationship....

"Finally, where grandparents succeed in obtaining access, courts are careful to confine its scope. Typically, courts grant access one weekend day every three to six weeks for a period of several hours."

So the leading decision with respect to grandparent access is the case of *Chapman versus Chapman*, which supports the parental autonomy approach. I'll just read you some facts of this case:

"Larry and Monica Chapman, not Esther Chapman, are responsible for the welfare of the children. They alone have this legal duty. Esther Chapman, as a grandparent, loves her grandchildren and, understandably, wants to maintain contact with them. Nonetheless, the right to decide the extent and nature of the contact is not hers, and neither she nor a court should be permitted to impose their perception of the children's best interests in circumstances such as these where the parents are so demonstrably attentive to the needs of their children. The parents have, for the moment, decided that those needs do not include lengthy, frequent visits with their grandmother. Although the parents' conflict with Esther Chapman is unfortunate, there is no evidence that this parental decision is currently detrimental to the children. It should therefore be respected by the court and the children's best interests left in the exclusive care of their parents."

Martha Shaffer goes on to conclude in her article, "I conclude by arguing that the case law on grandparent access offers important insights for future development of the law, either by the judiciary or at the level of legislative reform. The case law establishes that parents often deny access or seek to restrict it for legitimate reasons. Where family relations have reached the point that grandparents are prepared to go to court to force access and parents are prepared to go to court to prevent it, access may not be in the best interests of the child. For these reasons, courts should be cautious to ensure that they do not make access orders too readily. Legislatures should refrain from creating statutory presumptions of grandparent access, as these provisions are likely to do more harm than good in repairing fractured family relationships."

That's an article that was presented in the Canadian Family Law Quarterly in 2003, after the *Chapman versus Chapman* decision in the Ontario Court of Appeal. What the member is trying to accomplish here is no doubt a presumption in favour of grandparent access over the approach of parental autonomy, which the courts currently support.

It's a very short bill, and the provisions are very pointed. Subsection 1(2.1) says that parents and others with custody of children are to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relationships between the children and their grandparents. That sounds nice, but I'll speak as a lawyer: Looking at that, what's the remedy for the grandparent, and what is the impact on the family relationship in a situation where the parents do not want

access for the grandparents to their child? That's what the author was talking about. Is that in the best interests of the child to go into a litigious situation, in terms of examining the relationship with the child? I have to speak frankly: I don't think it's in the best interests to have child access and custody be a litigious matter 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's not in the best interests of the child.

The other part of it is subsections 2(2.1) and (2.2), where, in this approach, the court is to look with respect to the best interests of the child. That is the law; that is the way it is. But I think the member from Niagara Falls is correct: We need hearings on this matter because we're going to hear some different sides. We need to hear from the legal experts and we need to hear some family law experts in terms of dealing with family relationships.

I commend the member for bringing forth this particular piece of legislation, but I also look at the government to say: Get on with it. Let's start looking at major changes, significant changes, to the Family Law Act and Children's Law Reform Act. I don't want to hear from the other side, coming back and saying, "Why didn't you do it?" We're here today to try to deal with something. The member from Niagara Falls—

Interjection.

Mr. Tascona: I don't want to hear from the member from North Bay, because she has nothing to say on this.

I want to say something: We're dealing with a particular piece of legislation that is a piecemeal reform in terms of a situation where it requires a major overhaul of the Family Law Act and the Children's Law Reform Act because the case law begs it and the relationships today in 2005 require it.

Those are the comments I have to make. I look forward to public hearings on this particular piece of legislation. Unfortunately, because it was brought by a private member, the chances of this going forth probably aren't very good, but if we can get the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the Attorney General to start looking at major reform in these areas, we might see something happen.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I'm very pleased to get up today to support the member for Niagara Falls', Kim Craiton's, Bill 8, a bill that emphasizes the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents and requires parents with custody of children to not place obstacles or get in the way of the potential relationship between a young person and their grandparents.

Why is this important? Well, the relationship or bond between a child and a grandparent can be invaluable in the development of that child. It's not irreplaceable—there are a number of young people who grow up without seeing their grandparents—but it can certainly be an invaluable contribution to the development of that person.

I know Mr. Craiton feels passionately about this, and he shared with us a number of stories that people have exchanged with him. It was very touching, hearing a lot

of those stories. But I thought, upon hearing Mr. Craiton's passion for this, that he must be a grandparent himself, having experienced that bond with a grandchild, although he looks far too young to be a grandfather, of course. I asked him—he's my seatmate—the other day, "Are you a grandparent already?" And he said no. But his comments led me to believe that he's a wannabe grandparent. I'm hoping he sends this Hansard to his daughter Colleen and his son Chris, because he told me that he really wants them to get on with it so that he can experience that great bond with grandchildren. I know his wife, Helen, probably feels the same.

You make sure you send that to your young people. I'm doing my bit to help you out.

1140

Mr. Craiton also shared with us a lot of empirical evidence of the importance, in terms of child development, of that relationship between a grandparent and grandchild. A lot of it leads to self-esteem. The empirical evidence suggests—in fact, probably proves—that having a grandparent actively involved in the life of a child really does boost a young person's self-esteem. When we look at some of the problems going on in our urban areas, and particularly here in the Toronto area over the last little while, if there were ways we could expand the impact of grandparents and that grandparent relationship with some of the young people who are experiencing problems, I can't help but think that perhaps we could have prevented some of the problems we're experiencing today with a very small portion of our young people, but a portion that's having a very significant impact in our communities. I can't help but think that that higher level of self-esteem that a grandparent brings—because it's unconditional love, quite often, that a grandparent brings to a child. It's that pressure-free love that I think really gives a young person that feeling of confidence to go on and do whatever it is they want to do with their lives.

I can tell you today that it's not only empirical evidence but personal experience of the relationships that I was privileged to have with my grandparents. I had a grandmother who had six kids that she had to bring up in pretty much abject poverty, both in the Ottawa and Toronto areas. I remember the relationship I had with her. I remember seeing her trying to read the paper day in and day out. She was Ukrainian and she would spend hours trying to read the paper. It led me to believe how important literacy is, because she would read that paper day in and day out, but she could barely get through it.

I remember my grandparents on my father's side. My grandmother was an immigrant from Ireland, and my grandfather—his father had come over from Scotland. I remember the things they taught me, the value of standing up for yourself, the value of being kind to others, the value—and I'll never forget this. There was a school group here from Wexford Public School that I spoke with earlier. I told them that when I was a kid, I was shy, and it wasn't until my grandfather told me—

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): You were shy?

Mr. Duguid: I was really shy; a very shy kid. I really was. My grandfather told me that when he was younger, he was shy too. My father told me he was shy when he was younger. My grandfather said, "If there was anything I could change about myself, it would be that I wouldn't be shy." I said, "Well, my grandfathers were shy. My father was shy. I can't follow in those footsteps. I've got to change," and so I drove myself to be much more outgoing. Lo and behold, here I am speaking to a bunch of people in the Legislature, which I think my grandfather probably would have been terrified to do. But it just goes to show that that relationship with your grandparents can change a child's life, can have a big impact on where they go in the future.

Mr. Craitor, I thank you for bringing this forward on behalf of all of us.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I rise to speak to the bill, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, put forward by Mr. Craitor.

The member was just speaking about not being a grandparent yet, but in fact I became a grandparent twice this past summer for the first time. I also want to go on and say that I have not seen my grandparents since I was six years old. It was because our family moved to a different country and the grandparents obviously didn't. So it's a very important thing to me, but I guess I'm the effects of not having grandparents as opposed to the effects of having grandparents.

Again, speaking to the issue of being shy, I have also been trying to avoid following in my father's footsteps. I have 14 brothers and sisters. I'm trying to avoid that, and I only have four children.

I want to say that I do support the bill. I think what the bill is trying to do is ask the courts to give effect to the principle that the child's interest is foremost, both in whom the custodial parent should be and the access for grandparents. I think it's very important. The key words are "in the best interests of the child." We have to guarantee that decisions made are in fact in the best interests of the child.

Again, it's not that I want to be negative to the bill, but I want to read a section of a letter I received from a parent who wants us to understand a different side of the situation. She starts out by saying that she and her husband are a loving, committed couple who have been married for seven years and have two children aged three and five. She also says that dealing with her husband's parents has been an ongoing battle throughout their courtship and marriage. Christmas of 2003 was the last time they saw his parents. She wrote, "The visit didn't go well from the beginning. My father-in-law was very disrespectful toward my husband. He was demeaning and rude. My daughter was three at the time and that was an impressionable age—old enough to see and hear the tension and the anger, old enough to see the way her grandparents treat her father and mother. My children never willingly kiss or hug or interact with their paternal grandparents. Everything is forced. When we left their house, my mother-in-law threatened to take away all of

her presents if she did not kiss her grandfather. This is what they do—threaten to get their way."

Well, without reading the whole letter, it came down to the daughter-in-law letting her husband's parents know that they wanted to be treated with respect. Instead of sitting down and talking to each other, her in-laws went to court and filed papers to gain access to the children; this started an eight-month court battle. The battle was a bitter one. The grandparents eventually dropped the case but continue to threaten to go back to court when they want to get their way.

In her letter, the mother states, "From what I have read about Bill 8, it seems like it is just for situations like a divorce or a death of a parent, but it still concerns me. It concerns me that one day my in-laws may have a chance to gain access to my children. They have told us more than once that they would take us back to court, and if this bill gets passed, I have no doubt that they will. The part that worries me the most is, 'A person who has custody of a child shall not unreasonably place obstacles to personal relations between the child and the child's grandparents.'"

The mother states that the grandparents and extended families do not have the right to be part of children's lives; it is a privilege. I have to agree with her point. In fact, in Oxford they offer a unique program that is aimed at helping guide grandparents in their role as new grandparents. The program, entitled the Joy of Grandparenting, is being offered by the Oxford County Board of Health to teach grandparents to be grandparents. The two-hour session explores a number of interesting issues. They say—and I have to admit being guilty of this myself—that grandparents often can't stop giving advice. It was also mentioned that it's hard to let go. We sometimes forget there is a lot of value in a support role and just loving your grandchildren unconditionally is a great opportunity.

Thank you very much for this opportunity, and I want to say that I don't know what I would do if the courts said that I would no longer have visiting rights to the two grandchildren I presently have.

Mr. Delaney: It's a real pleasure to stand in support of Bill 8, put forth by my seatmate and good friend the member for Niagara Falls, with whom I've been joined at the elbow since my election.

Today's grandparents are strong and healthy people. Today's grandparents look more like their parents did a generation or two ago than their grandparents of the post-war era. Our lifespans are longer. Today we look at the decade of our 60s and beyond with anticipation, and we don't look upon them as our declining years. That brings us to Bill 8, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act. Bill 8 is very simple. Bill 8 merely requires the courts not to dismiss an application by a willing grandparent to assume custody or to retain access to a child when doing so is in the best interests of the child.

Bill 8 deals with cases that many of us would rather not spend too much time thinking about: the breakup of a marriage, conflict within a family, the death or disability of one or both parents. Bill 8 deals with these often tragic

cases where the courts need to make a decision on who will assume custody of a child. Bill 8 asks, when a court needs to consider the best interests of a child or children, that willing grandparents not be denied custody of the children, nor be denied reasonable access to them.

Bill 8 asks courts to consider the interests of the grandparents who are willing and able to assume custody of their grandchildren should tragedy strike their children's family. Let's look at why that would be a good idea. Our government is in the process of ending mandatory retirement. We recognize that we have a shortage of people in their child-rearing years. If we can't find them on the job, then how do we expect to find them in family settings to be foster parents or guardians? While Ontario looks to immigration to fill our ranks in the trades and professions, it also encourages people in their prime career years to work, if they choose to. So let us extend that same philosophy to custody of children. These days, grandma and grandpa are as likely to be a working couple as are mom and dad. Moreover, when it comes to raising a child, grandma and grandpa have done the job of child-rearing; not only have they done it, but they have the maturity and perspective of experience and age to enable them to enjoy child-rearing in their mature years in a way they may not have been able to a generation earlier.

1150

As a personal example, a number of years ago, when I lived on Trondheim Crescent in Meadowvale in northern Mississauga, our street had a large number of young children, all about the same age. For a few years I went with the kids to Canada's Wonderland, taught them hide and seek, played ball hockey, went to birthday parties and generally served as a big brother to all of our street's kids. I found the experience to be unexpectedly wonderful. I got to see my own teenage years in a whole new way and I lived them a second time around when I played with the kids, who today are all young adults.

Let it be the same with grandparent access to children. Our grandparents have the willingness, the energy, the health and the capacity to share time with their grandchildren, and when necessary to substitute for the parents of the child, to assume custody and to raise the grandchildren in a caring and loving environment.

Bill 8 says to the courts that they may not dismiss the rights and willingness of grandchildren in child custody or access cases. If courts must be blind to religion, to ethnic origin and to gender in considering the well-being of a child, let courts be similarly blind in their consideration of the age of a grandparent who is willing and able to raise grandchildren as their own.

I think this is a good bill. I'm supporting it. I encourage all members to support it. I think this adds to our Ontario fabric the type of fairness we're bringing to the workplace and the type of attitude we expect in schools. I think this is a bill we're going to look back on and be proud of in years hence.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I'm pleased to speak in support of Bill 8, raised by my colleague the

MPP for Niagara Falls. We all know that children need stability, that children need feelings of self-worth, and that it's vital to help children form meaningful, long-term relationships. I'm going to use my short time here this morning to talk about a meaningful relationship that occurred in my life, and about grandparents who affected my life and those of my children. I wish to recognize the role my grandparents, Rose and Frank Gray, played not only in my upbringing but in that of one of my children.

Nineteen years ago I gave birth to a son who was special needs. I know grandparents always want to check that they have children with 10 fingers and 10 toes, but sometimes children come in different kinds of packages. I had grandparents who saw a child who was special needs at the time, but I had a grandmother who didn't believe he was special needs. She would never accept that and believed in him having untapped potential that no one else could see. She was a wonderful person who listened when I needed to talk, held her tongue when she probably should have stepped in and said something to me, and was a wonderful sounding board and a steadying influence in my life and my son's. They loved unconditionally, and I think that's the most special thing about grandparents. They listened when I needed to talk. I guess they were the best encouragement I could find in my life and in my son's life.

Without the strong support, children, youth, are vulnerable to other risks. We know that they can make wrong decisions without grandparents as a steadying influence. They are a valuable resource, an untapped resource, and I support maintaining the ties between children and their grandparents. I support Bill 8.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I would like to thank my colleagues for allowing me to share the time this morning. I would like to congratulate the member for Oxford on becoming a grandpa, because it is such an important time in his life and such a great relationship. I also want to congratulate the member for Niagara Falls for bringing this forward today. It is an important discussion to have, and I support him in this legislation and in ensuring that grandparents have a role in their grandchildren's lives.

I know that the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford didn't want to acknowledge that in eight years his government took no action, but I will acknowledge that they didn't. I also note that the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, speaking as a lawyer, had some concern about this legislation. I too am a lawyer. I noted that in the drafting of this legislation we did reference, on a number of occasions, "the best interests of the child," and of course that is fundamental to family law and to custody issues and to access issues. Again, the member for Niagara Falls has taken great care to ensure that the best interests of the child are foremost in this piece of legislation.

I want to take just a brief moment to speak about some great grandparent relationships that I had in my life. My grandfather, Cyril P. Smith, was a pharmacist in North Bay. He was the only grandparent I knew. My other three grandparents had passed away before I was born. He was

in his 80s when I was conscious of him. He was a vital, active senior who took great interest in his grandchildren. We had the privilege and fortune of growing up two blocks away so we would always head down to Papa's house with our report cards and were given treats because we did well. He provided a great deal of support and nurturing to me and my three brothers. We were the last generation of grandchildren for him, as my cousins were quite a bit older. But he never spared a moment of time or energy or interest in our lives. He was always there to hear our stories and to be supportive.

My mom has recently become a grandma and was very delighted. As Mr. Duguid pointed out, there was much pressure put to bear on becoming a grandparent, and now she has two granddaughters. She's an active grandma who will jump on a plane at the drop of a hat to look after those grand-girls, and is having a delightful time with them. I see that bond and the importance of that relationship, and actually can't even fathom putting a halt to that relationship, to the joy that the girls bring to Grandmama and to the extent that Grandmama has an impact and contributes to their lives. I think it really is an important familial relationship that we cannot underplay.

I want to congratulate the member for Niagara for bringing this forward, for recognizing the importance that grandparents play in so many lives. In my work in long-term care, I see homes where they're providing a play area for the children so that those grandchildren can visit their grandparents, and that's so important.

I want to commend the member for Niagara Falls. I support Bill 8, and I want to thank the other members for their great comments today.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Craitor, you have two minutes to reply.

Mr. Craitor: First, I want to thank all the members who have spoken on this bill: the members from Mississauga West, Scarborough Centre, Brampton Centre, Hamilton East, Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Durham and Nipissing. It's quite interesting listening to their remarks in support of the bill, but also to the stories they share about their grandparents and the influence that those grandparents had on their lives.

I often say to my friends back home that I'm pretty lucky to be a provincial member of Parliament. I think we all are. I take it seriously, like everyone else in this House. But I guess today is one of those days that you're pretty proud—even more so, I'm pretty proud of all of the grandparents who have gone out of their way to be here today. I'm proud of all of the organizations that have helped me along the way. I thank all of the people who shared their personal stories with me, probably stories that they may not share with other people but they realize it's an important bill. By sharing it with me they probably helped to motivate me even further than what I might have done to take this bill forward.

It is a modest bill, but when you hear the stories and the situations, it's a bill about people's lives; it's a bill about their grandchildren. Today, it is one step forward. I

heard some comments about, "It's a private member's bill," and, "What are the chances?" I never think that way. I'm a very positive person. I've supported some of my colleagues in opposition on some of their bills because I think they're great bills, and I'm prepared to go forward as far as I can to make them a success. I think that's what will happen with this bill.

I thank everyone for their comments and look forward to the passing of this bill, and will go forward with it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you to all members. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT), 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION (PARTICIPATION COMMUNAUTAIRE)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall deal first with ballot item number 9.

Mr. Fonseca has moved second reading of Bill 19.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members after we've dealt with the next item. We will now deal with ballot item number 10.

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT DE L'ENFANCE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Craitor has moved second reading of Bill 8.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will vote on this one as well. Call in the members. I remind you, it's a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Members take their seats, please. Mr. Kormos, you have to take your seat. Is Mr. Kormos in the House? Then Mr. Kormos must take his seat.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: It's my understanding that the member for Niagara Centre is in the House. I'm warning the member for Niagara Centre that I will name him if he does not take his seat.

I'm naming the member for Niagara Centre.

Mr. Kormos was escorted from the chamber.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT
(COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT), 2005

LOI DE 2005
MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉDUCATION
(PARTICIPATION COMMUNAUTAIRE)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Fonseca has moved second reading of Bill 19. All those in favour will please stand.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Gerretsen, John	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Arthurs, Wayne	Hardeman, Ernie	Prue, Michael
Baird, John R.	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bisson, Gilles	Jeffrey, Linda	Racco, Mario G.
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Scott, Laurie
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Tascona, Joseph N.
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Yakabuski, John
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol	
Fonseca, Peter	Mossop, Jennifer F.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 34; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, this bill is—

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Mr Speaker, I ask that the bill be sent to the standing committee on social policy.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Fonseca has asked unanimous consent that the bill be sent to the standing committee on social policy. Agreed? No.

All those in favour will please stand. The majority is in favour. It will be sent to the standing committee on social policy.

The doors will now be opened for 30 seconds before the next vote.

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM
AMENDMENT ACT, 2005

LOI DE 2005 MODIFIANT LA LOI
PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT
DE L'ENFANCE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Craitor has moved second reading of Bill 8. All those in favour will please stand.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Gerretsen, John	Mitchell, Carol
Arthurs, Wayne	Hardeman, Ernie	Mossop, Jennifer F.
Baird, John R.	Horwath, Andrea	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bisson, Gilles	Hoy, Pat	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Racco, Mario G.
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Craitor, Kim	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Duguid, Brad	Mauro, Bill	Tascona, Joseph N.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Fonseca, Peter	McNeely, Phil	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 36; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to standing order—

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to refer the bill to the standing committee on social policy.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Craitor has asked unanimous consent that the bill be sent to the standing committee on social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, this House will adjourn until 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1214 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Each year, our farmers in Ontario rely on 14,000 migrant workers—excellent workers from countries like Jamaica and Mexico—as well as local seasonal help to plant and harvest crops. This requires lodging—bunkhouses—to provide a home away from home. Now the McGuinty government has ruled that bunkhouses should be taxed at the same rate as residential properties, and MPAC has just confirmed this.

For years, farm-worker bunkhouses have been taxed like other farm buildings. I lived in one 30 years ago when I primed tobacco. Taxes, rightfully so, have been based on the assessed value of the bunkhouse multiplied by one quarter of the residential rate. Typically, in my riding that's \$100 a year in taxes. With this week's ruling it quadruples to \$400.

Assessment complaints to date, as we all know, have launched an investigation of MPAC by Ontario's Ombudsman.

Only a government that doesn't understand or care about the plight of our fruit and vegetable or tobacco farmers and our farm economies would permit this to happen. Assessment tax hikes are the last straw for farmers already struggling with weather, low commodity prices, loss of markets and skyrocketing energy and other input costs. First maple syrup, then trailer parks, then horse farms, now—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

HIGHWAY 101

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Members may know that we've had a couple of tragic accidents on Highway 101 through the city of Timmons over the last month or so. We've now had a couple of fatalities, where people were involved in accidents from transport trucks coming through the community, specifically from the lumber industry.

You will know, Minister of Transportation, that earlier this week articles appeared in a local paper calling on the

provincial government and the municipality to look at finally fixing what is called a perimeter road passage around the city of Timmins. You would also know that the perimeter road was started some time ago. A second river crossing on the Mattagami River was part of that initiative. There is also the initiative that connected Shirley Street with Airport Road, which is part of the second phase of the project. The city, at one point, is going to be coming before this Minister of Transportation asking for the rest of the money necessary to finish the perimeter road from one end of Highway 101 to the other side of South Porcupine.

