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Tuesday 18 April 2006

Mardi 18 avril 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 18 April 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 18 avril 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006

SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 81, An Act to implement 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 81, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When this bill was last debated by the House, the New Democrats had the floor, so now I look to the government side for a speaker. The member for Mississauga West.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's good to speak on a topic on which I feel very strongly, which is the budget that this government presented this year.

This bill places Ontario on track to eliminate a chronic budget deficit inherited from not one but two former governments. Ontario's public debt grew—grew, mind you—by more than \$24 billion on the watch of the former government. Shortly, the chronic deficits that contribute to that slide into public debt will stop and Ontario will have a sustainably balanced budget. That means a sustainably balanced budget without selling highways. That means a balanced budget without privatizing hospitals and schools. It means a budget in balance even as wait times in health care are coming down and as our infrastructure finally, for the first time in more than a decade and a half, begins to improve.

Let's be specific. For those of us in growing Mississauga, that means capital funds for three hospitals that serve us: Credit Valley in my riding of Mississauga West, the Trillium Health Centre in southeast Mississauga and the William Osler Health Centre in Brampton.

For surgeons in our hospitals, expanding infrastructure means more hours in the operating theatre each week. One of the conundrums for our surgeons is that the amount of time they can spend in the operating room practising their craft is often only five to nine hours a week. So expanding infrastructure in health care is one way to ensure that our surgeons, who have the capacity to do more, are able to do more. And making that pie bigger is

the only thing that's going to be necessary to decrease the wait times that have bedevilled those of us in the high-growth areas, such as Mississauga and Brampton, such as the fast-growing areas in York region, across the top of the city.

For those who need operations, addressing infrastructure in a deficit means shorter waiting times. It means you're going to get your operation sooner rather than later.

Contrast that with the approach taken by the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition exhorted us and said, "But you could have balanced the budget." Separate from that the Leader of the Opposition's difficulty in understanding the difference between one-time funds and ongoing funds. He said we could have balanced the budget, but that meant my telling people in Mississauga, "Well, we can't get a start on phase 2 of the Credit Valley Hospital." It would mean people in the southeast corner saying, "Well, we can't put more capital funds into Trillium." It would mean telling people, "Well, we can't build those new schools."

One of the things that one of my colleagues mentioned to me at dinner tonight struck home. We were talking about the frequency of trains and it occurred to me then that there are as many trains from London into Toronto as there are from Meadowvale into Toronto. There are a lot more people who need to commute each day on the Milton line, who get on that train at Milton and Meadowvale, and Streetsville and Erindale, and Dixie and Cooksville, and ride that train into Mississauga. The Leader of the Opposition would have them wait or sit in traffic. The last of those trains leaves Meadowvale, my home, every day at 8:10. The Leader of the Opposition would have anybody who wants to leave Meadowvale at 8:15 get in the car and join the traffic.

1850

That's the difference between balancing the budget and addressing the infrastructure deficit. The key thing the government did in this year's budget was to address infrastructure, whether it means for people in Mississauga something as basic as better commuter service or as essential as better hospital service; or something that looks long-term such as more schools—and we are building schools in western Mississauga—to address the needs that we have in the fastest-growing part of our dynamic city, which is approaching some 680,000 in population, more than double what it was merely a decade and a half ago.

It's been my pleasure to stand on behalf of this government and address the budget that I'm so proud to defend, a budget that's so progressive, and I thank you for the time.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I listened for all of the lengthy 300 seconds that the member spoke to the budget bill and I appreciate why he was brief, because regrettably, Bill 81 has so little to do with budgetary matters, other than of course the tax cut for the banks and the insurance companies at the expense of kids and their autism treatment—big tax breaks for the banks and the insurance companies. Oh, yes, shed crocodile tears for the Royal Bank, the TD Bank, the Bank of Montreal or the CIBC and their high-priced CEOs. Oh, just weep for them that they need \$1.2 billion in accelerated tax breaks, while the child benefit clawback continues. Some of the lowest-income families in this province, Mr. Tascona, are having their pockets picked to the tune of \$2,000 or \$3,000 a year, and don't think that doesn't mean that kids aren't going without shoes and clothing and some of the very basic essentials.