I want to lend my support to that, because I think in the end we need to take a look at how to reduce truck traffic on Highway 101 cutting through the city of Timmins, so that we can make it safer for both the motoring public and those who walk along Algonquin Boulevard. I expect to see something from the city of Timmins soon.

CHINESE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I wish to report on my recent trip to China. I was invited by the Chinese government. While in China, I was pleased to hear of the Chinese business community's satisfaction with the economic investment climate in Ontario. They were pleased to hear that the McGuinty government is committed to publicly funded services such as health care and education. They also praised the billions of additional dollars the McGuinty government has added to these publicly funded services since assuming office, and how this investment has ensured continued strength and growth in Ontario's economic performance.

The members of the Chinese business community were especially impressed by the McGuinty government's ability to manage the province's finances by having a deficit even lower than was originally forecast.

I came away from China with an understanding that the Chinese business community places great importance on investment in people. They told me that the government of Ontario is on the right track by focusing on people, because people are the key to attracting investment. I believe we are on the right path to a prosperous future because we recognize people as the province's most valuable resource.

I invite all the honourable members of this House to visit China whenever they decide to go outside of Ontario. Not only is it a beautiful nation to visit but it's also where the future of economic prosperity in the world is going to be.

LAYOFFS

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): The recent announcement of the General Motors job losses in Oshawa will have an impact on the economy of the local community. It will affect not only those who will lose their jobs but also those who are involved in the related parts and service industries.

These cuts will affect an area much wider than Oshawa and Durham regions. General Motors is the largest employer of the people in my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock. Job losses, whether through layoffs or attrition, will have an impact throughout my riding and other surrounding areas. The Premier has called this loss of jobs a “contraction,” but locally the impact is more than just numbers; it is going to affect people's lives. These job losses will have an impact on local businesses that have depended on General Motors as a customer. It will also impact on those businesses that have depended on General Motors employees as their customers.

Many businesses in my riding have been having a hard time coping with fewer customers because of the agricultural crisis that has hit our farming families. Farmers have not had money to spend in local stores. They've barely had money to make ends meet in a lot of cases. Now, with the announced closures by General Motors, these businesses will also lose many of these people as customers. Combine that with increased costs like electricity and it puts many of these businesses in danger of failing.

The McGuinty Liberals on the other side of this House need to understand that everything is interconnected and those economic contractions are more than just numbers. Every job loss is more than a number. Job losses affect people, their families and their communities.

CHRISTOPHER BART

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): On November 16, I had the pleasure of attending the 2005 Outstanding Business Achievement Awards hosted by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. As the past president of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, I was pleased to join the Hamilton team and current president, Brian Wilson, to attend the awards.

I'd like to take this time to recognize one of the proud winners of the evening, an esteemed academic and the husband of Judy Rosen, one of my colleagues, Dr. Christopher Bart of McMaster University, who took home the corporate governance award for his work in establishing an innovative new program at McMaster's Directors College.

The college offers a comprehensive professional development certification program for corporate directors. Dr. Bart is the founder, principal and lead professor of Canada's first and only university-accredited program created specifically for the development and training of corporate directors. His goal is to increase awareness of the need for the certification and professionalization of corporate directors. Dr. Bart created this institution after dedicating his entire career to the study of corporate governance. His innovative ideas, combined with his dedication and hard work, led to his success.

I'd like to take this time to congratulate Dr. Bart, McMaster University and the DeGroot School of Business on the receipt of this well-deserved award.

MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): The Minister of Education continues his campaign of political spin over substance. On November 1 and 2, the minister was asked to provide specific information to the standing committee on estimates relating to the number of suspensions, expulsions and exclusions which took place under the authority of the Education Act and the Safe Schools Act. He was asked those questions because he had repeatedly refused to acknowledge to parents who appealed to his office that indeed a serious problem exists in some schools where special-needs students are being expelled from school. They and their parents are left with no resources or supports and they have nowhere to turn for help. Essentially, the education system is failing these children and their families.

Even under direct questioning on this issue during committee hearings, the minister either could not or would not acknowledge that a problem exists. That was the reason for my specific questions and the request to have answers tabled with the committee. By refusing to provide specific information directly to the standing committee on estimates as requested and choosing instead to spin the information out through a press conference yesterday, this minister has not only demonstrated a lack of respect for members of that committee, but I submit that in every practical sense he is in contempt of Parliament.

I call on the minister to stop this practice of political spinning and to take his responsibility seriously. Be willing to get informed and have the courage to demand accountability in your ministry and in school boards across this province.

1340

SAULT AREA HOSPITAL

Mr. David Oraziatti (Sault Ste. Marie): I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation on behalf of the citizens of Sault Ste. Marie to Premier McGuinty and Ministers Smitherman and Caplan for their support of a new state-of-the-art hospital in Sault Ste. Marie. After years of previous governments' foot-dragging on the Sault Area Hospital project, we are finally moving forward through our \$30-billion ReNew Ontario infrastructure program.

On August 18, 2005, Premier McGuinty was in Sault Ste. Marie, on the site of the approved hospital, to announce that our government would provide 70% of the construction costs for the new facility, including a much-needed radiation therapy bunker. The Sault Area Hospital will contain 289 beds, the same number as the two current hospitals combined, with improved space for emergency, surgery and mental health services. The total square footage for the department space is 34% more than both existing hospitals combined. This is great news for the residents of Sault Ste. Marie and area, and I know our local communities are excited about this project.

While the NDP and a few special interest groups spread fear and mislead Ontarians about the AFP process, claiming hospitals will be privately owned, we know this is not true. Capital projects completed on our watch will be publicly owned, publicly controlled and publicly accountable. They will not be Conservative P3s, which allowed for private ownership.

The record is clear. The NDP spent their time cutting the number of doctors in Ontario and ignoring decaying infrastructure, while the Conservatives attempted to privatize the few hospitals they built. We are getting on with the real work at hand with a massive reinvestment in our hospitals, schools and transportation—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

TELEPERFORMANCE CANADA

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): The member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey has made much of the numerous job losses experienced by the city of Cornwall in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh. In light of his comments and the negative publicity they created, it gives me great pleasure to report that on October 25, Teleperformance Canada announced it would be opening a brand new facility in Cornwall. This centre will bring 650 new jobs to the city, jobs that are greatly appreciated by the community.

Why did this company choose to locate its new centre in Cornwall? Allow me to answer in the words of Erifili Morfidis, president and CEO of Teleperformance Canada: “Locating in Cornwall gives us access to a bilingual workforce with a strong reputation for quality work.” That’s right: The people of my riding deliver, and their reputation speaks to this. There is no better form of advertising than word-of-mouth, and this new centre is proof that the word is getting out.

Whatever a business might be looking for, Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh has it to offer in spades. We are perfectly located along the 401, a short drive from Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto, and Cornwall has a bridge connecting us directly to the United States. The populace is, to a great extent, bilingual, and as its reputation states, it consists of some of the hardest-working, loyal people to be found in Ontario.

I take great pride in the dedication and ingenuity of the people of Cornwall and other communities in my riding, such as Chesterville and Long Sault, where job losses have had the greatest impact. I would encourage any company looking to establish a new facility to join Teleperformance Canada in learning just how justifiably proud we are.

MISS G PROJECT

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise to recognize individuals visiting the Legislature here today with the Miss G Project. The Miss G Project began with a group of four University of Western Ontario students

who were concerned about the lack of equity in education and gender representation in the secondary school curriculum. These students organized a group of motivated citizens to work together to challenge sexism through education and encourage active citizenship.

The project name comes from an 1873 text by Harvard Medical School Professor Edward H. Clarke. Professor Clarke wrote about the life of Miss G, one of his top students. At the time, Miss G was part of a small group who were beginning to push the accepted boundaries and roles women had in society. Unfortunately, Miss G died, and her professor concluded she died because she didn't have a "good reproductive system" while spending her "intellectual labour."

The main goal of the project is to positively influence secondary school curriculum and to add women's studies courses to the Ontario curriculum. This group believes equity in education is a policy commitment of the Ontario secondary school curriculum, but without recognizing gender and its implications, the curriculum fails to meet this commitment. The Minister of Education takes this student project very seriously and believes that the workshops that have been held are valuable and informative for all students.

I welcome the Miss G Project group to the Legislature today and wish to encourage them in challenging and improving education in Ontario.

VISITORS

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Would you please help me welcome in our gallery today an exchange student with the Rotary Club of Gananoque, Laureano Camano, from Madrid, Spain, and his friend Amy Curtis. They're right in the gallery; if they could stand up.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Welcome. That is not a point of order.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DE LA JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

M. Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke-Nord): Je demande la permission de déposer un rapport du Comité permanent de la justice et je propose son adoption.

I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 211, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code and certain other Acts to end mandatory retirement /
Projet de loi 211, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la

personne et d'autres lois pour éliminer la retraite obligatoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would indulge your office, if you would allow the members of this House to wear the white ribbon. It marks the start of the White Ribbon Campaign, which honours the men and boys who are fighting violence against women.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Ms. Pupatello has asked for unanimous consent to wear the white ribbon. Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LOCAL HEALTH SYSTEM INTEGRATION ACT, 2005 LOI DE 2005 SUR L'INTÉGRATION DU SYSTÈME DE SANTÉ LOCAL

Mr. Smitherman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to provide for the integration of the local system for the delivery of health services /
Projet de loi 36, Loi prévoyant l'intégration du système local de prestation des services de santé.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The minister may have a brief statement.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): In ministerial statements, thank you.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent for one representative from each of the three parties to speak for up to five minutes in recognition of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has asked for unanimous consent for representatives of each of the three parties for up to five minutes in recognition of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. Agreed.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I'd like to ask the members of this House to join me in observing the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Here in Ontario and around the world, November 25 is an opportunity to urge people

to take action to stop violence against women. It's also the start of an important two-week period of commemorations and campaigns. The annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, a campaign that reminds us that violence against women is a violation of human rights, runs from November 25 to December 6. Tomorrow also marks the start of the White Ribbon Campaign, when men and boys wear a white ribbon, which many of us in this House are now wearing, to symbolize their dedication to ending violence against women. These campaigns are important because they remind us of our collective responsibility to prevent violence against women. They remind us that building strong, safe communities makes sure that everyone can live free of violence. The next two weeks are an important opportunity to mobilize all members of the community to help those most at risk.

1350

As minister responsible for women's issues, I've had the privilege to meet women and children who have overcome tremendous odds and become leaders in their communities. I want Ontarians to hear these stories. I want Ontarians to hear the story of a remarkable woman I met just a couple of weeks ago, whose husband beat her for 11 years until she finally overcame her fear and went to a shelter for help. At this shelter, which is now undergoing expansion, she talked about her story, with her young boy, and how her life is going today. A very special thank you to her for being so brave to tell such a tragic story—and having such a wonderful outcome really is the best news of all.

I'm proud to say my government has a plan to help vulnerable women like her, who may not yet have overcome that fear. Less than a year ago, the Premier and I announced our government's domestic violence action plan. That plan involves action by all sectors that come in contact with victims of domestic violence: shelters and other community supports, police officers and the courts, educators and health care professionals.

When I tell the story of a young girl who told her teacher that she was sleeping in class as a result of watching TV all night—she was too ashamed to tell the truth; she had spent the whole night awake listening to her mom being abused by her dad—I'm proud to say that we have a plan for that young girl. As part of the domestic violence action plan, my colleague Madeleine Meilleur and I recently announced a new initiative to provide principals, teachers and counsellors at English- and French-language elementary schools with training that will help them recognize the signs of domestic violence in students and provide the appropriate supports and referrals. We are very pleased to see that that is moving forward quickly. Other important action plan initiatives are constantly being announced as we are rolling out this action plan.

In a few days, I'll be hosting the first-ever Ontario-government-led conference on domestic violence. Experts and front-line workers from a broad spectrum of sectors will share information and strategies. We'll work

toward creating solutions that will allow us to reduce violence against women. The best part of this conference is that it gives the floor to people who come from areas of true excellence in this field, whether that be in community supports, the justice sector or public education. Registration for this conference has far exceeded our expectations. The conference will be Webcast, therefore, so that many more people can participate. Please give me a moment and let me say that Web site address for people to participate: www.findingcommonground.ca.

Together, we are making progress toward ending violence against women. All of us understand how much more work needs to be done in this area, and we are getting a move on that. As we pause to reflect on this International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, I know all members of the House will join me in a renewed and vigorous resolve to put an end to the violence.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I'm very pleased to rise today on behalf of our leader, John Tory, and our party to recognize tomorrow, November 25, as the international day to eliminate violence against women.

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1999, and was motivated by the assassination of the three Mirabal sisters on that same date in 1961. They were political activists in the Dominican Republic. The day marks the beginning of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. Lasting until International Human Rights Day on December 10, 16 Days of Activism also encompasses December 1, which is World AIDS Day, and December 6, which marks the anniversary of the Montreal massacre. The 16 Days of Activism have been used as an organizing strategy by organizations and individuals around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

We know that violence against women crosses all geographic, cultural and socio-economic boundaries. The physical, emotional and psychological toll on women who are victims of assault is enormous. We need to remember that violence affects not just the women, but also their children, their family and their friends.

Our leader and our party support the initiatives that help prevent and deal with violence against women. Indeed, our leader, more than 10 years ago, with Jack Layton handed out the white ribbons in Union Station and other places. It was our party that was pleased to introduce and pass the Domestic Violence Protection Act in late 2000. We also increased shelter funding, and we allocated money to create a crisis line for assaulted women, which provided access to 24-hour, 7-day-a-week crisis services for abused women across the province. We also provided \$5 million for an early intervention program for child witnesses of domestic violence, which helped children recover from the effects of witnessing violence in their families.

We support the action being taken by the government on domestic violence. However, we would also encour-

age the government to keep their commitment on affordable housing for families, because if we don't, this particularly hurts the low-income families that are headed by women.

I'm pleased to hear the government will do more to help the victims of violence. However, this is a non-partisan issue and we all need to continue to work together and do what we can to ensure that women are more economically independent, and that they have the supports in place so that they and their children can and are able to leave abusive situations.

It is the responsibility of all of us in this House and all Ontarians to take the steps necessary to bring an end to violence against women and all forms of gender-based violence.

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): I'm happy to be standing on behalf of Howard Hampton and the Ontario New Democratic Party to speak about November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the 16 days to follow. I'm looking forward to hearing more announcements from the government on programs and supports for all of those agencies that are operating out there on a shoestring, that are working hard to help women and their children escape from violence.

Today is, of course, likely the last time I'll be speaking in this Legislature about this yearly campaign to end violence against women. I feel that government, and I've seen that government, has a paramount role to play in this struggle. It has been a major part of my work as an MPP over the past 15 years. It's been an honour to work with all parties, all members over those years, through different governments, on so many of these issues.

When I was part of government, we made some strides on this front, like providing a safe place for women to go, which is critical in breaking the cycle of violence. We stabilized, for the first time, funding for shelters, and we continued to build affordable housing despite the terrible recession that was happening, because we recognized that affordable housing was a key ingredient in terms of women leaving a violent situation.

When the Conservatives were in government, I was proud to have worked with Frances Lankin, the then MPP for Beaches–East York, and the government, and of course the community which worked hard on this for years, to expand the assault helpline province-wide.

The minister talked about some of the key things within the Liberal domestic violence action plan. I want to take a few minutes, once again, to talk about some of the key things that aren't in the plan and that I know the minister is aware of. I know that her commitment is real and that she will want to ensure that before the end of their mandate these things are done, because they're absolutely essential.

1400

One of them—and I've spoken many times on this—is restoring funding for second-stage housing. I don't need to go into a lot of detail about why that is so important. We know that after the Conservative government fell—

funding had been stopped for second-stage housing, and the Liberals said they would bring it back. That hasn't been done. A new program, which we support, was brought in. Some of the money is going into some of the existing second-stage housing, but some is also going into this other transitional program, so existing second-stage housing, who thought they were going to get full funding restored, didn't get it, and they are having a terrible time. I know the members are aware of that, and hopefully we will see some action on restoring that funding.

Another thing I want to mention briefly: I'm sure we'll all agree that we have to provide new, stable, long-term support to emergency shelters so they can expand their staffing, programs and operations. We hear time and time again that shelters have to turn women and their children away because they are filled beyond capacity. This has been a reality for a number of years. We desperately need the funding to expand these shelters. Last year, the Globe and Mail reported how a shelter that I'm very close to in my riding, Nellie's, was forced to refuse more than 700 requests. That is another thing that I believe is absolutely essential, which we have to see included in this plan.

The third thing I want to mention briefly is an issue that has been a difficult one in this House, because it's about the death of Lori Dupont, the nurse who was recently murdered at her workplace in Windsor. I want to reiterate once again how important it is to bring sexual harassment and other kinds of harassment under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. It's absolutely critical that that be done so we don't have another murder like this happening in the workplace.

Finally, I do want to say that I'm proud to be wearing the white ribbon today. This is the white ribbon organization established by Jack Layton many years ago. He's the MP in my riding of Toronto–Danforth. I think it is one of the most important things that Mr. Layton established in this province. I'm very pleased that we're standing here today to acknowledge the work by boys and men as well on this very important issue.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It is with great pride that I rise today in this chamber to speak to a bill which truly qualifies as historic, and I'm honoured to do so in the presence of not just members of our Legislature but our inaugural board chairs and CEOs of local health integration networks.

I'm referring to the Local Health System Integration Act, which I tabled just a few moments ago. This bill represents the next step—and the most important step—

in our government's efforts to transform this province's health care system, to transform it into something more effective, more transparent and more accountable, to build a true health care system.

When our party took office just over two years ago, health care in Ontario faced some serious difficulties. There was a lack of planning and organization. Services were delivered in an uncoordinated way. There was too little communication between hospitals, long-term-care homes, mental health agencies and other providers. They didn't share information or best practices. They didn't always look for ways to work together.

I often wondered if our so-called health care system really was a system at all. Clearly, delivering services in this way leads to gaps in service, and too often, it makes it too difficult for patients to figure out who does what. Equally troubling, important decisions were made behind closed doors here at Queen's Park, usually with very little input from those most affected by the decisions, namely, patients.

I'm proud to say that this government took a good, hard look at the situation, and we developed a plan to fix it. In order to undertake a job this big, we set some clear priorities: reducing wait times, improving access to nurses and doctors and making Ontarians healthier. I'm proud to say that over the past two years, we have taken some bold steps to reform the system and bring us closer to these three goals.

Earlier this year, we introduced the toughest, most comprehensive anti-tobacco package in North America, including aggressive smoke-free legislation which takes effect next spring.

We're working hard on Operation Health Protection, a plan to revitalize our public health system to ensure that we're able to deal with things like disease outbreaks. We've strengthened the role of the chief medical officer of health and revitalized the public health system.

We're improving access to doctors and nurses with the creation of family health teams and investments to increase the number of doctors and nurses in this province. We're increasing medical school enrolment by 15% over the next four years. We're also increasing the number of family residency positions by 70%, and we're training more international medical graduates than ever before.

We're also working to increase the number of nurses in the province and to make their jobs more satisfying and safe. We've already created 3,062 new, full-time nursing jobs, and the percentage of full-time nursing jobs has increased from 51.7% a year ago to 59% today, according to the College of Nurses.

We're taking action to fix wait times, and we're creating a system to measure and report to patients about wait times, including a Web site available to all Ontarians with the most up-to-date information on wait times, broken down by procedure, hospital and local health integration networks.

The people of Ontario also deserve independent proof that they're getting a system that delivers the best possible quality of care, and we're delivering this through

the Ontario Health Quality Council. But there is more to be done, some of it decades overdue.

The legislation I have introduced today represents one of the most important pieces of the solution. If passed, this bill will be the most significant, far-reaching and enduring reform of all. If passed, it will give real power to communities and people, creating a system which is genuinely transparent.

The most significant changes have to do with the powers we are granting to local health integration networks. The powers we are proposing to devolve to Ontario's 14 LHINs amount to nothing less than a \$20-billion transfer of decision-making power out of Queen's Park and into the hands of local communities.

There's no argument about the fact that change is needed. That's especially true for a \$33-billion operation like our health care system. The real question is whether, where and how these decisions should be made. Our answer to that question rests on a simple premise: In an environment where we all agree there will be fewer resources than we might prefer, it's just common sense that we ask people from local communities, closer to the action, to help to determine which local priorities must be supported first. They should be made in the communities affected, not hundreds or even thousands of miles away here at Queen's Park. These decisions should be made by working with the people most affected, namely, patients.

This bill, if passed, will give LHINs the power to do just that, to include the people of Ontario in this conversation. LHINs will have the power to integrate, plan and fund their local health systems. They will also have a responsibility to monitor the performance of their local health system and its health services and to engage their communities to identify health priorities or problems.

Local health integration networks will also have a duty, I dare say an obligation, to consult with communities about the decisions that are before them. This legislation makes it very clear that decisions must be made on the basis of public interest and in the full view of the public.

Specifically, LHINs will have responsibility for hospitals, community care access centres, mental health and addiction agencies, long-term-care homes, community health centres and community support service organizations. The province will initially retain responsibility for ambulance services, laboratories, provincial drug programs, independent health facilities and public health.

Obviously one of the things LHINs will try to do is identify opportunities for greater efficiency, say by consolidating some back office functions and reducing duplication. Are there savings to be realized? Of course there are. But the savings realized by local health integration networks will be reinvested where they are needed most: in patient care. These decisions will be made on the advice of those closest to the action.

This is not an exercise in cutting costs; this is an exercise in empowerment. It's not an effort to introduce sweeping restructuring; it's an effort to do the exact op-

posite, to provide a degree of stability, of local accountability.

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This bill is about more than just LHINs. As its name suggests, it's about system integration, and another part of this integration is community care access centres. Community care access centres are a crucial part of our health care system, but there is room for improvement. At present, clients in some parts of Ontario are receiving services that are not available to others. That's not equitable. Under our proposed changes, there will be no disruption in the crucial relationship between case managers and clients, and all existing CCAC storefronts and offices—all 209 of them—would remain in place.

But in order to provide more efficient, more effective service, this bill would enable us to reduce the number of CCACs from 42 to 14, in order to align with LHIN boundaries. CCACs are aware of this proposed realignment. In fact, many of them advised us to do it, because this alignment makes sense. It will create a system positioned to provide improved and equitable access for all CCAC clients and contribute to improved efficiencies.

We're also introducing changes to allow CCACs to select their own members and executive directors. By taking this step, we will be returning CCACs to the communities that they serve, reversing a move by the previous administration to steal CCACs away from their communities.

Finally, this bill will allow us to broaden the mandate of CCACs, permitting them to serve in an expanded role as system navigators for the first point of contact for a broader array of services. CCACs are an important and effective part of our health care delivery system. We want to make them stronger still.

Mr. Speaker, as you and other members of this chamber will have noticed, there is a consistent theme to these changes, and it is this: The best way to make decisions about change is as close to the ground as possible. Any business person or management expert will tell you that change is essential in order to survive. They'll also tell you that you can't run a \$33-billion operation from head office. The reforms contained in this bill will, for the first time, enable communities to make the necessary changes and achieve the necessary integration.

I've always believed that one of the fundamental tests of any public institution is equity. The legislation I am introducing today represents a profound step in this direction, as we return one of the public's most precious assets to them. I'm extremely proud of these reforms. I'm absolutely certain that it's the right thing to do. The big winners will, of course, be the people we serve—the people of Ontario.

GROWTH PLANNING

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I rise today to inform all honourable members that my ministry is releasing the government's proposed growth

plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe today. This marks the first time in a generation that the province has re-engaged in long-term planning. As members may be aware, the greater Golden Horseshoe contributes more than two thirds of our province's gross domestic product and almost one third of the gross domestic product of Canada.

We recognize that the greater Golden Horseshoe needs a growth plan, a plan that looks beyond the boundaries of any one municipality and covers the entire region, while still giving individual municipalities the flexibility they need to meet their own identified priorities.

You will recall that in June we passed the Places to Grow Act, groundbreaking legislation that enables the province to designate growth plan areas and develop growth plans. The greater Golden Horseshoe is the first designated area under the act.

We are beginning the growth planning process right there in the greater Golden Horseshoe because of the tremendous growth pressures that are expected to occur over the next quarter of a century. By 2031, some 3.7 million more people are expected to settle here in the province of Ontario, and the vast majority of these people will choose to live in the greater Golden Horseshoe. This population increase is roughly equivalent to the combined populations of Vancouver, Calgary and Winnipeg. And make no mistake: This growth is very much desired, it is very much needed to strengthen and diversify our society, to help grow our economy and to enable us to sustain both our quality of life and our cherished social programs.

Much of our population growth in the greater Golden Horseshoe will be from immigration. This growth will ensure that we have a range of skilled workers necessary to continue to attract new investment and provide new opportunities for our communities. Although growth is important to the provincial economy, we need to be strategic about it, and that's what the proposed growth plan is all about—ensuring we have places to grow business, places to grow food, places to grow trees and, most importantly, places to grow families. It's about informed, strategic decision-making.

Our government has a proposed growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe to ensure that this region continues to attract new business and to support an exceptional quality of life for residents, now and in the future. The proposed growth plan is a coordinated strategy that would create more livable communities, where people are close to shops, parks and jobs; revitalize downtown neighbourhoods; provide greater choice in housing types; curb urban sprawl and preserve valuable green spaces and agricultural lands; reduce traffic gridlock by improving access to a range of transportation choices; and get better use of existing public infrastructure investments in schools, hospitals, water and sewage systems.

The proposed growth plan is designed to ensure that better planning goes hand in hand with strategic investment. It supports the development of more compact and

complete communities, with the right mix of housing, a good range of jobs, convenient transit and easy access to stores and services to meet the daily needs of residents. The plan also complements the Golden Horseshoe greenbelt that protects the natural and agricultural lands so vital to this area.

The proposed growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe supports greater intensification in our urban areas, but this does not mean, as some have suggested, that the plan favours high-rise development over other housing types. Indeed, intensification can take many forms, including modest increases in building heights along major streets, denser industrial parks and employment areas, and a greater variety of housing options, such as stacked townhouses and medium-rise apartments.

Members should also be aware that my ministry's research indicates that the greater Golden Horseshoe currently has a sufficient land supply available to accommodate the future growth we are expecting. As the population of the greater Golden Horseshoe continues to grow, people will continue to have access to a wide range of housing options and, importantly, at competitive prices. My ministry will continue to monitor the land supply issue in the future and to consult with our individual municipal partners on the need for additional urban lands as they may be needed to accommodate future growth.

For many years, municipal leaders and indeed other stakeholders have been calling for provincial leadership and planning, and our government is finally doing something about it. We are committed to providing strong, effective leadership on planning issues, the kind of leadership that ensures that our future development occurs in a more compact and transit-friendly way, creating more vibrant communities, providing better protection for our environment and promoting healthier lifestyles for our residents.

By developing a growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe, we are taking a significant step to ensure the strength of the province; indeed, a significant step to ensure the strength of our nation.

As members will recall, my ministry released a draft growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe last February for comment and input from key stakeholders and from residents in the province. That document received strong support, and our general direction has not changed. However, based on the feedback we received, the proposed growth plan is more focused and more strategic. We have also clarified some policies to ensure the successful implementation of the final plan.

I am pleased to say that there is a growing consensus around not only the need to plan effectively for growth, but also around the specific provisions in our proposed growth plan. In releasing the proposed growth plan today, indeed we are seeking even more input and feedback from the public and from stakeholders as a final step before releasing the final growth plan early next year.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal is placing public notices in selected newspapers starting today

in the greater Golden Horseshoe and a notice on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry to inform the public how they can obtain a copy of the document and, importantly, how they can provide their valuable insight and input. The proposed growth plan is also being posted on the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal Web site.

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Our government is working to ensure that growth planning and development within the greater Golden Horseshoe complements the very significant investments we are making in public infrastructure. Through ReNew Ontario, our government's five-year infrastructure investment plan, we earmarked some \$7.5 billion in infrastructure investments to make improvements right here in the greater Golden Horseshoe. Our efforts to plan proactively for the future growth that we know is coming in this part of the province will ensure that vital facilities and services are in place when and where they are needed.

The proposed growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe represents a key step toward our objectives and planning for a successful future. In short, a growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe will ensure that residents of this area and throughout the province of Ontario continue to enjoy economic prosperity, a high standard of living and an exceptional quality of life.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response?

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I am pleased to respond to the announcement made regarding the LHINs legislation today. Despite the rhetoric we hear coming from the minister, the reality is that LHINs are focused on a system and organizations creating 14 new bureaucracies and have little to do with taking a look at and improving the experience of patients within our system.

Contrary to what the minister said about returning health to local communities and local decision-making, what we have is the creation of 14 new bureaucracies. These bureaucracies, these LHINs, have a minister-approved CEO and boards that are political appointments. So what we are actually doing is politicizing the system of health in the province of Ontario. In fact, this announcement steals local autonomy away from the people in the local communities. I would ask, where is the community voice? There should be an obligation on the part of the LHINs to consult with the public. There should be a process, and there is not. This simply talks about community engagement. There is absolutely no process. All we have are political appointees making decisions on behalf of huge communities.

There should also be an appeal process when a community disagrees with a LHIN decision, and that is not there. These LHINs are being given tremendous power. They are being given the opportunity to make decisions about amalgamating hospital services and programs, even

eliminating one hospital or eliminating community services, and there is no opportunity if a community disagrees.

For example, let's take Cambridge hospital. Maybe the reason the money is not flowing to Cambridge is because there is a secret plan in the minister's office to do away with Cambridge hospital and shift the services to one of the other Kitchener or Hamilton offices.

There is no appeal process whatsoever, but there is tremendous power being given to these LHINs. Regrettably, health is a complex system, and the health system is all about people. Today's announcement is not about people. We need to make sure that we better respond to the needs of the patients within our health system. The OMA has talked about the lack of family doctors. The nurses have told us about the need for more nurses. Emergency doctors have told us about the impact of this government's demand that hospitals balance their budgets. In fact, there are not enough nurses, not enough beds. So I would say that this announcement today totally eliminates any accountability to the local community. It eliminates local autonomy. There is no process for input whatsoever. I would encourage you, as you take a look at this legislation, to put in place a mechanism. This gives a lot of power to very, very few people.

The other thing I would say is that there's a lot of concern about the size of the LHINs. For example, someone living in Owen Sound is in the same LHIN as someone living in St. Thomas or in London. Again, people are concerned about their lack of ability to have any real input to decisions being made by that particular LHIN, and that is across the whole province.

The other thing we need to take into consideration is that a huge amount of money is being spent on creating 14 new bureaucracies. There are going to be huge legal costs, as most of the legislation within the Ministry of Health and labour legislation is going to have to be amended. There is going to be a need for unions to come together—union harmonization—severance costs and other costs. This ministry has not presented us with any cost estimates at this time, money that, by the way, could be better spent on patient care.

There's also no timeline as far as implementation, and that's a fault of this government time and time again. They make wonderful announcements, but, as in the case of the family health teams, where we know there's only one fully operational and 67 announced, we have no idea as to when these LHINs are going to be implemented, what the timeline is, what this is going to cost taxpayers in the province of Ontario.

When it comes to CCACs, the minister talks about returning power to the community. I can tell you, the minister has no plan to return any power to the community, because they are going to appoint the next directors, again, themselves: cabinet appointments. I would say to you that much of what is contained herein is all about systems, not—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Further response?

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I want to respond to the statement by the Minister of Health by focusing on what Ontarians want from, or expect of, their health care system, because this is what the LHINs are supposed to respond to at the local level. Patients want three things: (1) the health care that they need; (2) when they need it; and (3) as close to home as possible. Let me deal with those three things.

(1) The health care that they need: Frankly, that's a function of how much money government makes available to the system, and it's a function of government policies about who gets those health care services. Let me give you three examples:

First, many Ontarians see chiropractic care and eye exams as essential health care services, but this government cut the funding for those important services, and there's nothing in the LHIN legislation that's going to get those health care services back.

Second, cancer patients were here last week because they need access to chemotherapy drugs that have been approved by Health Canada but are still under review here in Ontario. One of those patients who was here, Jim Leslie, desperately needs those treatments. It's the only thing that might work for him. Getting the health care that he needs means having this government and this minister adopt an exemption policy for chemotherapy drugs on a compassionate basis. That's not anything that the LHIN legislation is going to do.

Third, we've got many seniors and disabled who need greater access to home care, but this government has still not rescinded the regulations put in place by the former Conservative government, which limit the number of hours of home care that you can receive and also restrict access to homemaking services unless you have a personal care need. People who want to stay in their own homes longer can't do that because of these restrictions, and there's nothing in the LHIN legislation that's going to change that for them, either.

(2) People want health care when they need it: This is a function of the availability of operating rooms, health care providers in the system to meet medical needs and the availability of hospital beds, long-term-care beds and community services. Let me give you three examples:

First, the coalition of emergency physicians is filing a complaint with the Ombudsman because they believe that patients in Ontario don't have an ability to access life-saving care in emergency when they need it, and that the government failed to provide that. The wait times in emergency are not included as one of the five wait time priorities of this government. But I can tell you, for a lot of those 5.2 million Ontarians who access emergency rooms every year, that is a priority, their wait time for life-saving care in emergency. The LHIN legislation can't deal with that.

Second, Sudbury has had an ongoing crisis with respect to alternate-level-of-care patients for over a year now. You've got patients who come to the hospital for an operation and who are having to go back home or somewhere else in northeastern Ontario because there are

no beds, because there are too many alternate-level-of-care patients who can't get access to long-term-care beds or to addiction services in our community. So you've got a revolving door and you've got, in most recent weeks, this being a very public matter again, people having to go home with surgery being cancelled, and now, the spectre of long-term-care patients having to go to Parry Sound to get access to a long-term-care bed. Nothing in the LHIN legislation is going to deal with this.

The third example is human resources when people need them. You've got too many patients being discharged from hospitals who can't get physiotherapy services from the CCAC. You had the Ontario Nurses' Association here last week complaining that there are not enough nurses in the hospital system to provide the care nurses need to provide; that nurses in public health, for example, can't even deal with mandated public health services, never mind getting ready for a flu pandemic. You had OANHSS here just this week, saying that residents in long-term-care facilities can't get the care they need, because there is not enough money to hire more personal support workers. There are nurses having too many patients to care for, and all of those patients can't get the specialized services they need. The LHIN legislation isn't going to deal with that.

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Thirdly, people want to get their health care as close to home as possible. I can tell you that when people start seeing words like "consolidation" in my part of the world, they think that means they're going to have to travel even longer and even farther to get the health care they deserve. When I look at the geographic boundaries of the LHINs, and I see that the LHINs are going to have authority to consolidate services, in my part of the world that means people coming from northwestern Ontario are now going to have to travel for even more services to Thunder Bay, and other people, in northeastern Ontario, are going to have to travel for even more services to the regional centre at Sudbury. I don't want to see people having to travel like that. I want to make sure those services are in the community hospitals. I don't see that happening with this process.

Finally, I'm really worried about patients' continuity of care because nothing has been more disruptive than the competitive bidding process in home care. If this is the model that's applied to LHINs when they purchase services, that disruption for patients will now be across a broad spectrum of health care services, and that will be disastrous.

VISITORS

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to welcome in the public gallery four guests from India. One is Satish Mehta, the Consul General of India. The others are Rajesh Tope, minister of state for urban development in the state of Maharashtra; Rajendra Shingne, minister of state for rehabilitation, resettlement and

revenue, also from the state of Maharashtra; and Sunil Deshmukh, minister of state for finance and planning for the state.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Health. Today you announced, and talked about here in the House, a plan to create 14 new health care bureaucracies, but noticeably absent from your plan and from any of the discussion you engaged in today was the cost of this scheme. Could you tell us how much it will cost for this local health integration bureaucracy? How much will this cost the taxpayers of Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I appreciate the nature of the honourable member's question and his ringing endorsement for the status quo. I'm troubled to think that a person who once held the high office of CEO of a company has now come to the conclusion that a head office ought to run the whole kit and caboodle. The circumstance we're seeking to address is the idea that a \$33-billion operation ought no longer to be managed from head office. The circumstances associated with that are that it's hard for the head office, therefore, to rise to the strategic level required to fulfill its important obligations in areas such as health human resources or information technology.

With respect to costs, all of these are contained in our government's estimates. I can confirm for the honourable member that any expense related to this initiative will be dealt with from within the existing allocation for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Mr. Tory: I think somebody pushed the wrong button there, because we got the wrong answer. Actually, there was no answer.

Let me try again. Here's what we do know: According to leaked cabinet documents from your ministry, you have already spent \$16 million to shut down district health councils that cost \$18 million a year to operate. In their place, you're creating 14 new bureaucracies that are estimated to cost \$55 million a year to operate by 2007. In addition to that, we know you're going to reduce the number of CCACs, the organizations that coordinate home care and long-term-care services for our seniors, from 42 to 14, at an estimated cost for that of \$100 million of taxpayers' money.

Will you confirm what is in these cabinet documents, namely, that your new LHIN bureaucracies will cost \$55 million a year to run, on top of at least \$116 million in costs associated with firing and then rehiring bureaucrats across the system? Will you confirm those numbers?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I'm in a position to confirm neither the numbers nor the characterization the honourable member offers, because it's all inaccurate. The reality is that in our printed estimates are the expenses related to local health integration networks. There's another thing in those expense lines too, the indication that the changes we've made to district health councils mean that on a going-forward basis nearly \$20 million worth of expenditure is now available to support other initiatives to enhance our capacity to deliver care in a coordinated fashion. The honourable member wants to stand in his place and wrap his arms around the status quo, and that is his choice. But I say, sir, you should take the time, take a look at what we call a system now and at what we are attempting to bring together: capacity that's in the same place, closer to the action, in local communities, with people dedicated to their communities.

That's what these people are. To call them political appointments is an unsavoury approach. These individuals were selected by their community, and many of them enjoy a relationship or no relationship with a variety of political parties. The initiative we're building is to bring together all these pieces so that we can, for once in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: I didn't know we invited community people into the cabinet meeting where you made those appointments. I don't recall any community people being involved at all, but anyway.

My supplementary to the minister: What this amounts to is potentially tens of millions of dollars—in fact, well in excess of \$100 million of taxpayers' money—being spent on new bureaucracies that will do nothing for individual patients. This week alone, we've had emergency room doctors here saying wait times in Ontario are twice as long as they should be. We've had the Ontario Medical Association saying that access to a family doctor on your watch is getting worse, not better, and that 1.4 million Ontarians will have no family doctor by the end of the year. You've already spent \$90 million to fire 757 nurses.

So you don't have any answers. You tell us to look here and look there and so forth as to the cost, but you've managed to spend more than \$100 million of taxpayers' money to hire more high-priced bureaucrats. Can you name one specific benefit that will accrue to a patient in Ontario as a result of this \$100 million plus that you're—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Firstly, to repeat what I said earlier, the honourable member can make up all the numbers he wants, but the printed estimates are the place in this world where we look for those costs, on the example he asks for.

I recently had the chance to be in Bramalea at the launch of the Central West Health Integration Network. Two women approached me, one from Hospice Peel and one from Hospice Dufferin. They said, "For eight long years now, we've been trying to get the ministry to

resolve a \$22,000 differential in the way we've been funded." For eight years they railed against a system that couldn't deliver them equity on that basis. I'm pretty sure that, with Joe McReynolds as the chair of the local health integration network for Central West, they will resolve that to the benefit of patients, the same patients, sir, that you represent.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock.

New question. The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: It's another statement of good intentions, but as we know, that will amount to nothing.

My question is for the Minister of Health. While it appears to be boom town and the biggest day ever for new bureaucrats under your watch, we're seeing the real story of what's happening to health care in communities across the province. Just today, Quinte Healthcare, covering hospitals in Belleville, Trenton, Picton and Bancroft, released a letter from you that comments on the \$6.8-million deficit at the hospital and the plan submitted to you to close beds and cut patient services. You say in your letter to them, "Based on a preliminary review of the materials we have received ... your ... consolidations appear to have merit," referring to the closure of surgical beds in Trenton.

Minister, why are you giving the green light to close surgical beds in Trenton while you're spending tens of millions of dollars the very same day to hire new bureaucrats for the Ministry of Health?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Simply put, we support the proposals that have come forward from Trenton because the surgical beds that are in discussion are not being utilized. I think if you looked at the other consolidations that are now being advanced by the Quinte Healthcare Corp., you would see them as sensible: the idea, as an example, that when you have four hospitals working together, you might actually provide all of one service at one place, for two simple reasons, and the first is because the clinical evidence is clear, almost always, that the outcomes are better, and the nurse who sits behind you could probably confirm that for you; and secondly—

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: No, I mean it. It's a well-known fact we're operating on here.

The second piece is that it will benefit from the standpoint of resources. We want to continue to contribute to more resources at the Quinte Healthcare Corp. They got more money this year than last year, and they're going to get a \$100-million redevelopment. This is evidence of our commitment to the people in Quinte, but we do believe there's a better way to integrate the system down there, and we applaud the leadership in the local community that has come to these conclusions.

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Mr. John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Time for a shuffle.

Mr. Tory: It was time for a shuffle a long time ago.

My supplementary to the minister is this: The story doesn't stop with the \$6.8-million funding shortfall at

Quinte Healthcare. Tomorrow, Lakeridge Health, covering hospitals in Bowmanville, Oshawa, Port Perry and Whitby, will be revealing details of the drastic measures they have to take to deal with their \$14-million deficit.

According to a story in the Scucog Standard, the hospital CEO admitted that all the cuts that could be made have been made, and that includes over 300 layoffs including cuts to nursing staff in Port Perry. The article quotes the hospital CEO as saying the 300 layoffs will still not come close to dealing with the current deficit, and that to get the deficit under control—again according to the CEO—will require reductions in patient care.

Their plan is on your desk, Minister. On the very same day you've managed to find in excess of \$100 million to create new health care bureaucracies in this province for bureaucrats, you have a choice between funding their deficit and dealing with that or having more cuts take place—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You can offer up a number that you've made up all you want, but until you offer some proof of it, it seems to me important that the honourable member stand in his place and take the opportunity to be just a little more forthright with genuine information rather than what is a figment of his imagination.

The reality is that the challenge we have in health care is clear. Hospitals in Ontario have benefited from \$2.35 billion worth of new investment since our government came to life—every hospital in the province of Ontario—and Lakeridge Health system has been among those. What I'm looking forward to in the case of both Lakeridge and Quinte, hospital networks that came together through your government's restructuring plans, is to give them the opportunity for once, especially in those smaller centres, to define the core services to make sure everybody is clear on which services will be provided at all those hospitals. Lakeridge is doing difficult work. We appreciate that people from the community, embraced of the leadership responsibility of community, are exercising those judgments in partnership with government.

Mr. Tory: It's interesting how enthusiastic you are about all these changes taking place around the province, but not the people who are actually involved, especially of course the 300 people so far who are without their jobs.

Now we have the \$6.8-million deficit and the bed closures in Trenton, we have the 300 layoffs and the cuts to patient services at Lakeridge, and of course we have the ongoing deficit struggle at Sarnia's Bluewater Health care. According to your own member, Bluewater's deficit stands at \$14 million and 170 layoffs have already been announced, effective December 31. That will still leave them with a \$2-million deficit.

Again, the plan to deal with that deficit is on your desk. You did have a choice. You decided to sign the one that hired dozens of bureaucrats for \$100-million-plus, and yet you've not dealt with the challenges being faced by people in Sarnia, Trenton, Belleville, Picton, Bancroft,

Oshawa, Whitby, Port Perry and Bowmanville. How can you cut them while you're hiring bureaucrats?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You'd think that a party leader who enjoys the same family name as his party's name would at least be pleased to stand in his place and acknowledge the fact that two parties in this Legislature today that have had the privilege of governing in the last 10 or 15 years—two of three parties have reduced funding for hospitals. The Liberal Party is not one of those.

Each hospital in the province of Ontario received more money last year than the year before and received more money this year than last year. They also received something else long promised: local, stable, predictable funding, something long-promised in the hospital sector in Ontario. We're investing an additional half billion dollars in hospitals this year, evidence, alongside the unprecedented largest investments in community care, that we are a government that recognizes health care is simply not about hospitals, as you pretended, but rather about the way all services come together to the benefit of patients. This initiative is about patients, something the honourable member doesn't seem to understand because he's always—

The Speaker: Thank you.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is for the Acting Premier. Today, Campaign 2000 released its 2005 report card on child poverty in Canada. The findings are shocking to everyone who cares about children in this province. Shocking finding number one is that a lone parent with one child living in a large city like Toronto, Ottawa or Hamilton needs \$24,475 annually to meet basic needs. From your government they only get \$14,875. That is a \$10,000 gap. How come you broke the promise you made to the people of Ontario in the last election and froze Ontario Works and ODSP rates in your last budget?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Thank you so much for addressing this report that came out today. It's a report that I hope will galvanize governments at all levels—members of Parliament, members of Legislatures across the country—to renew and redouble their efforts to deal with poverty issues. I can tell you that, as this member knows, we have been working diligently to address that.

What we have done since we became the government two years ago is instill the first 3% increase in both welfare rates as well as disability rates for the first time in 12 years. In fact, individuals had not seen a raise since the early 1990s. This makes it extremely difficult. But what is really poignant is that today is now the second day that we've had reports that speak to individuals being hungry. Yesterday we had the food banks here tabling a

report that showed some extremely difficult trends—trends that tell us we have much more work to do. We will continue to have opportunities to make a difference for people in Ontario.

Mr. Prue: I would agree that you have much more work to do. It could have started in the last budget but did not, and it could still continue. If you think this is an emergency, take it from the emergency fund.

Shocking finding number two from that same report: A job is no ticket out of poverty in Ontario. Forty-eight percent of all poor children live in families with parents who are employed year-round. This would not happen if we had a livable minimum wage in Ontario. Minister, I know you've increased it to \$7.50—I know that—but it's not enough. When will you increase the minimum wage to a livable amount so that children do not go hungry?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: Let me say again that when this House had information tabled before it to vote on that would increase the minimum wage, the member opposite voted against that item. That is a shame.

Let me say this: This member opposite had seen our plan—not just one increase but a continual increase throughout our first term, and that is important. As well, as mentioned yesterday in this House, we know that the last federal budget, tabled only two weeks ago, shows the federal government as well making significant improvements in taxation levels for low-income earners. This is the same party that is trying to take that government down. These are significant initiatives that make a huge difference, not just for people who are on social assistance but people who are earning at a low level. This is a group that is a great concern to us because this is a very difficult trend to see: individuals like this who are increasingly using food banks.

Mr. Prue: If your shouting and your finger-pointing and all the things you say over there would put food on the table, the kids wouldn't be hungry. Unfortunately, they don't.

Shocking figure number three: 41% of poor children use food banks. That's 144,234 children in this province. It must be pretty difficult for you to read that, and it must be pretty difficult for the McGuinty government, because during the election you promised to stop the clawback of the national child benefit supplement. The Premier said it was immoral. Today the McGuinty government continues to claw back up to \$2,800 in federal child benefits from poor, hungry children each and every year.

Tell all those children—I want to hear it from your lips—when will the McGuinty government stand up for them, keep its promise and stop the clawback of the child tax benefit?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I guess I have a question for the member opposite, and I want to be serious: Tell me why, when you see this government make the moves in the direction that is finally the right direction, finally relieving the national child benefit to the tune of \$37 million, this member opposite voted against the measure. Please tell me why.

1450

We finally, as a provincial government, have a labour market agreement with the federal government that will pour hundreds of millions of dollars for new Canadians—many of whom are captured in these statistics—who are not doing well enough as new Canadian families in Ontario. Will I see you support that measure, or will you again be opposed?

I have to say this: We all agree that we have more work to do, and we work diligently on this every day. But I need to see you come clean. We are moving in the right direction and you absolutely have to support us on those measures.

FEDERAL LIBERAL ELECTION PROMISES

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): I have a question for the Acting Premier. This week, ordinary families have witnessed the Paul Martin Liberals engaging in the most cynical, confused and desperate attempt to buy votes in Canadian history.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. You may not be surprised that I'm having difficulty hearing. The member for Toronto–Danforth.

Ms. Churley: People support—and the NDP support—investments in the things that matter most to people, but people don't support Liberals using taxpayer dollars for flashy pre-election photo ops that are just attempts to buy votes.

Acting Premier, you know the date of the Ontario election. You are keenly aware of your timetable for keeping promises. So will you agree today to impose a 60-day pre-election freeze on taxpayer-funded government photo ops to spare ordinary families from Paul-Martin-style vote-buying in Ontario?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The member opposite is clearly still here physically, but obviously she has made the move out of the Legislature to another potential career opportunity. As long as her interests and ours don't conflict, we wish her well in that endeavour.

Let me say this: This government has brought forward a ban on partisan political advertising in Ontario. This government is attempting to reform political finance in this province but the NDP is blocking the passage of the legislation, and we can't intervene with that. This party and Premier Dalton McGuinty have worked hard to get good deals from the federal government. Those deals are being signed this week. The federal and provincial governments continue to work together to ensure the best interests of the people of Ontario. We are less concerned about cheap partisan games—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Churley: What piffle. What absolute piffle. After 12 years of spending announcements and then breaking promises, this week the Paul Martin Liberals flew around the country, giant rubber cheques in tow, holding flashy

photo ops, making pre-election promises worth \$10 billion and counting. People support investments in people, but they find taxpayer-funded flashy government photo ops just days before an election dishonest and distasteful.

Again, you know the date of the Ontario election. You are keenly aware of your timeline for keeping promises. I ask you again, will you agree today to impose a 60-day pre-election freeze on taxpayer-funded flashy government photo ops to spare ordinary families from Paul-Martin-style vote-buying in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This province fought for 25 years for those agreements, and these ministers got them for us. We ought to be proud about that.

Now, as we're having a little dialogue about what's said in an election and what's delivered upon assuming office, the member opposite was talking—

Interjection: Agenda for People.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Yes, the Agenda for People, in 1990. The member opposite campaigned and said, "We will bring in public auto insurance," and what did they do? They didn't do it. They didn't bring in public auto insurance. This was the party of organized labour that stood up for collective bargaining, and what did they do when they came to office? They stripped collective agreements across the province. This is the party that was for working people, for poor people, and when they came to office, more than a thousand people a month lost their jobs on their watch. If we are going to talk about ethics and politics, if we're going to talk about ethics and campaigns, if I were a voter in the riding of Beaches, I would ask that member, "Why did you say one thing running and do quite another when you got elected?"

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock.

Member for Toronto–Danforth.

Ms. Churley: It was insane. It was nuts. It was like a hundred monkeys on hallucinogens writing cheques. That's how your good friend Warren Kinsella describes what's happening in Ottawa, and we agree.

Again, ordinary families want politicians to keep their promises when they're in office, and you guys wrote the book on broken promises. Who said, "We will not raise your taxes"? It was the Liberals. They don't want to see pre-election rubber-cheque tours with post-dated solutions for stale-dated promises.

If you won't impose a 60-day pre-election freeze on taxpayer-funded flashy government photo ops, will you agree to strike a committee with representatives from all three parties to set rules for limiting flashy government pre-election photo ops to prevent Paul-Martin-style vote-buying in Ontario? Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I guess the member really is anxious to get out of here and go to another place.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Yes, she's gone already.

Let me say this. Talking about transparency, when we assumed office, there was a \$5.5-billion deficit that hadn't been reported by the previous Conservative gov-

ernment. As part of our first budget, my colleague and predecessor brought in full disclosure; that is, prior to an election, the government must allow its books to be audited. What did that member do? She voted against it. She voted against improved accountability. That member and her party left a legacy of poverty, of unemployment, of broken promises, of a 54% increase in tuition after they said they would—

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Duncan:—hydro increases of 43% while they were the government of Ontario.

The Speaker: Thank you. Stop the clock.

Please sit down.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question?

1500

LAYOFFS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): At the risk of prompting more arm-waving and pirouettes from over there, I will ask my question of the Acting Premier. This has been a devastating week for families and communities across Ontario left dealing with layoffs just in time for Christmas. Worse, there has been no leadership, no help, not even really a measure of any empathy at all for these men and women, from your government. From the Cascades coated paper plant in Thunder Bay throwing 375 people out of work at Christmas, to the massive layoffs announced at General Motors affecting 4,000 direct jobs and who knows how many more indirect jobs, our manufacturing sector has been dealt a body blow on your watch.

The Premier refused to say anything meaningful to these families, so I'll ask you: What specifically has your government done and have you done as Minister of Finance, Acting Premier, since you heard about the General Motors and Cascades layoffs? What have you done for these families and these communities?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Our government implemented the automotive investment strategy in advance. We anticipated challenges for the sector, and have invested half a billion dollars that has leveraged \$5 billion in new investment. No government, I would argue, in the history of this—and by the way, your party opposed that. You opposed assisting the auto industry. You refused to do it. You refused to listen to the automotive industry. Those have protected 18,000 existing jobs and have helped produce an additional 1,800 jobs. Overall, since assuming office, 214,000 new jobs have been created in Ontario.

As long as one person loses their job in Ontario, we're concerned and we will work with them. As long as one family is concerned about their future, this government will continue along the path it has to protect existing jobs and to create new jobs in a way that has never been done in the history of Ontario, certainly not by that party that

neither understood nor responded to the concerns of working people—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tory: In shorter words, the answer for Thunder Bay and Oshawa and St. Catharines is “nothing.” It’s clear that the government has no plan to deal with the 42,000 and counting manufacturing job losses over the past year in Ontario.

Today we can add to this list 47 employees at Ciena Corp. in Kanata, Ontario. ABB Manufacturing in Guelph, the last large power transformer manufacturer in Ontario, will close its doors, throwing almost 300 people out of work on January 31, 2006—not a great way to start the new year. AFG Glass had factories in Concord and London until this year and employed 250 people. Now those men and women are looking for work.

Minister, to say, “Don’t worry; be happy; the economy is fine,” is not good enough for these people. Do what the Premier would not do and stand up in your place and tell us what specifically you are doing for these people in these communities, these families who are losing jobs this week and this year on your watch.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I remind the member opposite that you voted against the automotive investment plan and the strategy to protect those jobs. You voted against it; all of you, every one of you. Unlike the member opposite, the Premier has met with the chairs of all the big automotive manufacturers. Unlike the member opposite, the Premier has been engaged in discussions with the CAW, both at the national level and just yesterday when the Premier spoke with the president of the Oshawa General Motors CAW local.

Let me say what other people have said. Unlike the member opposite, the president of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers’ Association said, “It’s not all doom and gloom. Canada’s still doing reasonably well.” RBC Financial: Manufacturers “continue to drive a positive, middle-of-the-pack growth pace for Ontario.” The Conference Board of Canada: “Led by strengthening consumer spending and continued strength, Ontario’s domestic economy will post solid growth this year and next year.”

By the way, the member for Durham, Mr. O’Toole, said this yesterday, speaking about the job losses in his riding: “It’s changing. Globalization is changing it, not Dalton McGuinty, essentially, any more than anyone else.” The member is right.

This government cares about working people. Unlike the member opposite, we’ll continue—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

HIGHWAY 407

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question this time is to the Minister of Transportation. You have publicly stated, on more than one occasion, your disappointment that the 407 ETR owners can continue to deny people their licence plates. Minister, my question’s

a simple one: Who gives the 407 ETR the names and addresses of licence plate owners?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I have said on more than one occasion in this House—and outside this House—that the 407 is a bad contract. It was a 99-year lease, now 93 years, and our government has done everything in its power to make this contract better for Ontarians and the people who drive on this highway.

There’s no question that the terms of the contract that the previous government gave provide the 407 with the ability to deny plates. That is exactly the reason we were fighting for this, and we’ll continue fighting for the people, and that’s why we have appealed this decision.

Mr. Prue: Minister, you didn’t answer the question, but I think you do know the answer. It’s your ministry that hands over these details; it is your ministry that turns over the personal information from the motor vehicle registry database to the 407 ETR so that they, in turn, can turn around and deny Ontarians their licence plates. You said just a couple of weeks ago in the *National Post*, “Denying someone the right to renew their licence plates significantly affects their ability to drive, and that is very serious.”

My question to you is a simple one, again: If you think it’s wrong, why don’t you simply stop telling the 407 ETR and their collection agency, Canadian Bonded Credit Ltd., who owns the licence plate? Alberta had the guts to do it. Why don’t you?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: This was a decision made by the court. The court said that we have to start denying the plates based on the contract that the previous government signed. We have appealed their decision. I always said that it causes inconvenience to the people, and the previous government should not have given this kind of right or these kinds of privileges to any party, but our hands, to a certain extent, are tied, based on the contract that the previous government created. We will still continue to fight for the rights of the drivers and the privileges of the people of Ontario, and we will do our level best.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, Ontario’s workers are among the best in Canada and respected around the world. Ontario, like all jurisdictions in North America, must compete globally, and our workers must be given every opportunity to upgrade their skills to support a robust economy here in Ontario.

Yesterday morning at George Brown College, you signed a labour market partnership agreement with federal Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Belinda Stronach.

Minister, could you tell this House and all Ontarians what this will do for our economy and our Ontario workers?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd like to thank the member from Ottawa–Orléans for his advocacy on behalf of the workers in his riding and for recognizing the opportunities that these agreements represent.

For almost 10 years, the people of this province were denied the opportunities from a labour market development agreement because a previous government decided it wasn't important. And yes, there were elections during that period in 1997 and 2000, but they couldn't deliver. Premier Dalton McGuinty took a stand and delivered for the people of this province. What did he deliver? He delivered the opportunity to develop a one-stop training system for all the workers in this province, and through the labour market partnership agreement, he delivered an extra \$1.368 billion over six years for new apprenticeships, extra workplace skills development and new integration programs for new immigrants, a great deal for the people of Ontario and for the people of Ottawa–Orléans.

Mr. McNeely: We have all heard and know about the needs of new Ontarians in their attempts to find work suitable for their training and education. Our government has been working hard to meet the needs of our skilled workers. On top of that, our government has been working to increase the number of homegrown skilled workers through a number of new apprenticeships and skills training programs. Not only does this benefit our economy, but it gives our youth new opportunities to become engaged in successful and rewarding career paths.

Minister, can you give us an outline of what these programs are, and how they benefit our youth and all of Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: There are a number of programs that we use at the moment. First of all, you want to encourage people at a very early stage to look at the opportunities that, for example, the trades present. That's the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. Just this week, we announced an enhancement to the funding. Already, 20,500 young people take advantage of that in high school. This is going to give us the opportunity for even more to take advantage in the future.

1510

For those who aren't connected to school, we've got the Job Connect program that helps 97,000 young people every year take a look at skills development and skills enhancement, whether it's sophisticated or whether it's basic literacy skills, to make sure they get connected to the job market.

Then we have programs such as the co-op diploma apprenticeship program, that will help people get an apprenticeship and a college diploma.

With the new labour market partnership agreement, we're going to have 1.3-billion-plus opportunities in the future for more work—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. On October 25, you said that there were currently no proposals for drug consumption sites before any municipality in Ontario. We know that just such a proposal is making its way through the machinery at city hall in Toronto as we speak. We also know that Ottawa is considering a similar plan. Minister, do you care to correct the record?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think you should correct the record. I know that the city of Toronto endorsed their drug strategy the other day, unanimously as I understand it. But if the honourable member looks at the language with respect to the spectre of consumption sites, she'll see that the city is only at the very, very earliest stages of giving any consideration. What I said to the honourable member from Leeds–Grenville in answer to his question, and I believe in media scrums as well, was that the province of Ontario is not in receipt of any proposal for such. The question was asked in the context of, "Would we be offering funding?" I said no. You can say all that you want, that the government of Canada may be considering this, but in order for any consumption site to come to use, to come to life, it has to be licensed by the government of Canada. My points remain entirely accurate. I'm aware that there's some discussion going on at the city of Toronto, but there is no proposal being advanced by any municipality in the province of Ontario, including the city of Toronto. I'm very accurate on that, I believe.

Mrs. Witmer: Minister, in response, you also said that there were no public health dollars involved in this. Yet if you take a look at the 2006 operating budget submission of Toronto Public Health, they are requesting \$249,500 for their comprehensive drug strategy. It falls under the category of service enhancements that will be funded 65% by the province. You are pleading ignorance, but the board of health, if they get their way, is going to be paying for safe houses for drug users with provincial funding. Yet you won't pay for physiotherapists, optometrists or chiropractors. You do have the power under the regulations of the Health Protection and Promotion Act to put an end to this. Are you prepared to act today? Will you set the record straight?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member suggested that I was somehow misinformed. It is she who is misinformed. She asked me to stand in my place today and put out the fire of a conversation that the city of Toronto, in a report that they just endorsed, is going to have. They've said in their report, "We're going to have a conversation." Larry Campbell, the former mayor of Vancouver, came in and said, "This is the kind of thing that it's important to talk about." I'm on record personally. I've said very clearly that my awareness of the drug culture differential between Toronto and Vancouver leads me to believe that there is no cause for it. That's my personal view. But the reality is that the honourable member asked me to stop a conversation that is taking

place in the city of Toronto. It's an appropriate conversation for them to have.

The honourable member seeks to create the impression that there are provincial dollars behind safe consumption sites. She is wrong on that, because there are no safe consumption sites. Accordingly, there are no—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): I have a question for the Minister of Health. You may have heard that today Toronto's medical officer of health released the Toronto pandemic influenza plan. The medical officer of health has requested help from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, including building surge capacity in all components of the health care system. Most public health units don't even have the resources to complete core responsibilities like inspecting restaurants, let alone dealing with a pandemic. Will you commit today to provide the funding necessary so that Toronto Public Health has the tools it needs to protect people from a pandemic?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The honourable member seeks to eliminate confidence among Ontarians by trying to pretend we've got some public health apparatus in our province that's feeble. This is an impression that it is irresponsible to suggest. It has been made stronger by the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars of resources from our government as part of Operation Health Protection. We're working on a number of areas, including toward the creation of a public health agency in Ontario.

Ontario's pandemic flu plan has been updated regularly. It's available for people to take a look at on our government's Web site. Alongside that, people can easily find that our government has been very active in implementing the recommendations that came from the reports of Naylor, Walker and Campbell. The point is that Toronto Public Health is functioning in a much greater way than it ever has before. It has responded well to recent crises, and some evidence of the expansion in funding for them has been their recent budget proposal to increase their staff by 326 people.

Ms. Churley: I'm honestly surprised by that answer. I would say to the health minister that it's irresponsible of him to ignore these dire warnings. The Ontario Medical Association says that Ontario is not prepared for a pandemic because the McGuinty government has underfunded public health, because local public health units don't have the resources for basic tasks, and because we don't have enough local medical officers of health.

The OMA says, "Our public health system is broken. It remains unprepared for challenges we know it must meet." Toronto Public Health says it needs support from you for surge capacity so it can guard against pandemics. Will you commit today to funding public health properly

so it has the tools it needs to protect people from pandemics?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member, in her apparent lack of research, confuses the issue of public health capacity with surge capacity, which is not in the public health apparatus but rather in all other elements of the health care system. Then she goes on to attribute comments that were not part of the Ontario Medical Association's—

Ms. Churley: I was there; you weren't.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: —oh, here we go—report to them.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Mr. Speaker, I didn't call her a rascal.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Minister.

Hon. George Smitherman: I think we acknowledge that we've got to continue to do more to enhance our preparedness with respect to pandemics. We're behaving very prudently in that fashion. We've got terrific leadership. I think our record with respect to public health stands in very stark contrast to yours, because like on so many issues with your dance partners alongside you, there are two parties in this Legislature that have cut funding for public health: not the Liberal Party, just those parties.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. I regularly meet with families of individuals with developmental disabilities in my riding of Nipissing. I also have just recently met with Laura Pearce, executive director of the Mattawa Community Living Association, and I know of the great work she is doing in the Mattawa area. I continue to enjoy a great working relationship with Ray Thorne, executive director of the North Bay and District Association for Community Living, whose office is right next to mine on Main Street in North Bay.

They know as well as I that having capable, highly trained support staff active in the lives of our children with developmental disabilities goes a long way toward reducing the barriers that can impede opportunities for social inclusion and a high quality of life. We know that caregivers and professionals in the developmental services sector work incredibly hard at their jobs, and we appreciate them for that. I want to take this opportunity to thank those in my community who are working so hard.

Minister, how is your ministry helping to promote the developmental services sector to those interested students who wish to work with clients living with developmental disabilities?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I appreciate the question from our member from the north. Let me say, first, how much we—all of us in

this House, every MPP—recognize and support the work people do in the developmental services sector.

Let me say very clearly that this month we launched something that is very important for this sector. Let me tell you about it today. We've recently launched the first part of a comprehensive plan to strengthen specialized care for individuals with developmental disabilities, some of whom have the highest care needs. Starting this year, up to 20 college and university students in designated clinical disciplines are eligible for up to \$4,500 each in financial support through the Ontario developmental services career connections grant. This is important. The Ontario developmental services career connections grant provides up to \$4,500 in financial support for students in the practicum component of their—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Smith: I'd like to acknowledge that I don't have the special skills of the member for Toronto-Danforth. They will be missed in this House in the not-too-distant future.

I'm pleased to hear from the minister about this new grant program. It certainly is going some way to addressing the concerns surrounding support staff retention, which is a real concern for parents, and particularly for the elderly parents who worry about what will happen to their child, should they as parents not be around later in life to provide the necessary care for that child. I'm sure the minister would agree that even more can be done to ensure that adults with developmental disabilities are not kept to the margins of society.

Minister, can you explain to this House how our government is ensuring that Ontario's support system remains sustainable in the long term?

1520

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I know that this member has watched carefully the many announcements we've made in the developmental services sector. Let me just highlight one very important one, because it is often a concern, where parents will say, "What happens when I die? What will be left for my child with a developmental disability?" and a very particular need for people with very high needs. One of our announcements, a \$41-million announcement, focused on specialized care: four networks of specialized care specifically addressing the coordination of services that must be available for people with very high needs. That announcement also includes living places for people with very high needs. In addition to that, we have seen over \$200 million in total coming out in the very near future. It has already started in the last two years. We're very happy about the moves we're making, but in particular the transformation of the system, the policy work—

The Speaker: Thank you.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. You will know that the

first phase of the York region Viva transit project is now complete, fully implemented, and we're ready to move into phase 2 of that important project. Since May of this year—I asked you a question on May 18 about funding for phase 2—repeated requests to your office and to you personally to get some indication of a commitment for funding for phase 2 have been met with silence. We are now at the point where this entire project is at risk because York region needs your commitment for the \$7.3 million.

Minister, I'm going to ask you now, could you stand in your place and make this commitment to York region so that they can get on with the planning for the important phase 2 of this project?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member for asking me the question. I have been to York region about three or four times with regard to Viva announcements and I'm very proud of the work they have done. They have done some excellent work.

Let me just say what our government has done on the transit field. Our budget for transit is \$800 million this year, which is a record investment that any government has ever made in transit. This is in addition to the gas tax money that we have promised to the municipalities. We started with one cent, we are giving them one and a half cents this year, and it will go to two cents. So we are providing very stable funding to transit. I know that the project that Viva has, even their second phase, is a very worthwhile project. I always said that we will look at the proposal they submit and we will work with them.

Mr. Klees: The minister has been looking at this project since May. That's six months of looking. York region now needs the commitment. It's crunch time. I know that gridlock isn't important to the minister, because his party pays for airplanes to put important people like the Premier into, to move from Hamilton to Toronto—68 kilometres. People in York region can't get on an airplane to travel across the gridlock. We need transit.

So the question is, will you stop looking? You know what the project looks like. You've said it's important and worthwhile. York region needs your commitment to fund phase 2, at \$7.3 million. Would you tell me now, would you tell the people in York region, when can they expect that commitment?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: Let me say this: The previous government never put any money into transit—never. The honourable member on the other side was also the Minister of Transportation. He was very much aware of what needed to be done in York. I would really like to know how much money he approved when he was a Minister of Transportation and what kind of commitments he had. Since then, we have funded the first phase and we are willing to work with them on the second phase. We have an \$800-million investment that we are making that the previous government didn't make.

Mr. Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The minister is absolutely wrong in his response—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): That's not a point of order, and you know that.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Marilyn Churley (Toronto–Danforth): He's warned now.

I have a question for the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment. It's a year and a half since the McGuinty government posted its proposed Drinking Water Source Protection Act on the Environmental Bill of Rights. At the time of the posting, the then Minister of the Environment stated she hoped to introduce the final bill later in the year. That was 2004. Then legislation was promised in the spring session of 2005, but still nothing. Source waters are being contaminated and permanently impacted daily. Will you stop the stalling and introduce the government's long-promised Drinking Water Source Protection Act today?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Minister—parliamentary assistant?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Thank you for correcting that, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate the question from the member, who's on her feet a lot today—perhaps not in the future, but at least today. I just want to assure the member that the McGuinty government has a commitment to the first recommendation of Justice O'Connor, which was to introduce sweeping cross-provincial source water protection legislation. That's what Justice O'Connor said we should do.

Unlike the previous government, which rolled out things without enough consultation and planning, we have taken the time to make sure we get this right. I know that my minister is looking forward to being back in this House to introduce source water protection legislation. I know that will be a wonderful day for the people of Ontario, because it will make a commitment that we campaigned on a reality in this House. I know that all the members will be looking at that important piece of legislation and working with us to make sure that we get it right.

Ms. Churley: I want to assure the member that I will always be on my feet; I'll probably die on my feet.

I want to say to the member, each day York region's big pipe will rob the Rouge watershed of twice the volume of the main branch of the Rouge River north of Steeles. Consequently, the dewatering of the Rouge watershed will continue forever. Despite opposition to the big pipe from citizens, environmental groups, the city of Toronto and even the government's own Environmental Commissioner, the McGuinty government still approves it. This is the real record of the McGuinty government on source water protection. If you are serious about source water protection, will you issue a stop order immediately and end your big pipe madness today?

Mr. Wilkinson: I find it interesting that the member, who back in the 1990s was talking about source water protection when she was in government, actually never

did anything. And now she's in here and she's specifically asking a question about the pipe. That has been a long-standing process. I think the most important thing that we have to remember is that our ministry is very concerned about that situation. We're reviewing it. We continue to scrutinize construction activity. The work that's going on right now has some 40 conditions imposed by the Ministry of the Environment because we take the protection of our environment, for our children and for our grandchildren, very seriously. It's important that the growth that was approved in 1994 for York region when you were in government, which is underpinned by the importance to have the public infrastructure that was never completed by the previous government, who were so busy cutting taxes that we ended up with a huge infrastructure deficit—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

1530

HEALTH PROMOTION

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. Just by way of preface, I want to relay a quick story.

Interjection: Hear, hear.

Ms. Mossop: Yes, hear, hear. The home of John Wilkinson.

I heard about the students at Stratford Northwestern Public School, who are regularly eating at a little innovative café called the Screaming Avocado. This of course is going to be of interest to our Minister of Health Promotion because this is a place where they make very healthful foods from scratch. Actually, when the students are there, they can learn a little bit about nutrition and how to make foods and all the rest, which is very good because, as you know, our government has banned junk food in schools. We all know that this is part of what's necessary to instil this awareness, not only in our youth but also in all Ontarians, if we're going to get a handle on health care. But I need to know from our Minister of Health Promotion what other kinds of programs we are providing our youth—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Minister?

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to thank the honourable member because I too had the opportunity to meet some of the people involved with that innovative café called the Screaming Avocado. What we're trying to do within the Ministry of Health Promotion is take a holistic approach to some of the challenges facing young people in particular. Stats Canada reported that over the last 25 years, there has been a 300% increase in obesity rates amongst children. That is going to have tremendous repercussions for the health care system down the line, in terms of type 2 diabetes and so on.

We're taking a holistic approach. I was pleased to co-announce with my colleague the Minister of Education

the 20 minutes of physical activity that's going to be mandatory in schools. My colleague Mary Anne Chambers doubled the amount of the student nutrition program to \$8.5 million. All of these programs in whole are aimed at teaching young people the importance of nutrition in the school system.

Ms. Mossop: Also, just moving on now from the eating aspect into the exercise aspects, our government started the Active 2010 initiative and the introduction of 20 minutes of physical activity in our schools on top of a lot of gym time. Actually, I'm thinking this is something we should move into Queen's Park now. I think we need a mandatory 20 minutes of exercise every day at Queen's Park. I don't know about anybody else here, but I'm spending a lot of time sitting around in committee meetings. Here in the Legislature, we sit and sit. The only exercise we're getting is our jaws and maybe our thumbs on our BlackBerries. I think we could use the 20 minutes of exercise here. Those cookies they serve in the committee meetings aren't helping, either, let me tell you. Minister, we've got to have a change there. The only exercise we're getting is jogging down the halls when the bells start ringing.

Anyway, my point is that I'd like to hear from the minister a little bit more about what we're doing in the area of active lifestyles.

Hon. Mr. Watson: One component of our plan is called Active 2010. I have big running shoes to fill in Jim Bradley, who launched that program for us. It's aiming to get the number of Ontario adults who consider themselves physically active from 48% to 55% by the year 2010.

We also have the communities in action fund, which is a very innovative program that is giving small grants to recreational programs throughout the province of Ontario. We've announced a number of these programs. I'm pleased that in the next two weeks, we're going to be announcing a whole series of other community in action fund programs. These are the kinds of grants that provide the seed money for organizations to get up and running, whether it's a small basketball league or for a scout or a guide organization—

The Speaker: Thank you. Government House leader?

DEATH OF CANADIAN SOLDIER

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I have unfortunate news. A Canadian soldier serving in Afghanistan was killed and four others injured in a vehicle accident today. In my capacity as government House leader and at the request as well of Bob Runciman, the House leader of the official opposition, and Gilles Bisson, the whip of the third party, I would ask that members of the Legislature rise for a moment of silence in memory of this individual.

The House observed a moment's silence.

PETITIONS

LESLIE M. FROST CENTRE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock):

“Recommendations for the Frost Centre.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government announced the closure of the Leslie M. Frost Natural Resources Centre in July 2004 with no public consultation; and

“Whereas public outrage over the closure of the Frost Centre caused the government to appoint a working committee of local residents to examine options for the future of the property; and

“Whereas the working committee has completed their consultations and has prepared recommendations for the provincial government that include a procedure to follow during the request for proposals process; and

“Whereas the Frost Centre has been an important educational resource for the community, and continued use of the facility for educational purposes has widespread support;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should retain public ownership of the Frost Centre lands and follow the recommendations of the working committee regarding the request for proposals process.”

It's signed by hundreds of people from my riding.

GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I keep getting petitions about the dilapidated bridge near Old Weston Road and St. Clair Avenue. The petition is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, the minister of infrastructure services and the Minister of Transportation, and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that GO Transit extend the tunnel beyond St. Clair Avenue West so that trains will pass under St. Clair Avenue West, thus

eliminating this eyesore ... with its high banks and blank walls. Instead it will create a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape with easy traffic flow.”

Since I agree with this petition 100%, I'm delighted to sign it as well.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have another petition similar to the ones that have been coming forward.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I affix my signature as I agree with it.

1540

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I am pleased to enter this petition from Mr. Al Moreland, president of Community Living St. Catharines. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I'm pleased to sign this in my support.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I affix my name in support.

AGGREGATE EXTRACTION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a petition to the Legislature of Ontario:

“There are numerous reasons for rescinding the joint board decision including the following:

“Whereas the decision contravenes the purpose of the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act;

“Whereas the decision sets precedent for quarry expansion licences on the Niagara Escarpment;

“Whereas this decision could lead to habitat destruction for species of concern;

“Whereas escarpment rural lands are equivalent to buffer designation under the United Nations' framework for biosphere reserve...;

“Whereas to attempt to maintain the significant wetlands and the streams course water will have to be pumped in perpetuity;

“Whereas this decision allows for pumping 50 feet ... below the water table;

“Whereas the 50-foot dams to be constructed have a potential for failure;

“Whereas aggregate can be readily accessed close to market off the Niagara Escarpment in land that is not protected or at risk;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

“We call on the government of Ontario to:

“Issue an order by the Lieutenant Governor in Council ... rescinding the decision made by the joint board dated June 8, 2005, approving the applications of Dufferin Aggregates in regards to this matter;

“Issue an order by the cabinet substituting for the decision of the board on this matter, a decision rejecting the applications of Dufferin.”

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I have a petition here:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario has an inconsistent policy for access to new cancer treatments while these drugs are under review for funding; and

“Whereas cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy may apply for a section 8 exception under the Ontario drug benefit plan with no such exception policy in place for intravenous cancer drugs administered in hospital; and

“Whereas this is an inequitable, inconsistent and unfair policy, creating two classes of cancer patients with further inequities on the basis of personal wealth and the willingness of hospitals to risk budgetary deficits to provide new intravenous chemotherapy treatments; and

“Whereas cancer patients have the right to the most effective care recommended by their doctors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide immediate access to Velcade and other intravenous chemotherapy drugs while these new cancer drugs are under review and provide a consistent policy for access to new cancer treatments that enables oncologists to apply for exceptions to meet the” important “needs of patients.”

As I agree with the spirit of this petition, I affix my signature to it.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many owners of seasonal trailers kept at campgrounds have raised their concerns over the impact of property taxes on seasonal trailers and the unfairness of imposing a new tax on persons who use minimal municipal services;

“Whereas this new tax will discourage businesses and tourism opportunities in Ontario and will cause many families to give up their vacation trailers altogether;

“Whereas the administration of this tax will require a substantial investment in staff, time and resources across the province of Ontario;

“Whereas some representatives of the recreational vehicle industry, campground proprietors and trailer owners have suggested an alternative sticker or tag system to establish fees for seasonal trailers;

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

“That the Parliament of Ontario immediately abandon the assessment and taxation of recreational trailers used on a seasonal bases in 2004; and that the government of Ontario consult with all stakeholders regarding the development of a fair and reasonable sticker or tag fee that would apply to recreational trailers used on a seasonal basis.”

I affix my name in support.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I’m pleased to introduce the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s health insurance plan does not cover the cost of PSA (prostate specific antigen) test as an early method of detection for prostate cancer in men;

“Whereas mammogram tests for women are fully covered by the Ontario insurance plan for early detection of breast cancer and the PSA test for men is only covered once the physician suspects prostate cancer,

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

“We support Bill 201. We believe PSA testing should be covered as an insured service by the Ontario health insurance program. Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canadian men. At least one in every eight Canadian men is expected to develop the disease in their lifetime. Some five million Canadian men are currently at risk in their prostate-cancer-risk years, which are between the ages of 45 and 70. For many seniors and low-income earners, the cost of the test would buy up to a week’s worth of groceries for some individuals.”

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

HIGHWAY 35

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): “Highway 35 four-laning

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas modern highways are economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario’s economy; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been planning the expansion of Highway 35, and that expansion has been put on hold by the McGuinty government; and

“Whereas Highway 35 provides an important economic link in the overall transportation system—carrying commuter, commercial and high tourist volumes to and from the Kawartha Lakes area and Haliburton; and

“Whereas the final round of public consultation has just been rescheduled;

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

“That the Liberal government move swiftly to complete the four-laning of Highway 35 after the completion of the final public consultation.”

Thank you to all the businesses in my riding that have been gathering signatures for this.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to introduce the following petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

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

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance plan."

I'm pleased to sign this petition to show my support.

1550

SERVICES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have yet another petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I affix my name in support.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): The following petitioners have decided to place my name on this petition, Mr. Speaker. I hope you don't mind if I read it with my name included.

It's a petition to the Parliament of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the so-called Tenant Protection Act ... has allowed landlords to increase rents well above the rate of inflation...;

"Whereas the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal created by this act awards major and permanent additional rent increases to landlords to pay for required one-time improvements and temporary increases in utility costs;

"Whereas the same act has given landlords wide-ranging powers to evict tenants;...

"Whereas our own MPP, Liberal Tony Ruprecht, called for a rent ... reduction at a public event in June" 2005;

"We, the undersigned residents of Doversquare Apartments in Toronto, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:...

"To shut down the notoriously pro-landlord Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal;

"To abrogate the Tenant Protection Act and to draw up new landlord-tenant legislation in consultation with tenant and housing rights campaigners."

I'll present the petition to our page, who is actually from Davenport. Thank you very much.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader):

On a point of order, Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 55, I wish to rise to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, November 28, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 27, Family Statute Law Amendment Act, and in the evening, second reading of Bill 16, the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act.

The afternoon of Tuesday, November 29, will be confirmed. In the evening, second reading of Bill 18, Budget Measures Act, 2005 (No. 2).

On Wednesday, November 30, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 21, Energy Conservation Responsibility Act.

On Thursday, December 1, afternoon and evening to be confirmed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2005 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2005

SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (N° 2)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 22, 2005, on the motion for second reading of Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts/ Projet de loi 18, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2005 et modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): On the last occasion I was here and spoke for some 18 or 19

minutes. Just to recap in a minute or so, for those who were not here or those tuning in for the first time on television, I talked about this act, Bill 18. It's kind of a strange little act. It is a compendium. It is An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures in a whole bunch of arcane ways, something that I think most citizens would find rather tedious and boring and wouldn't understand why we're even debating it at all.

I have to tell you, when I first read it, that there were a number of very funny things in here—the community small business investment fund, which is not funny, because that's taking away tax credits for investments in labour-sponsored investment funds. They're being phased out. There is no rationale given by the government, as I said in the speech, for doing this because in fact this is the only opportunity that many people of modest income and modest means have to actually invest in the province and in some very helpful projects that these labour investment funds have done in the past: things like building public housing and building infrastructure in communities where the labour investments are used. They're being phased out. There's no rationale for this at all. I'm at a complete loss as to why the government thinks this needs to be done.

I went into some of the others, though. The Electricity Act: Here's an example of one of the things that this act purports to do. The owner of a hydroelectric generating station located in an unorganized territory without a school board pays taxes to the province and not to the financial corporation. I guess it's just bypassing the financial corporation, which in the past sent it to the province. Now they have to pay it direct. I don't know the rationale for this. Certainly no government member spoke of this at the outset.

We have the Gasoline Tax Act. It did everything except lower the price of gasoline, which I think is what consumers were hoping you would do, or regulate it so we don't have the spikes we had all last summer. I think that's what they were hoping, but that's not in there at all. It's just something about whether the gas is clear or not clear.

We have the Securities Act, which gives the securities organization the opportunity to make its own rules. The committee that was set up, of which I was a member, the finance committee that studied this, said that the Legislature should be making those rules. I fail to understand how you can have an enforcer, an adjudication branch—which is not separated and has not done so—make their own rules. That will certainly not have the securities well looked upon by those people who feel they have been wronged by the system.

We have the Tobacco Tax Act, which I think is one of the most arcane things I have ever read. I read it in because, even after you read it and reread it and read it again, I don't think any rational person would have a clue what the government is trying to do with that.

Last but not least is the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation Act. I can't see how that is possibly a

budget measure. It allows an elected person from the city of Toronto to sit on the board, because currently—

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Do you oppose that?

Mr. Prue: No, I'm not saying I oppose it; it's just not a budget measure.

Here it is. It allows an elected person from the city and an elected person from the province to sit on the board, because heretofore they were not allowed to sit on the board. I'm not opposed to them sitting on the board, but I don't think it's much of a budget measure. It has nothing to do with what was contained in the budget of Ontario. In fact, the budget of Ontario was a really bad, mean-spirited, limiting budget. It did not do what the people of Ontario, and particularly its poorest citizens, had hoped it was going to do. This is, after all, an act to implement the budget measures. It describes in some detail the little, tiny nuances in the budget that the government wants to do, having come down with a sledgehammer against many people who had hoped that times would be better.

I'd like to return to that budget. It was a flawed budget. I have spoken in this Legislature on numerous occasions as to why it was flawed. It was flawed because it didn't do anything for the poorest of the poor. It was flawed because there was no extra money for housing. It was flawed because people on ODSP and people on general welfare did not get the monies they need. It was flawed because it did not end the clawback. It didn't do anything about the clawback, which you had promised to remove. It was flawed in every single social aspect that I can think of.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the housing portion of what was not in that budget and what is not contained in Bill 18. It seems that the Liberals of Ontario—this government—are allowing the federal government to give money; the municipalities seem to be matching the dollars; but there is very little by way of a budget for housing in Ontario. This province is doing virtually nothing. I've said this to the minister on numerous occasions, and I'll stand up and say it again today: This province is doing virtually nothing when it comes to building affordable and supportive housing in Ontario. When I've asked the minister in this House how many housing units are being built, I get all kinds of answers—5,000, 8,000, 9,000—the plans they have, the announcements upon reannouncements. But we know that in 2003, the first year this government was in place, there were some 20 housing units built, in 2004 there were another 20-something housing units built, and, when we ask how many are being built, we get thousands upon thousands.

I have to tell you, I was very impressed in this House the other day when a government backbencher stood up and wanted to know how many housing units have actually been built and occupied since this government came to power. The figure that was given by the minister on that date, and we're going to try to verify it, was that 893 housing units have actually been built, but they're not all occupied yet. This is in a city like Toronto, where

there are 75,000 families on the waiting list, and you've built 893 for the whole province. I have to tell you, I think that's bad.

1600

Yesterday, I put the question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing about the housing stock that is in the city of Toronto, the deplorable state of the housing stock that is here and how much money is in the budget this year for the repairs to that horrible housing stock. Of course, in this budget, not one red cent has been committed to that. In this budget, there is nothing and no hope for the people who live in subsidized and assisted housing in Toronto. I know the housing stock elsewhere in Ontario may be bad, but the city of Toronto has come forward and asked this government to make good on rebuilding the deplorable state of public housing in Ontario.

The former government did something I still decry to this day, so I'm going to get off the Liberals for just a minute and talk about the former government. They downloaded all that housing stock to the municipalities of Ontario, municipalities that at that time had neither the money nor, in some cases, the expertise to look after it. They downloaded it as is, having spent generally no money on repairs and no money on upkeep for the eight previous years. It was—if I can use the word, Mr. Speaker—a dastardly act. It was an act that was going to condemn people who live in poverty to live in squalor. What has happened is that these homes have been sent down to the city of Toronto, and \$244 million is needed to bring them up to code. Not even a penny of that \$244 million is contained in this budget of which we are speaking today.

For the last two nights, and for three days as well—as much time as I could get there—I have spent my nights and my time in the Jane-Finch community, or, as they'd like to call it, the 218. I went there and talked to the people who live there. I lived with them, I ate with them, I drank coffee with them, I met with them, and I went on a tour with them. I want to tell you that I have nothing but the greatest of respect for that community, and I have nothing but the greatest of respect for the people who live there. They are hard-working, they are decent, and they want to do the best for their children. They are like every other person in Ontario. But you know, they have something they cannot get around, which they do not have the money for, and that is the deplorable state and condition of the housing that we as a province have left to them and which the city cannot maintain.

One of them opined to me, and I think she was right, that we have a responsibility here in Ontario because, after all, we are the landlord, and if we are content to leave their housing in the deplorable condition it is in, we are no better than slum landlords. Do you know something? She was right. We are in fact slum landlords for what we have done to that community.

I am mindful as well, because I read the Hansard, although I was not in the room at the time, that the member for York West stood up and was scornful of me,

and said that I had been scornful of his community. I am not scornful of his community; I am there trying to assist his community. When I asked the question of those same people last night and today, about whether or not I had somehow maligned them by saying that they lived in deplorable conditions, or that I had maligned them by saying that the carpets in the halls and the public access ways were dirty, or if I had maligned them by saying that there was no shower in the apartment they had given me and that another family will move into, starting tomorrow, or if I had maligned them by saying that there were cockroaches and mice, they said no; I had not maligned them. What I had done was something that very few politicians have generally done, and that is go in there, see it and stand up here and tell the truth of the conditions under which they live.

I promised I would come back here and talk about it again today, and I intend to. These people live in difficult and trying conditions, generally through no fault of their own. The only public housing they can afford is old, it is decrepit, and it has not been kept up to standard. In fact, it is the only place they can afford to live because it is on rent-g geared-to-income. These are people who are, in many cases, on Ontario Works or ODSP, and in many cases are the working poor who make \$7.50 or \$8 an hour, which is not enough to afford standard rents in a city like Toronto.

They took me around this morning, along with Marilyn Churley, my colleague. We went around, throughout all those pathways, as they call them: Needle Firway and all those romantic names that one can find in North York. They took us around and we saw decrepit windows that were in some cases not there, with cardboard in them. We saw that they were leaking, in many cases, and on a first cold night already had the signs of frost and icicles hanging from them and were already starting to bleed on to the sills inside. We saw doors that had holes in them. We saw doors that had been kicked in. We saw damage done up and down the stairways and in the sills. We saw damage in the apartments that had been vacated. We saw graffiti on the walls from all the gangs. I'm not an expert on gangs, and I started to ask, "What does this mean?" It was explained to me that the gang puts their signature there and, if it's not challenged, that's their building. If someone challenges it, there might be a fight outside, and maybe a shooting. That's what these good, generous and decent people live with: gang violence and people putting graffiti on their walls, claiming buildings as their own.

They took us into one apartment and I nearly jumped a mile because a mouse ran right close to me. I'm not generally afraid of mice, but I was absolutely shocked to see this mouse in broad daylight—it wasn't even dark—darting in and out from the garbage and what had been left behind in probably one of the most decrepit living conditions I have ever witnessed in my life. I thought I had seen a lot as the mayor of East York in some of the privately owned buildings that were in such disrepair that they were a disgrace to our community, but I want to tell you, I think this one was even worse.

I saw cockroaches—live ones, dead ones. I saw bars on the windows; people who bring up children have bars on their windows if they live on the first floor. They've asked to have them removed, but they will not be removed because there's no money to remove them, so people virtually live in prisons in their own home. I saw in those apartments 40-year-old fridges and 40-year-old stoves. This is from the same government that tells us to buy energy efficient appliances and says that this is one of their platforms. Do you know that the people in this facility, the people who live at 218, or at Jane-Finch, have 40-year-old fridges and stoves? I don't know how energy efficient that is.

They also have electric heat. That is the only way of heating it up to standard. They have all had baseboards. Because it's so poor and so shoddy, they have baseboards with electric heat, which the taxpayer ends up having to pay for—the most expensive form of heat possible. They have leaking pipes. They have problems I could not even imagine living with on a long-term basis.

I've said in this Legislature before, and I'll say it again today, I'm a boy from Regent Park. I'm a boy who grew up in public housing. In fact, I lived in public housing my entire life until the day I got married. That's where I lived; that's what I know. But I have never seen the state of shoddy condition that I saw today in that structure and in that development.

Those people are wonderful people. I also didn't see just depressing things. I saw people of indomitable spirit. I saw people who gave me hope. I saw people, youth, who had rebuilt the interlocking pathways and the whole centre of the community. They had laid it themselves with brand new interlocking bricks so that the kids had somewhere to play, to shoot some hoops, to meet, to gather, so that it looked nice. They rebuilt it themselves with no assistance from the Ontario government. I saw youth who were replastering the walls; again, not one penny of assistance from this government which says that it's committed to public housing, not one cent.

1610

I take my hat off to the city of Toronto, which is doing the best that they can. The city now has an imaginative plan where the contractors that they hire to do the repairs must hire the youth who live in and around the facility. You had youth who had heretofore looked at that facility sometimes as a place to damage, sometimes, in their frustration, as a place not to like. They were the ones who were actually doing the plastering and the painting and learning a trade. I was heartened by that. I thought, "What a wonderful thing."

This is a province that does, and has done, virtually nothing to assist the youth. We talk about gun violence in that community. We talk about the deprivation and what is drawing people into that kind of gun violence, where they take life with hardly a care, even at a funeral, and we wonder why that happens. I am suggesting that the members opposite, all of you, should take some time to go into these public housing units and see the deplorable condition under which people live and the despair that

they have. Those young men who I saw plastering the wall this morning are, in my opinion, not likely to be the ones who go out and buy a gun and take life and cause harm. It is those who live in despair, who don't have that opportunity, who are doing that. If this government truly believes that it wants to help, I would suggest that this is the area you should go in, and that the money you have not committed to housing in this budget should be spent there.

I saw youth who were working in teams on projects as mentors. These were young kids who got paid \$10 a day and a little bit of food, who were in training to help younger kids so that they don't go down into that cycle of despair and violence. They had hope in their eyes, hope that I hadn't seen before, and they were doing it on a shoestring. I asked them and the people who were there, and not one penny is being spent from the Ontario government. There was nothing in the budget to assist them in any way.

I went on, and I saw a York University student. There's a group of youth and York University students who publish a little newsletter that's handed out to the youth and the people of the community. It's just a little Jane-Finch news that you can open up and see some of the positive things that are happening in the community, because God knows you'll never see anything positive in the local media. You'll see violence and all the stuff that is portrayed of that community. There they are publishing a little newspaper. I asked, "Who funds it?" Nobody funds it. They do it themselves. Not one penny comes from this government, although we all talk about how we want to help that community and other communities who are in despair.

The minister from the United Church, whom I had seen many times on television, is doing a tremendous job in the food bank, in trying to organize the community and trying to reach out in a multicultural way. Although he is a United Church minister, he also gives hope and celebrates events like Kwanza, Eid and Diwali. This is a multicultural, multi-faith community, and they are there doing their best.

I asked him, "How much money do you get from the Ontario government? How much support do you get? How much support do you get around the housing initiatives or what you're doing in this community?" You know something? Sadly, with this budget, not one red cent is going in there. He's despairing, too, although I don't think that's a man who's likely to give up.

Probably the most remarkable person I met, though, was a woman. She's in charge of the rec centre. I don't think she has any formal training to do it, but what a personality, what a commitment to her community. She cooks the food, she gives the guidance, and she is like a mother to the kids. She has literally taken them out of the doorways, out of the sills and out of the places where they were getting in trouble, and she has given them a mission, some hope and some opportunity. She said—and rightly so—that they live constantly hoping that things will get better, that governments will listen, that

somebody will look at the despair, somebody will try to do something about it. They wait year after year after year, and nothing happens. The conditions get worse, the governments ignore it, and, I would suggest to you, you can't do it any more.

I asked the youth, when I was leaving—I sat down with two of them: “What is it you want me to do at the Legislature? Do you want me to go back and talk about the conditions under which you are living, or is the member from York West right, that I am maligning you somehow?” They told me that I need to stand up and say what I am saying today, to take this opportunity to do it, and to talk about housing and how housing needs to be in the budget. That's what I promised them I would do.

They said that they need to have a sense of hope, a sense that things are going to get better, or that so many of them from that community are going to go down the road to despair. They all know youth who have guns. They all know youth who have been kicked out of school. They all know youth and their friends who have been hassled, in their view, by the police. What they want is to have hope. They want a government to listen to what is there and to use the budget and the whole wealth of this province to say, “We can do something for the people of Jane-Finch.”

The second thing they wanted was someone to stand up and fight for them. They said that their own politicians—be they at any level of government from that area—really don't do enough. They don't remember the last time that they have seen many of them. They don't remember the weeks or the years that have gone by that a politician has come to their community, to their meetings, to address their concerns and to try to fight for them at city hall or in the province, or in the federal government.

I promised them that I would use some of my time here today on this budget bill to talk to this government, to say that your budget bill is flawed. You've already passed Bill 197. You've already said that it's going to be the law. You've already stood up and congratulated yourself—and perhaps rightly so—in some areas that you've done in education, and perhaps rightly so in some areas around health. But I want to tell all of you: You have failed the people who live in public housing. You have failed them at Jane-Finch, you have failed them in Crescent Town, you have failed them in Flemingdon Park, and you have failed them wherever they live across this province, provided that you allow them to live in the conditions you allow them to live in, and provided that you accept that, as their landlord, you will allow that to continue.

The city of Toronto has some really good bylaw enforcement officers, as I'm sure does Ottawa, as I'm sure does Mississauga and Hamilton and every large city, and even some small ones who go out and look at the decrepit conditions of non-public housing, of private housing, and who make the landlords make the repairs and will not allow the conditions that I observed today to happen. But we have in the province of Ontario, through its down-

loading and through its neglect, places like Jane-Finch, like 218, where the kids live in despair.

I hope that I never open the paper again and see that a child has bought a gun and shot another child. We've seen it enough times this year. But I will tell you, I don't want to hear members opposite talk about, “How could this happen in our city? How could this happen in our province?” If you want to know how it happens, go and look at this place. Go and look when someone has no hope. Go and look when somebody has nowhere and nothing to turn to. Go and look when the only way they can hold their head up high and belong is to be in a gang because they've been kicked out of school. They don't have an education, they don't have a job, they don't have any future, they don't have anyone who will hire them. They go home to mice and cockroaches and filth every day, and the landlord allows it to happen. When you look at that, you'll know why most of these kids have a gun. I'm not saying it's the only reason but, boy, it's a big one.

1620

I'm asking members to do something about this. The city of Toronto has asked—I think rightly so, in this downloaded public housing frenzy that took place in the last government—that the province live up to its commitment. They have looked very carefully at the structural and necessary—not cosmetic—repairs to make it energy efficient. So that they can be sustained in the long-term, they need \$244 million. This budget has not one cent to go toward that.

I'm asking the members opposite to fight in your caucus the next time around to make sure there is \$244 million, that next March those young people have some hope and no despair, that next March that community knows someone listened, that next March that community can rightly be the kind of community of caring people they truly want to be. I don't want to leave them with no hope. I hope the members opposite are listening, and I'm very thankful I have not been heckled. I'm very thankful that most of you are hearing what is being said. I invite all of you to spend a couple of nights in that place or in another public housing development in your own constituency or one in Toronto, if you're here, during the Legislature. They would very gladly show you what it's like.

When I asked the minister yesterday if he would want his family to live there, he wouldn't answer, but I know he wouldn't. He wouldn't want his family to live like that, nor do the people who live there want their families to live like that. We have an obligation to do something. We can do something. Two hundred and forty-four million dollars is a lot of money. But kids shooting each other on the streets of our city is a lot more and a lot worse than spending it that way.

I've still got 12 minutes. I want to talk about other things in the budget as well, things that should have been or were not included in the budget, things like poverty and poor children. I've stood in this House the last two days and asked questions about that. I asked questions,

and I know my leader, Howard Hampton, asked questions, first of all, from the Ontario Association of Food Banks. Those questions were asked yesterday.

I didn't ask for a late show, because I don't really think that does much except allow for people to stand up and play the blame game. I listen to the ministers and the Premier whenever this issue of poverty is raised. It's always, "When you were in government..." Well, that was 15 years ago. I'm sure there were governments before the NDP that probably could be blamed too, or when they were in government.

That's probably the ultimate cop-out. Every time I hear it from over there, I cringe. I have to tell you that you are the government. You have a responsibility to look after the social and economic problems of this province. The people of Ontario vested that right in you. They vested that right in the 71 of you. In their wisdom, they determined that I should be one of your critics, and I take my critic responsibility well.

But I don't think the people of Ontario, and certainly the people who worry about poverty, the people who worry about housing, the people who worry about the less fortunate in our society and the people who worry about autistic kids, need to hear statements like, "When you were in government," or people going back 15 and 20 years to different economic circumstances, different times, before scientific breakthroughs in autistic research and all of the other things, and play a blame game. They are looking to you, quite frankly, for solutions. They are looking to you for a budget that won't be talking about whether there should be an elected person or not an elected person for a body that they don't know anything about. They're not looking, to you for arcane words, what some of these things mean around the tobacco tax. After having read it three and four times, I still can't figure it out, and there's been no explanation. They're not looking for the 23 schedules that are being changed. They are looking for real change. You promised it.

The people still live in hope. I suggest to you it's not too late. It's not too late for many of you, who I know are very proud Liberals, to go back to that very proud Liberal tradition. I remember it when I was a boy. I remember people like Lester Pearson, who had a proud Liberal tradition, who wanted to help. I remember Liberals in the House of Commons in the 1990s who voted unanimously to end child poverty. I remember Liberals in the federal government who put forward the child tax credit so that kids in Ontario and across the province wouldn't have their money clawed back. Then I see Liberals today who, quite frankly, in my view, are not much different from the Conservatives you replaced in many areas.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Sometimes I go into despair. I listen when ministers say, "When you were in government," and all kinds of silly things. I close my eyes and I still hear Mike Harris. I don't want to hear that from a proud Liberal Party. You should not be saying those things. You should be standing up in caucus and you should be fighting with the executive cabinet committees, and you should be saying what you want in the

budget. What you should be wanting is in that whole area of social policy, which has been neglected for too long. We have people on welfare who did not get a raise for 11 years. They finally got one of 3%. Did I think it was enough? No. Did you think it was enough? I bet you didn't think it was enough either. I understand why you voted for it. I understand that was all the money there was in a first budget when you were \$5.6-billion in the hole and struggling to get out. At least it was something. At least there was some hope for the people on welfare and ODSP.

But this budget, the one we are talking about today: Not a penny went to those same people. Do you think inflation costs went down for them? Do you think the cost of energy went down for them? Do you think the cost of living went down or the cost of riding on the TTC or the cost of medicines they may have to buy for a sick child went down, or the food that they eat went down? I don't think so. But the money did not come for them to pay for it. There was nothing in this budget for the poorest of the poor. There was nothing for the 144,000 children in Ontario who have to go to the food bank to eat. The same is true of ODSP. There was nothing for them.

Three weeks ago, the minister, in her wisdom, announced that she was cutting off the opportunity that many people on welfare and ODSP were taking to go to their doctors and try to get a food supplement. The minister said that this was milking the system; the minister said that this was somehow wrong. I don't know whether it's wrong or right, but I don't blame people who subsist on less than \$10 a week to feed themselves for looking for some way to get some more money.

I ask all of you to think about \$10 and whether you could subsist on \$10. I don't think you could. I know I've tried twice. Twice I went on the welfare diet and both times, for \$10, I lost four pounds. That's what I lost in 10 days: four pounds each time because the food was not nutritious enough at a buck and a half a day. Meals had to be skipped and I often went hungry. That's what these people have. And they have the temerity, the unmitigated gall to go to their doctor and say, "I'm not getting enough food to eat," and the doctor, quite wisely, says, "I think you need more money for food. I think that you're sick. I think that you're going to get really bad if you don't get more money," and signs the chit. Lo and behold, this person is now eligible for the lordly sum of \$200 extra a month in order to feed themselves and their family. That's where the money goes, you know; it goes to food. And the minister has determined that this is somehow cheating the system.

What's cheating the system is the welfare rate, not the welfare recipient. The welfare rate cheats them because they cannot afford to live, they cannot afford to pay the rent, they cannot afford to put food on the table. They do what they need to do. I think the minister should rethink that. I know many people in the medical profession believe that these children and these people deserve a great deal better.

1630

The minister talked the other day about the housing allowances and all those things. Well, the housing allowances are few and far between. There was a 400-person pilot project that seems to be successful. There are a few housing developments, one in my own riding on Coxwell Avenue for those people who are psychiatric survivors, where they have their rent supplemented. Good idea; I don't think it's a bad idea. I'm sure that every single Liberal thinks it's a good idea—except there's nothing in the budget that's increasing it for this year. There's nothing in the budget that you're going to extend that to the 75,000 families who are waiting for housing, or to all the thousands of families who are on ODSP or general welfare. They need the money too. They need the rent supplement too. Surely you have to have some compassion for what their needs are. They need a rent supplement as well.

I had a constituent come into my office the other day. I had to tell her that I'm going to try to get her a rent supplement, but that it's going to be very difficult. This is a woman who is 57 years old and who three or four years ago found out she has MS. The MS is progressing pretty quickly; it's unfortunate. She was forced to go on ODSP. She lives in a basement apartment, and up until a few months ago was able to eke out an existence; I wouldn't want to say live well. She was able to eke out an existence on the \$900 a month that this government and the previous government gave her as an ODSP recipient with MS who is struggling. She walks with two canes and/or a walker or a wheelchair on occasion. She is struggling to make ends meet.

She's a smart woman. When she discovered she had MS she applied to go into a co-op. She applied for a very good co-op down on the Lakeshore. She put her name on the list. She had been there for 10 years on that list. After 10 years on the list, she has made it up to number seven and she has been told that it's going to be at least another four or five years for her to get into that co-op, if she is lucky. She has since applied for a great many more places, holding out hope for that co-op which will best suit her needs. I said, "You get \$900 a month. You can't afford any rent in the private market, unless we can get you a rent supplement."

I phoned around and my staff phoned around for a couple of days trying to get this woman a rent supplement. You know, she doesn't qualify. This government will not let her qualify. They will not allow the rules for her to get a rent supplement. If she had a rent supplement, a couple of wonderful things would happen. First of all, she would move out of the basement apartment, which I'm sure is far too small for her needs, but when she moves out of the basement apartment, ODSP will qualify her for a scooter so that she can actually travel the city and get around and do her own shopping instead of calling friends, neighbours and charitable organizations to do it. She will get the scooter, but she can't get the scooter until she lives in a place that's either on one floor

or has an elevator, because she's not eligible under this government to get that scooter.

I thought it was pretty simple: Let's get you a rent supplement. Let's get you off the waiting list, let's give you \$100, \$200, \$300, \$400 a month and get you into an apartment, any apartment you want with an elevator. Let's get you this and let's make sure your life is made as comfortable as possible with a debilitating disease like MS. We're still working on it. All I do, from the government ministries and from the government itself, is run into roadblocks. There's nothing in your budget that lets deserving people like this get a rent supplement. It has not been extended. There's no money because you have put no money in the budget.

I look at all the others. I'm not going to despair because I told those kids this morning and those people in Jane-Finch and 218 not to despair, that we need to keep fighting. I have spoken for nearly my entire hour. I have talked to you about what you need to do. I've talked to you about what's not in this budget. I'm asking all of you who are here to go back when the next budget round starts. It's going to start in January. I'm on the finance committee. We're going to travel. We're going to listen to people. I'm asking you to listen to them as well and find it in your heart of hearts, no matter what the deficit is, to find the monies necessary to make people's lives better. Give them some hope, lift them from squalor, give them some opportunity, like the woman with MS. If you do that and think about that, then you might be worthy of calling yourselves Liberals.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments. The Chair recognizes the member from Ottawa-Orléans.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I would just like to mention some of the things that our government has done and will be doing. Housing was mentioned by the member for Beaches-East York. Our government has signed an agreement with the federal government. It's the largest agreement that has ever been signed for housing: \$301 million federal, \$301 million provincial. It will create 15,000 units of housing in Ontario. Of those, 1,000 units are now occupied and 4,000 more units are under construction. It takes some time. We know that for seven or eight years, the provincial government was out of investing in social housing. Our government has got back into investments and these units are being created. This will make a difference in Ontario.

We know that social housing was downloaded on the cities. I was on council when we got 10,000 units that came from the province; I think it was in 2001. Certainly, investments in social housing are needed. So these are some of the things we are doing as a government, and \$300 million is a lot of dollars considering that we are coming from a \$5.6-billion deficit that we inherited. It's a matter of trying to put the dollars in the right place.

The Minister of Education is investing in schools, and that's going to help. It's not enough, but it's certainly a big improvement, and that's going to help in some of these areas.

Thank you, Speaker. That's the end of my two minutes.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Of course, the former mayor of East York, the member for Beaches–East York, always speaks eloquently about these social issues, and more so tonight. It was a great speech.

He talked about the need for housing. I agree with the member that there are people in Toronto, and in Ontario really, who need adequate shelter. We live in a severe climate, and people who live in this climate need shelter, and they need adequate shelter.

In my entire life, I have never had a new house. Building new houses for public housing—I'm not sure I can equate that. Have subsidies for people so they can have adequate housing, whether it be 10 years old, 20 years old, or whether it be some kind of basement apartment or those kinds of things, providing it's adequate. Building a new house for someone who is not participating in the economy for one reason or another—I'm not sure I can agree with that.

I understand the member's point, and I agree with him that adequate housing is an absolute must in our country, but I am not sure that I would agree that the solution he gives is the right one. We would differ on that. I think we agree on the direction that it should take. I would go the subsidy route, and you would go the subsidized housing route, which quite frankly didn't work very well when you were in government.

1640

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I am pleased to participate in the debate on second reading of Bill 18. This government has made a commitment to the people of Ontario to build a strong economy, and what Bill 18 does is help to achieve that commitment. We intend to do all of what we said we were going to do, and this bill will assist us in achieving that.

As you can see, this bill also increases investors' confidence in Ontario. I'm sure all of us will agree that by doing that, there will be more investment in Ontario. By having more investment in Ontario our economy will do better, and of course we can afford more affordable housing because more tax will come in. Potentially we will be able to build additional subway lines where new lands will be available for affordable housing and normal housing for everybody to enjoy in Ontario.

In the taxation area, we are recommending an increase in the income threshold for the Ontario property and sales tax credit for seniors. That number is going up to \$22,250 a year. That increase will give real money for people in Ontario, for people in Concord and Thornhill, the area I represent. Seniors are certainly affected by our tax system. When we talk about property taxes, they certainly are affected more than others because of their fixed income. This will give them a little break, which I'm sure they will be very pleased to receive. That is why we should all support Bill 18.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): What we are speaking about is a budget bill. In light of what has taken place in the auto sector—I mean, we're starting to see the

dominoes fall. The auto sector is the largest employer in the province of Ontario, and Ontario has always been known as the economic engine of Canada. One of the problems we're experiencing is that government should be establishing a climate or an area that's designed to attract and foster business and business development. The best way to move on with life is a good job. Some of the areas that we should have been looking at in this is possibly the gas guzzler tax that a previous government—a Liberal government, I might add—brought in, which adds in excess of about \$1,000 for a vehicle that is mostly produced in Ontario. Something to enhance and promote the built-in-Ontario and driven-in-Ontario would certainly assist the largest employer.

And there are some other areas. We're hearing about electricity bills where there were overpayments or the fact that we made more money—we're giving the money back now. Should we not be looking at fostering and encouraging businesses by providing electricity at a reasonable cost so they can continue to deliver so many things?

Some of the other things that should be mentioned in the short time given here: fuel costs, for example. General Motors, like most businesses, runs on a just-in-time delivery service whereby they are incumbent on everything coming in by transport trucks. In Oshawa we have in excess of 1,000 trucks a day coming in, and when the fuel price goes up, guess what else's cost goes up? Business is restructuring and taking place, and all these affect the bottom line, which is fewer jobs in Ontario.

One thing I should say too: If as a society you're willing to accept purchasing goods at substantially reduced costs, so should you be willing to accept the wages that are in line with the production of those goods.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Beaches–East York for a response.

Mr. Prue: Just in the two minutes, for the member from Ottawa–Orléans, I agree: \$301 million plus \$301 million is a lot of money. The unfortunate thing is that the federal government has only put forward \$80 million of that. That was not matched, though, by the province at all. This budget contains only a maximum expenditure of \$30 million. Our own inquiries have shown that the agreement that was signed allows the province up to 20 years to pay their portion of the \$301 million. So you have 20 years, which will limit it and can limit it to an average of \$15 million per year. That is simply not adequate. It is not going to do what this much-ballyhooed agreement said it was going to do. It is pretty sad. It's these long-term, 20-year agreements, and the people need the help now.

To the member from Halton, I thank him for saying that something needs to be done. I know that he appreciates subsidies more than building houses. I appreciate the building of housing and fixing up the old housing more than I appreciate the subsidies, but I would have to agree with him that there is a mix available to this government. You need to do whatever you can, and in some cases it's the fastest to do.

The member from Thornhill was talking about new buildings, and yes, I agree: Get the economy going—great. But he talked about the increase to seniors, and that's a little-known thing in here. All it is, is that this is the same portion of a bill that is being put literally in front of every province and territory. It is to bring us in line with what the federal government has already done. Like so many bills, it is not an initiative of this government. It is simply putting the income tax in line provincially as well as federally. Will it give more money to seniors? Yes, but it is not something that I think you can take credit for. This was done by someone else in Ottawa a long time ago.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. McNeely: I'm pleased to speak to Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts. I think generally I want to speak about investments this government is making and how that impacts me in Ottawa-Orléans and in the city of Ottawa.

Orléans is a community of 100,000 people. We've been struggling in Ottawa to get our share of the health dollars. That goes back many years, when we used to provide health services to Quebec. Since we spend 46 cents of every dollar on health care, it is extremely important that each community in this province gets its share of the health care and that there is equity across the province for health care.

One of the things in the past, and certainly when I was elected in October 2003, was that I tried to get answers to see how we compared to other parts of this province. That information was not available, and didn't come to us until I think May of this year, when the ICES report came out. The report, Access to Health Services in Ontario, April 2005, was measuring the wait times that were in place in 2003-04, when this Liberal government was elected.

One of the things we heard during the campaign and during that period was that Ottawa had one MRI on a per capita basis, compared to Toronto having 2.2. This was in the newspapers. We felt this, because a lot of our people had to go to the US or Quebec. Actually, an MRI exam site was set up in Gatineau, Quebec. That's where a lot of the MRIs were being done. This was the word we could hear and it certainly caused us concern. We had two hospitals, the Riverside and the Grace, close. There was an attempt to close the Montfort Hospital, and the courts resisted that and told the government before us that they couldn't close it. There was an attempt to close the cardiac unit at the children's hospital. So there was a major attack on the health care services in Ottawa throughout that period, and that came out in the ICES report. That was the first time we could see it.

Ottawa, the Champlain district, which is probably 60% Ottawa, and the surrounding districts were 14th out of 14 when measured against other health districts across this province. Being 14th out of 14 explained everything, but it took a year and a half after we were in government before that information could be brought together. Now there's a Web site that's going to measure those wait

times. I must say that our government and Minister George Smitherman had been making announcements. The people who were using the diagnostic equipment or medical equipment in hospitals were coming to us, saying, "We have old equipment." Certainly a lot of that equipment has been replaced. We've been well treated by the provincial government in health care. Minister Smitherman tried to give us more knees and hips, but he couldn't, because there were not the operating facilities, the anaesthesiologists or the operation teams there. We've got the maximum that we can use.

1650

There have been big improvements in the Ottawa area since we came along. We have two new MRIs in our community, one in Orléans, and this has started to help the wait times. We still have people going to Gatineau, Quebec, but this hysterical thing of saying that because we were serving Quebec, it has hurt the Ottawa area—I'm very thankful that our minister got hold of the facts, has that Web site, recognized that we were last in the province in health care funding and has done a lot about it. We've seen it in our communities. I've seen it with the MRIs. MRIs that used to work eight hours a day are now working through the night.

This budget, with the concentration on health care, is going to really help my community, has really helped my community, and will be in addition to all the dollars that have gone into education and economic development. I believe this budget is the right budget for Ontario. It has taken us forward, and we're going to have that economic development ability to fund health, education and other ministries and certainly make Ontario a much better place.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Chudleigh: This is a budget bill, and it's interesting that this government is so interested in affecting—I think this bill affects 23 different acts. In reviewing those acts, those different statutes, albeit very quickly, my assessment would be that not one of those statutes would affect the people in Ontario who are losing their jobs to plant closures and plant layoffs in the province today.

I don't think this government truly understands what the working people of Ontario are going through in the province today. There have been over 8,000 people laid off in the last month, month and a half. There have been 42,000 manufacturing jobs lost in the last year. Yes, I know, I hear the minister and I hear the Premier talking about 214,000 new jobs in Ontario, but most of those jobs are part-time. When you have a part-time job—

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): Not true.

Mr. Chudleigh: Yes, it is true. I'm sorry, Minister, it is true. It's very true that the 214,000 new jobs that have been created in Ontario are mostly in the service industry. There have been some in education, but most of them are part-time jobs. When you have a part-time job, you don't go out and buy a house, you don't go out and buy a car, you don't go out and buy a major appliance;

you kind of hunker down and subsist until you can get yourself a full-time job on which dreams can be born, dreams can be made and dreams can be fulfilled.

I'm disappointed in this budget bill. I'm very disappointed that they're not taking any action against the travesty that is happening to Ontario's manufacturing industry.

Mr. Prue: To the member from Ottawa–Orléans, unfortunately I missed some of your speech because one of your colleagues came to talk to me about mine, but I did hear a little tiny bit of it.

I do empathize in some way with the circumstances that this government found itself in. I do empathize, knowing that the province certainly has suffered, first through a recession and later, through some years, a pretty brutal government, particularly those people at the lower end of the economic scale. But the reality is that you have an obligation to put forward a plan that will assist each and every person in this province to make things better. The members from the Conservative Party have talked to you about the need for a better economic plan. I can certainly echo that and say that. I would think that you could agree with that as well.

We have to protect the manufacturing industry of Ontario. For too long, we were classified as hewers of wood and drawers of water. We then developed a manufacturing base that brought great prosperity to this province. But now we are seeing the erosion of that prosperity, and it is not being replaced by high-paying jobs. He is correct that many of the jobs that have been created—and I'm thankful they're created—are in the service industry. They are not paid to the same extent or to the same money as good, mostly unionized jobs that are being lost.

People have a desire to get a job. I talked to a woman from Oshawa the other day. This was before the announcement. I was talking about an MPP, and she very proudly told me, "You guys are underpaid," because as a unionized auto worker in Oshawa, she made more than we did. I hope she's not one of the ones losing her job. But the reality is that those are the jobs people want, not the ones at minimum wage.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to engage in a short two-minuter. I want to thank the member from Ottawa–Orléans for describing the circumstances that he found himself in in their community about the MRI. I look forward to the day when I can stand and make the same announcement about Brant.

Having said that, I want to talk just a short moment about the member from Beaches–East York's comments about the housing issue. I want to assure him that there is a very large plan that is going on about housing. They're quick to say that there are no houses actually, but these are new housing projects that are going on. I think he realizes that it takes a little longer to get brand new projects up and off the ground.

One of the things I want to point out to him is something that's happening in my riding that I challenge all of us to take a look at as a possible template or model, and that is home ownership—not just rental units but home

ownership. The city of Brantford is partnering with Habitat for Humanity. They're going to be working together, doing a large project that's going to see about 45 homes come on-line, some of them with Habitat for Humanity and some of them with affordable housing. The consideration, and we're talking with the ministry right now, is about whether or not some of them can be home ownership. So I think we need to make some new challenges and new ideas, and I really thank the partners that are happening in my riding for that.

I think we need to know more about that. I'm going to do a paper on that, to actually present, to indicate that there's another way we can start attacking this housing shortage and home ownership shortage as well. My kudos to Habitat for Humanity, my kudos to the city for being creative in different ways to partner with these, and the private sector is on board with this as well. I think we need to take a look at that for the future, and in the near future.

The second comment, to the member from Halton in terms of the jobs: I want to make sure that he understands clearly that I see the glass as half full instead of half empty, half full inasmuch as we've generated a \$5-billion investment in the auto industry through our strategy, and I think that's a good start. It's not the answer to those people laid off, but it's a darn good start to make sure that we secure the manufacturing jobs.

Mr. Ouellette: I will continue on along those lines that I spoke about earlier and my perspective of a government's responsibility in providing a fostering environment so business can flourish and move ahead. Sometimes people classify profit as a bad thing, but in order for business to make a profit, people have to be helping out and working in those areas.

When you look at what's taken place recently in Oshawa and in the auto sector, you've lost thousands of jobs already, which have been mentioned, but some of the other areas that haven't been spoken about are the spinoff industries and what's taking place there. We effectively feel that there's going to be some large numbers come forward that are going to be directly affected because of these layoffs, because in what's taken place the feeder plants will no longer be able to supply those lines that won't be running in the years to come.

Some of the things the government should be doing, and I would hope that they're planning—this is a bit of a heads-up, I think. One of the areas that they can look at is that industry is changing; it's coming full circle somewhat again. We moved to just-in-time delivery service because it was more cost effective to transport those goods in as opposed to storing them or manufacturing them directly in that area. What you're going to see now, in my opinion, due to the high cost of transportation, is a movement back toward local development to feed those plants. What this government should be doing is looking at ways to assist those businesses so they can now provide plants in those areas, to make it easier to use the services locally as opposed to trying to transport them

from Michigan and other parts of North America that are becoming very cost-prohibitive.

One of the other areas that needs to be addressed from the auto sector as well, and I don't think I'm going to get time to talk about it, is retraining of the skilled labour. What kind of programs are going to come into place for these individuals who are going to be displaced because of the job loss and the shutdown there? How is government going to be able to provide a service to upgrade these individuals, as in the past? I believe that when the steel industry shut down, there were a large number of retraining programs for individuals. Hopefully, they'll come forward with agreements and amendments with the companies and workers affected, so that we can retrain those so they can become working parts of the community.

1700

The Acting Speaker: In response, the member from Ottawa—Orléans.

Mr. McNeely: I think the budget is moving in the right direction. To have \$5 billion of new investment in our major job creator in Ontario is the right direction, and it's shown to be the right direction with the large investments that have been coming our way and the net increases in jobs in the automotive sector from these new investments. So those dollars are in the right place. They're doing the right job and this government is on the right track.

The budget in many ways is on the right track because of the major investment in post-secondary education. We were among the last—I think we were 49th out of 52 when you look at the States and the province of Ontario. We were ahead of Mississippi in post-secondary education. This investment of \$6.2 billion is going to bring us up to the Canadian average, where we should be. We let that gap between what we put into the federal government and what we get out grow during the 1990s. As far as investments are concerned, the previous government did not put in those investments, did not keep up with where we should have been. We didn't have the support. To be last in post-secondary education in Ontario, one of the strongest provinces, wasn't right and that gap is being closed.

Yesterday the minister announced the retraining dollars that he's been able to work out with the federal government. Those are extra dollars for retraining our workers, making them the best workers in this country and making sure we keep jobs in Ontario.

I believe we're doing it the right way. This is the right budget. We're going in the right direction and we're going to make sure that Ontario is strong, has a good education system and has a good health system.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener—Waterloo): I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 18, the Budget Measures Act, 2005. Regrettably, during the past two years, the McGuinty Liberals have been running what have been very massive deficits in the province of Ontario, and that despite the fact they have seen their

revenues skyrocket by \$13 billion since taking office. It's very much like we've seen in the past. It's tax and spend and tax and spend, despite the fact that the Liberal government promised to balance their budget each and every year they were in office. However, their 2005 budget clearly shows that the deficit is not going to be eliminated until at least 2008-09.

Based on this tax and spend, I regret to inform this House that the average Ontario family today—that's two income earners making about \$61,000—that family and other families are now paying over \$2,000 more per year in additional taxes and costs that they were not paying when the Liberals came to office in 2003. So in two short years, people are now paying \$2,000 more in taxes. As a result, obviously, some people this year are going to have to do their Christmas just a little differently.

I was listening to the radio on the drive in this morning and there was mention of the fact that some families this year were going to face a tighter financial situation, not only because of increase in taxes but because of layoffs and some insecurity about jobs in the future. There were some suggestions as to how people could better make ends meet and how they could perhaps purchase some less expensive toys for their children, but still ensure they could have a happy holiday.

As the result of Liberal policies that have been introduced this past two years, we are seeing investment fleeing this province. Regrettably we have seen over 42,000 manufacturing jobs lost. Of course, this week we heard from GM that there were going to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 3,600 jobs—the number varies a little bit, but the reality is that these jobs are going. I can tell you that in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo and in the region of Waterloo, these job losses in the automotive sector are going to contribute, and are contributing, to some stress because we have some auto suppliers in our community, and obviously there's no guarantee they will be able to continue to have an obligation or a contract to provide these parts to GM. So there is some anxiety as a result of Liberal policies, which are contributing to the jobs lost in Ontario.

Some of the policies that are probably causing investors to seriously consider whether they will stay in this province, or whether they come into this province, or whether they will choose to expand their business in this province are, for example, the higher corporate taxes people in this province are forced to pay. They do so, but it's at a cost to jobs for people who obviously depend on the jobs to support their families.

It's also a result of the very uncertain energy policy we see in Ontario today. We have seen electricity rates skyrocket. In fact, we keep hearing that if you think your rates are high now, just wait until 2006. We are hearing from some of the plants that are closing that the decision to close the plant here and perhaps transfer the operation to the United States or to Mexico or to another province of Canada or to China has been very much influenced by the lack of security about future energy prices, and also by whether we'll even have an affordable supply of

electricity, because this government, under Premier McGuinty, made a promise, as you know, to close the coal plants by 2007. They have now realized that's not possible, so it's now 2009. But the reality is that there is no long-term plan to ensure that people and businesses in this province are going to have an affordable and stable supply of energy in the future. So again, as businesses make these decisions about whether they'll stay in Ontario or whether they'll expand, the whole issue of the skyrocketing electricity rates is a huge factor in that decision-making.

Of course, another issue that causes people to consider whether they're going to stay here in the province of Ontario is the escalating WSIB rates, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board rates. This government refused to listen to those who operate businesses in Ontario, to the employers who pay these costs, and those costs for some of the employers have increased very dramatically. That again is a factor people take into consideration. It's just plain bad news for employees, because it's the employees who are going to lose the jobs if that company decides they're going to have to lay off workers or if maybe they need to move elsewhere.

Another issue that certainly is a cause for concern in the case of one business, Dow Chemical in Sarnia, is Bill 133, the spills bill, where you're now guilty and have to prove your innocence.

Another one is the new health care user fees, from a government that was elected with a promise not to raise taxes, which at the time said, "I won't raise your taxes and I won't lower them either." We have a Premier who stood up during the last election campaign of 2003 on a regular basis and we saw him many times during the course of a day making this promise to the taxpayers in Ontario. And yet, what did this government do? They introduced a new health tax that is causing families and others in this province who pay this tax some extreme hardship; this from a government that at the same time has delisted services such as optometry—which means eye tests—physiotherapy and chiropractic services; this from a government that is asking people in this province to pay more through the health tax and yet get less. These are all factors that have contributed to a rather uncertain economic climate in Ontario.

1710

Unfortunately, it has contributed as well to employers closing jobs and laying off people. It's creating real hardship for people in this province. When you think of the fact that we've now lost 42,000 manufacturing jobs, plus the almost 4,000 GM jobs that have been announced, there are going to be men and women and their families and children who are very much impacted. Most of these jobs are being lost as a result of the policies that this McGuinty Liberal government has put in place during the past two years. We can only hope that they won't do more damage over the course of the next two years.

I want to turn to health, because their attempts to deal with hospitals are resulting in some hardships for people

in Ontario. We know that we don't have enough doctors, including family doctors. In fact, the Ontario Medical Association this week put out a press release and a report indicating that it was reaching a near-crisis point under this government. We heard from the emergency doctors who came to Queen's Park this week. They indicated they were seeing patients who were waiting longer and, as a result, were suffering and in more pain. They also spoke to some situations where it had actually contributed to the mortality of individuals who were not treated in time. We have nurses in this province—the ONA—who have indicated that despite the rhetoric that they were going to create 8,000 new nursing positions, those positions are not being created. We've also heard from some of the long-term-care facilities that this government has not been living up to its obligations in their commitment to funding. They met here at Queen's Park this week.

Let's take a look at the impact on hospitals that have been forced by the Ministry of Health to balance their budgets, and the cuts that we now see. Bluewater Health in Sarnia is laying off more than 100 health care jobs. That was October 14, 2005. We see that Lakeridge Health up in Oshawa—this was in an article on November 15—is cutting 300 positions, which includes cuts to nursing staff. We already know that emergency room physicians have told us that there are not enough beds and not enough nurses, and this is adding to the wait times in emergency rooms. Certainly, at Lakeridge Health, this is further going to exacerbate the waiting time situation. We know that as a result of the demands of this government, Cornwall Community Hospital eliminated 13 positions on February 10 of this year. Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, according to an article on February 17, laid off more than 20 people. Rouge Valley Health System, in an article on April 7, said they were eliminating 24 full-time and 12 part-time positions, which includes 10 full-time and nine part-time nursing positions. On February 11, in the Peterborough paper, we read that Peterborough will lay off 75 full-time and part-time staff, including nurses, physiotherapists and social workers. On September 21, we read that Quinte Healthcare is proposing to cut services by closing three critical care beds at Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital and six surgical beds at Trenton Memorial. On May 3, the Royal Ottawa Hospital and the Brockville Psychiatric Hospital indicated that they had laid off senior administrative staff and warned that more cuts were certainly going to follow.

We are seeing cuts in hospitals throughout Ontario—cuts that are impacting on patient care, that are cutting the number of nurses in our hospitals. As our emergency room physicians told us, because there are not enough beds in the system despite the fact that this government did make a commitment in 2003 to increase the number of beds in our hospitals, we are not seeing that happen. So patients are being asked to wait longer and longer for services. As a result, we're simply seeing more suffering, more pain and, as I indicated, in some cases people are

simply not receiving the health care they need and there are some deaths that result as well.

Let me go back to Lakeridge. On April 15 there was a headline: "Lakeridge Health Budget at \$18.7 Million in the Red Despite Significant Job Cuts." That was when the hospital had announced that they were going to cut these 308 positions to help reduce the hospital's deficit and meet the government's balanced budget requirement.

People worked really hard in all of the hospitals throughout Ontario to try to maintain the level of service, to maintain the staff complement that they believed was necessary to meet the needs of the people in their area. But, regrettably, they have been forced to make these cuts, and it is going to cause further hardship and increase waiting times throughout Ontario. As a result, people are going to suffer.

Rouge Valley Health System on April 7, as I said, announced their intention to eliminate these 24 full-time and 12 part-time positions. We know that these types of cuts do impact access to patient services. So it's important to remember that that community is going to be impacted.

Of course, here we have another article from Lakeridge Health—again, this constant talk about 300 job positions cut. This includes cuts to nursing staff in Port Perry. But, again, they stress that the government has asked them to balance the budget. They've done everything they can in non-patient-care areas. So in order to balance the budget, they had to submit plans for patient reduction options. People are trying to do what they can but it's certainly difficult.

At the Bluewater Health board—this is interesting. October 14: It says that the Bluewater Health board had announced in July it was axing 169 jobs. It was cutting operating room times, closing labs and imaging departments and shutting down the palliative care unit. It also goes on to say that this announcement by the Bluewater Health board has sent shock waves through the Sarnia and Lambton communities. I know that, because I have had hundreds and hundreds of names on petitions indicating their concern about these job losses that potentially are also going to contribute to a reduction in operating room times, closing of labs and imaging departments and shutting down of the palliative care unit as they know it today. The cuts will include cuts to nursing staff, technicians, housekeeping, maintenance and security. When they made this announcement, it still left the hospital with \$2.4 million more to cut. So it certainly is contributing to less access to services within our hospitals.

This Peterborough headline in February of this year said, "Among 75 full and part-time layoffs, the hospital will lose 39 registered practical nurses, four registered nurses and a number of physiotherapists and social workers."

1720

These nursing cuts that I'm talking about that hospitals were forced to make in order to meet the balanced budget requirements of this government are in addition to the layoffs or firings that hospitals were asked to make by

this government in January. In fact, they were given \$91 million by this government so that they could fire 767 nurses. It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever that you would give hospitals that amount of money so that they could simply lay off and fire more nurses.

We see that all of these initiatives demonstrate that this government doesn't have a plan for health care. People are desperate to have access to a family doctor. They are desperate to ensure that once they're diagnosed with a condition, and someone indicates to them that there's a need for surgery, that surgery would take place as soon as possible, not one or two years into the future. Yet, with these cuts in hospital budgets, nursing and auxiliary staff, the wait times are simply going to go in the wrong direction and have a very, very detrimental impact on patient care.

I talked about the struggle that the Cornwall Community Hospital was having in dealing with its \$5-million deficit. Everybody wants to be assured that there will be no cut to services. I mentioned the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

If we take a look at what's happening around Ontario, certainly if we take a look at the OMA report, if you take a look at the headline that ONA used, words that both doctors and nurses are using today are, "There is a crisis." This crisis—that's their word. That was the word of the OMA and that was the word of ONA, the nurses' group. This crisis has now been developing and worsening under the watch of this government. Certainly I won't be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments.

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I'm pleased to participate in this debate on Bill 18, An Act to implement 2005 Budget measures and amend various Acts.

In this bill, if passed, the government is setting their key priorities. One of the key priorities is that they are making some key investments. The key investments that this government wants to make are in the areas of health, education and housing.

In my own riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, this government is building a new, 608-bed, state-of-the-art hospital, which will create new jobs as well as look after the health of the people of this province.

This government is also committing itself to invest in education. This government has committed \$6.2 billion over the next five years in post-secondary education. This is the largest investment this government has made in the last 40 years—the largest ever made by any government.

I believe that Bill 18 is the way to go, and this sets up the priorities by our government. Our government is doing the right things. They are making the best investments in the areas of health. I am really proud of this government and I want to support this bill.

Mr. Chudleigh: I appreciate the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, who spoke so eloquently on this bill. She echoes my same thoughts: that this bill, being a budget bill and dealing with 23 different pieces of legislation,

doesn't do one thing for the people of Ontario who no longer have a job, who have been laid off, or whose companies have closed. There are over 40 companies in Ontario that have announced their closure in the last month and a half, the largest among them General Motors, which is closing their plant number two. This is a wake-up call for anybody who doesn't understand that this province has some serious difficulties, brought on, I might add, in my opinion, by the unprecedented, historic tax increase in the spring 2004 budget. The lag time between a budget introduction, a government policy introduction, and the actual implications that it has within the business community is well known to be a year, a year and a half, two years. Well, here we are a year and a half after that application of the largest budget increase in Ontario's history, and now we're seeing companies close up across Ontario.

This budget bill which we are debating before the House today has not one thing in it that will help the people of Ontario who are facing a very bleak Christmas. They are facing a Christmas without a job. They're looking into the new year when they're going to be laid off or their job is going to be discontinued or they're looking at a finite period of employment. The employment that is available to them in this province now is part-time and it's in the service industry. It's disgusting.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I thought the comments made by our good friend the member from Wellington–Grey, I think it is—I never get the ridings right.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mr. Bisson: Kitchener–Waterloo. Thank you very much. That's somebody else.

I think her comments were well done, but one of the things I would like to have heard is her comments and thoughts in regard to where the federal government is going with its largesse. We've noted over the last week or so that there's this imminent federal election being called and all of a sudden the federal government is out there on a spending spree. I always thought Paul Martin was a fiscal conservative but it would appear that Mr. Paul Martin has become somewhat less than a fiscal conservative when you take a look at the almost \$3 billion to \$5 billion that he's announced over the last week. I think it's rather interesting.

I'd like to hear the member's comments on that and specifically on the softwood lumber industry, because we know there was an announcement today of some substance. The federal government all of a sudden has woken up and found out there's a crisis in the forest industry. I say, better waking up late than never at all, I guess, but I wonder where they've been for the last two years. Could it be that an election is going to be called in a couple of days which all of a sudden makes it recognize that there is a crisis in the forest industry and that somehow they've got to find some way of responding? I just find that if people think of us as politicians in a cynical way, this is much the reason. Sometimes a lot of

political games are played on issues that, quite frankly, deserve our fullest attention.

The other thing I would say to the government with regard to this particular budget is that it's yet to be seen if a number of the initiatives announced in the budget this year are actually going to be coming to fruition, because we've noted over the last number of years—and this Liberal government and McGuinty have not invented this—that governments in the past have made fanfare announcements in their budgets and we haven't seen a heck of a lot come of them when it comes to implementation. I'm just wondering if the member wants to comment on whether she expects those things that she cares about in the budget to be implemented.

1730

Mr. Milloy: I listened with great interest to the member's statement. Early on, she spoke about a certain, shall I use the words "lack of credibility," in the last election that came forward. She talked about a Premier who made some comments. I was quite shocked when I found that she didn't talk about Premier Ernie Eves, who stood up week after week, evening after evening, throughout the leaders' debate and said, "Our budget is balanced." I attended constituency meeting after constituency meeting, all-candidates' meetings, where I heard from my Conservative opponent, "We've balanced the budget." He pointed to the public accounts that came out in August, which said, "Despite the fact that Ontario had had some hardships this year, we're on our way to balancing the budget." I think we were a little bit surprised to come in and find a \$5.6-billion mess that the Premier of this province, Premier Eves, had forgotten to tell us about.

At the same time, my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo, a neighbouring riding, mentioned the fact that the health premium—Ontarians had gotten nothing. That is an outrageous statement. I think it's also an outrageous statement for someone who's coming from Waterloo region, where we've seen the type of investments in health care over the last two years which have shown the results of the health premium, whether it's more money for home care, whether it's more money for home supports, whether it's money that's gone into our local hospitals for hips and knees, for cardiac, or for cancer care. We stood in her riding several weeks ago and announced the go-ahead of the capital plan for Grand River Hospital, where we're going to see a new intensive care unit and where we're going to see expansion in terms of mental health services.

The health premium has gone into improving health care in this province; it has gone into improving health care in Waterloo region.

With 11 or 10 seconds left, I also have to mention the \$6.2 billion put into post-secondary education. Again, as a member from Waterloo region with three leading post-secondary institutions, how could you ignore that?

The Acting Speaker: In response, the Chair recognizes the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Witmer: Thank you very much to the members for Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale, Timmins–James Bay, Halton and, of course, Kitchener Centre.

I just want to correct the record. To the member from Kitchener Centre, I am so pleased you talked about the health investments, because I am pleased to share with all of the people here that it was our previous government—

Interjection.

Mrs. Witmer: It was our government that set up the Health Services Restructuring Commission. As the member full well knows, it was our government that made the announcement in order to ensure that St. Mary's Hospital in Kitchener would have a new cardiac centre. It was our government that announced that there would be a new cancer centre. It was our government that announced the first MRI—in fact, we did two. It was our government that actually introduced and put into place the first community health centre.

So yes, we have enjoyed a tremendous growth in health services in the region of Waterloo, in Kitchener–Waterloo. We have to thank the previous government for all of the investments that were made. There were millions and millions and millions of dollars invested into our community. I'm just so glad that the member reminded me of all of those investments that we made.

We also made huge investments in post-secondary education. We also announced many new schools which were going to be built. We have Sir John A. Macdonald, which is a new school, we have elementary schools, and I am very pleased to say that Conestoga College in our community was the beneficiary of our largesse, as was Laurier, as was the University of Waterloo. We now have a new centre. I can tell you that tremendous investments were made by the previous government.

Unfortunately, the budget we have before us today only leads us to more job losses.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Bisson: I was just waiting with anticipation to have an opportunity to talk about the budget bill. I'm telling you, it's so exciting because, when we talk about the budget bill, we can raise a whole bunch of issues. This is my opportunity, I guess, to put my shopping list out there for issues that matter to me and, I would argue, probably matter to many people in my constituency, as it probably does in many other ridings.

I just want to lay out, in no particular order, a number of issues that I've seen that have been surfacing over the last couple of years that seem to be indicating some kind of a trend when it comes to services. The first thing I want to talk about is services in the community, when we talk about community care. We know, for example, unfortunately there are many people in our communities who need to have special services to be able to live at home independently. We talk about organizations that provide everything from meals on wheels to respite care for caregivers, to nursing care in the home—whatever it might be in order to give people an opportunity to live at home independently. I think all members of the assembly agree with that. There's not a person in here who doesn't

believe that we should make all the investments that are necessary in order to allow people to live at home independently and to participate in our communities as full members of the community. But what I've been noticing as of late is that there seems to be, as we say in French, un recul, or in English, a little bit of going backwards when it comes to access.

Here's my observation. What's kind of interesting, too—because just over the last month or so it seems to me I've been getting a lot more of these complaints. I don't know if it's because something recent has happened or if people are hearing that I've been raising these issues publicly, and all of a sudden they're enticed to come to my office, but services for the developmentally handicapped and also for the physically developmentally handicapped—both mentally and physically developmentally challenged, I should say; pardon me.

What I'm seeing is this: For example, in Timmins there's a program that provides respite care for parents who have children with autism, especially those parents who have kids who are a little bit older. As we know, it's sometimes a handful. Parents have to work, both mom and dad. Respite care is a very needed service to give mom and dad a chance to go out and do the banking, do the groceries, do those things that need to be done and not have to always watch the child every waking moment of the day. As we know, it is quite a struggle for parents with autistic kids, because you really can't take your eyes off them. We know, unfortunately, of many tragic instances where children have died or been injured because parents took their eyes, just for a fleeting moment, from a child who is autistic, and sometimes these kids, because they tend to be very active, can get themselves into trouble. God knows, every child can get in trouble. But it's even more difficult for those kids with autism.

The thing I want to raise is that I've been getting an increasing number of complaints that parents who need services when it comes to respite care basically are not able to get that service. What we've seen lately is that Access Better Living in Timmins has really had to struggle to provide services to the community. I want to say up front that it's not the fault of the agency. I believe Access Better Living, and Sandra Williams, who runs the agency, and her staff are doing a great job. The issue is the level of funding.

For example, I'm dealing with one particular case where a councillor in the city of Timmins, Bill Gvozdanovic, who has a son who is autistic, has been told that he has three hours of respite care from now to the end of the fiscal year, which will be March 30. I find that rather distressing. I've raised this issue in the House with the minister already; I've gone to her and spoken to her individually. Bill and his wife are at their wits' end, because they're at the point where they don't know how they're going to manage the rest of the year.

What seems to be happening is that the lauded announcements that the minister, Madam Papatello, has been making do not seem to be getting out into actual

services. I think it speaks of some problem that we have within the system.

Mr. Speaker, I would like at this point to call for a quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Is there a quorum present?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is present, Speaker.

Mr. Bisson: One should look over his shoulder when he's calling for a quorum. Ah, he snuck in. Very good. I didn't see you. Anyway, we tried. I tell you, sometimes the plans of mice and men will lead to naught.

My point is that in this particular case when it comes to respite care for children with autism, it is really becoming a big problem, because we are finding that many of the parents who need services are being told by the community agency that services need to be rationed. The agency is at their wits' end because they don't want to ration services—certainly not. They want to provide the services that are needed by the community. Therefore, there's this lack of services.

Like I say, I've had an opportunity to raise this with the minister on a couple of occasions now, both in the House in the form of questions but also by way of conversation and by way of letter. It seems that what we're hearing is that there is money being announced by the minister responsible for community and social services, but the money doesn't seem to be getting to the agencies. I have to ask myself what's going on, and it's one of the questions we need answered by this government: What is happening? If you're making announcements, if there are dollars being announced by the minister of the government to provide services in the community, why is it that we're not seeing the money? I will hazard to guess that it's what we've seen in other areas, where there have been a number of announcements about all kinds of things, but the money has not yet flowed. I would just say that the government should be in a position where if it announces money, we should expect the community agencies to get that money on a very rapid basis, because it raises hope within the community, and the community's hopes are dashed when they find out that the services aren't there.

I'm hoping that that money will see its way to the community agencies, but I raise it in debate here in the context of the budget because if the government has made plans in its budget to provide dollars for community agencies like Access Better Living to provide services, then it's up to the government to make sure those dollars are flowing to the agency. I am being told one thing by the minister, but am being told quite differently by the agency.

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During constituency week, a couple of weeks ago, all of us travel through our ridings, and those who have large ridings like mine hold what we call community clinics. I was, I believe, in Fauquier, and a young woman, Jessica Bordeleau, came over to see me and told me the following: She is in a sheltered workshop and up until recently had an attendant who would provide care, when

she was there, 100% of the time because there needs to be somebody with her, given her condition. She cannot be left alone. She needs assistance with various parts of daily living. She was lucky because the funding that was provided to the agency in this case was provided for two people, but the second person never got to the agency. The money was provided for two people at 50% each, so because the second person was not in the agency getting care, the agency—rightfully, I think, in their call—decided to provide 100% of the funding for the individual, but when that other person came into the system, she had to be cut back by 50%.

Again, the same story. As I talk to the agency—in this case, the director, Mac Hiltz—I'm being told that the only money they've seen come through their door is the 1.5% they received by way of core funding. The 1.5%, as we all understand, doesn't keep up with inflation. If you look at where hydro rates went last year, where rents are, where wages for employees have gone up, 1.5% doesn't cut it. They may not be falling back as quickly as if they had got nothing, but they're certainly not moving ahead.

As Mac said, "Listen, I would love to give Jessica 100% service, as we used to before, but pray tell me where I'm going to cut somebody else's service." That's the dilemma the agencies are in. If somebody gets something more, somebody else is going to get something less, which speaks to the issue that we are not funding community support services to the degree necessary so that people can live at home independently, and can function within our communities to become fuller members within the community.

I think that's sad, because in the end it's far more expensive to go the other way. If people end up falling through the cracks, either they're going to go into crisis—if they go into crisis, the health costs, the social costs, and I would say even the human costs could be quite tragic, and not only is it tragic to the families, but to the government. I think you'll end up spending a lot more money.

One of the things we need to look at, and maybe it's something the government needs to do, is to mandate one of the standing committees of the Legislature to take a look at what is happening to community support services across Ontario. I don't believe it should be a committee specially appointed by the minister; we all know what happens with those. I think a committee within the standing committees of the Legislature could be given the mandate, either this winter or this summer, to look at what is happening with funding and make recommendations to the government. There might be a case to be made that there is a way of shifting money around; I don't know. There might be enough money in the system to provide services for people if we organize ourselves differently, or maybe it's a strict question that we've got to put more money in, at which point we have to ask ourselves the question, as legislators: Where do we take the money from? What other program is maybe less needy so that we can make sure people get the services they want?

That's one of the things I want to talk about in regard to this budget bill. I just want to make the point, once again, very clearly: If you're going to announce something publicly, you should push the money out the door. Clearly, what's happening in the case of Jessica and what's happening to Bill's son is that the money that has been announced to go through the door has not gone through the door and the agencies aren't getting it. People's hopes are raised and dashed. It's a very tragic thing for individuals.

The other thing I want to raise in the context of this budget is another issue, which the former health minister for the Conservative caucus raised, and that is the whole issue of the perception of health services. I'm going to say up front: In Canada, we have the best health care system in the world, bar none. I think we're very fortunate. We should not speak so disparagingly about health care as to say it's a total failure, because I think it's really a disservice, not only to the ministry staff but the front-line staff as well, when it comes to services. It always strikes me, and I say this as an opposition member: Somebody will stop you on the street or at the coffee shop and say, "Our health care system's awful." Well, talk to the person who comes in contact with the health system, and you find out that it's not as awful as it's purported to be.

Is that to say there are no problems? Of course, there are problems. I just have to say that the danger the government runs in the decisions they've made, by moving with the health tax as they did in the first budget, which was the breaking of a big promise, "I will not raise taxes," is that they've really set themselves up in a position for the next election where the public is going to say, "All right, I'm paying \$2.5 billion more in taxes that I didn't pay before. Am I getting more services?"

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Is it \$2 billion? Sorry—was it \$2 billion or \$3 billion? I don't remember.

Mr. Prue: It was \$2.4 billion.

Mr. Bisson: I was close. I said \$2.5 billion; it's \$2.4 billion. I see different people throwing up three and five fingers. My point is that the danger the government runs is that by raising the tax, it also raises the expectation that, in the end, health care services will be made much better. Government, as I know it, because I was a member of a government: You can stand in this place or you can stand on a street corner every week, making announcements that the health care system is better, but the litmus test is what the public sees when they enter the system. I would venture to guess, from what I'm seeing out there, that the system is no better and no worse than it was before, and that's the danger for the government. What happens in some cases—for example, I'm dealing with a couple of people right now on issues of travel grants. They have to see specialists in order to deal with particular issues. Their family doctors are saying, "I don't want you seeing specialist A in Sudbury because I think your condition warrants that you see specialist B" in Toronto or Kitchener or wherever it might be. Therefore, the travel grant is not approved, because you're not

going to the closest specialist. People like that say, "With \$2.4 billion in extra taxes, am I any better off?" That's what it's going to come down to.

What I'm seeing in my constituency is a lot of people who are feeling that it isn't any better than it was before. It's not easier to get a travel grant. Certainly, if you have a heart attack, it's like before: Bam, you're in the emergency ward, you're treated, you're put in ICU, and if you've got to get surgery, you're in. Those emergency services in Ontario are second to none. It becomes more of a slippery slope where we get into elective surgery and elective services. That becomes much more difficult because the patient has an expectation. For example, if it's for oncology, "I want to be treated right now. My doctor says I have cancer. I want treatment right now," and the person says that you've got to wait three weeks or five weeks. It puts that patient in a tizzy because all they know is that the more quickly you treat cancer, the better the chances of survival. That's going to be the litmus test. Will people really see that they're any better off? I don't see the evidence of that at this point.

I just caution the government that you've created one heck of a hill—not a hill. That wouldn't be fair. You've created one heck of an expectation that I'm not sure you're going to be able to live up to.

Interjection: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Bisson: I hear a government member saying, "Oh, yeah." Well, let's see. In the next election, that "Oh, yeah" will be tested by the public, right? I'm just saying that that's the problem. I am seeing in my constituency that it isn't that our system doesn't work, because it certainly works for people with emergencies etc. But the system is not markedly better than it was prior to the \$2.4-billion tax that the government announced in its first budget. I just say that there's a bit of a danger for you on that one.

I do want to give the government some credit, though. I've come into this House and criticized the government at times. At times, I've given the government some credit on things. There was an application made by the town of Kapuskasing to create a community health centre. It's something we've been working on for a long time. Unfortunately, the previous Tory government had stopped the NDP initiative of creating health centres across this province. There hadn't been any developed in the time they were in government. This government committed to doing that. In fact, we got our community health centre announced about two weeks ago in Kapuskasing, and I want to say to the minister, George Smitherman, as I said publicly when it was announced, kudos on that one. I think that's something that was well-deserved and is very well received by the community of Kapuskasing. Those are the things you can demonstrate, if there is any benefit for you, as far as the \$2.4-billion tax increase. I guess that to a degree, you can point to the health centre in Kapuskasing as being one of those examples.

But when I look across the riding at, for example, dialysis services: We are still without dialysis services in the community of Hearst. Hearst people who are on

dialysis still have to go to Kapuskasing or Timmins to get weekly dialysis services. On days that the weather is bad, that becomes a very big problem. We seem to be having a markedly increased number of people who need dialysis services in the Hearst area. I think that people in Hearst are going to ask, "Am I any better off?" Then they see things like what happened recently, where the Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board had basically announced that there would be a reduction in ambulance services in the communities of Hearst and Kapuskasing. In the case of Kapuskasing, they would have had to go from 24-hour service down to 16-hour coverage, which is to say you'd have no coverage at night and the paramedics would have to be called in, on-call. On the issue of Hearst, there was going to be reductions of services there where I believe about eight paramedics were going to be let go.

We had a number of community meetings. I met with the chair of the district service board and the mayor, J.C. Caron. I dealt with Steve Trinier, who is the director of ambulance services for the DSSAB and other people. What it really came down to was that they said this: When the land ambulance services were transferred to the municipalities, they were guaranteed they were going to get 50-cent dollars. This goes back to my argument: They've got to see it getting better. Here, they were promised 50-cent dollars on downloading the ambulances, but where we find ourselves now is that the 50-cent dollar is no longer a 50-cent dollar. Because costs have gone up and the province has not increased its share of monies toward land ambulance services, this means the share of the cost of ambulance service has gone up for municipalities, where the province is now paying around 36% versus the 50% they were supposedly going to pay before.

There's a happy ending to this story. We did a lot of work trying to convince the DSSAB that they needed to find some other way to find savings rather than cutting out emergency services in those communities, and the DSSAB found a way to do it, but I want to point out that it means they've got to find savings somewhere else. The DSSAB was forced to a decision: "OK, we've saved the 24-hour service in Kapuskasing. We've actually increased services a little bit in Hearst." There was going to be the loss of one permanent paramedic, but they managed a shift so there's more coverage on the weekend. I

give J.C. Caron, the mayor of Kapuskasing, who is also the chair of the DSSAB, much of the credit on this one.

But the DSSAB is in a very tough spot. They now have got to go somewhere else to get the money. My point comes back to my first one, which is that at the election date, will people think they're any better off as a result of the health tax they have to pay? For the people of Hearst and Kapuskasing, when it comes to land ambulance services, they're probably going to say, "No. Jeez, we almost lost it. If it hadn't been for our municipality, we would have lost emergency paramedic services in both Kapuskasing and Hearst."

I say to the government, that's the challenge you face, trying to convince people that the services are better. I don't think an announcement a week, announcing the same thing over and over again, by Minister Smitherman is really going to meet the litmus test when it comes to the public being convinced their health services are better. What they're going to want to see at the end is, when they access the system, "Am I any better off?" That's going to be the test.

I don't have enough time, but I want to say that the other issue the government needs to respond to is the whole issue of what is happening in the forestry sector, not only in northern Ontario but across the province. The industry is in a heck of a mess, and it's not completely an issue that is controlled by market events or what is happening with the Americans or the American dollar. Much of the problem, as the industry says, is a made-in-Ontario problem: the cost of fibre and the cost of transportation of fibre, but the biggest one of all is the cost of electricity. With electricity prices as they are now, we've already seen the mills starting to shut down. You saw Kenora go down; you saw Thunder Bay go down; you saw a whole bunch of other announcements already go down. There will be a lot more, especially if the government moves where I think they will this spring, which is to eliminate the rate cap, and that will push hydro prices another 15% or 20% higher. It will be a disaster for the forestry sector and others across this province.

The Acting Speaker: It being approximately 6 of the clock, this seems like a timely spot to adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m., Monday, November 28.

The House adjourned at 1754.

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Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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