I'm going to be blessed to have the chance to speak to this bill in a few minutes' time, and one of the concerns I'm going to express is that the government has put together here a hodgepodge of schedules and thrown in some rather peculiar stuff that it was going to try to slide through this Legislature in a rather haphazard way, hoping that people weren't going to pick up on it.

I'm looking forward to Ms. MacLeod from Nepean–Carleton participating in the questions and comments, the two minutes she's going to have in short order, because I'm sure that she, as a Conservative, is as concerned about this as New Democrats are.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I listened intently to the very articulate presentation made by my colleague the member from Mississauga West.

While I'm on my feet, I'll wish the Peterborough Petes all the success this Thursday as they start the finals against the Barrie Colts. We look forward to having success on that front, too, like the budget, which was a big success.

This was a budget that really benefited the little guy. When I hear my good friend the member from Mississauga West talk about the increased opportunities and services being provided by the Credit Valley Hospital, that the budget initiatives were sort of the underpinning of that fine initiative in the area of Mississauga to help all the people in Mississauga and the people in the GTA, you can see that this budget goes a long way to support many good initiatives.

The member didn't mention it, but providing insulin pumps and supplies for families who have children with type 1 diabetes was a groundbreaking initiative. I believe we're the only jurisdiction in North America to provide that kind of support. The member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan was the real pioneer to bring forward the private member's legislation on that particular topic.

The member from Mississauga West did a good job to highlight the benefits that this budget will have for Mississauga and the GTA area, and when you look at it beyond that, the support of municipalities right across this great province in Stratford, in Cornwall, in Havelock, Peterborough. This budget has resonated through all parts of Ontario, providing the support that many of our municipal colleagues have asked for. I would ask all members of this august body, when it comes to a vote in the next few weeks, that we get on board and support this budget, which has great benefits for all—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I'm certainly pleased to join in the questions and comments part of the debate. The comments made by the member from Peterborough are just astounding, let alone shocking, that he could even consider that the Peterborough Petes would be in the same rink as the Barrie Colts. I know the member over there, the minister of post-secondary education, with the London Knights—I had the pleasure—they were in the Barrie Molson Centre also, and both teams were whipped decidedly by the Barrie Colts. I don't want to dwell on that, because we'll be hearing a lot of whining from the member for Peterborough over the next two weeks, and then we'll hear from the minister when London comes to town.

I would just like to say, on this particular budgetary measure, it's very important to recognize that this is the part of the year, April 1 to March 31, when the budget comes in place, not only for the operating side but also for the capital side. It's very important in my area, and I ask the Minister of Health with respect to speeding up the building of the RVH expansion, which I think is very important to our area. That hospital needs expansion and it needs expansion now. The fundraising efforts, which are ongoing, have been very successful, and actually there is a major event that I am participating in on Friday, the I Believe hockey game, which is Team Corson against Team Gartner. I'll be participating in that, raising funds at the Barrie Molson Centre for the RVH expansion. It's efforts like that which make it very important for the government to recognize, in their budgetary measures, that there are needs out there in the community and they have to be recognized and acted on and not pushed off in terms of some kind of budgetary hocus-pocus, because the need is now in Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): “Hocus-pocus”—now, that's a word I haven't heard in a long time.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Oh yes, there's this hockey rivalry thing going on. Don't you know that both the teams are playing golf about now? No, no, just joking. I'm going get in trouble over here.

I listened intently to the comments made by my colleague from Mississauga West. A couple of things: Budgets are about choices. It's about a government saying, “I choose to do this over the other thing.” This

particular government chose to do some things that are, I think, not in keeping with what some of their fellow travellers, or people who supported them in the last election, would have liked to see them do. For example, if you take a look at those who are the most vulnerable in our society, those people who are on ODSP and those people who are on welfare have fallen back over the last 10 years by, some would argue, as much as 40% when it comes to the amount of money they get on either their ODSP pension or on OWA benefits.

I had a letter come into my office today. It was almost enough to bring anybody to tears. The woman said, "This is my monthly budget for myself and my young daughter. I'm disabled. I had a heart attack. I'm no longer able to work. My husband passed away some years ago." She's living on an ODSP pension and she lists how much she's got at the end of the month after she pays for rent, groceries, hydro and the phone. She was left with \$37 for month for spending money. That didn't even include the ability to buy cigarettes, because obviously she doesn't smoke with her condition.

She said, "I can't afford to live. What hope and what chance do I have to participate in our society and to feel that somehow or other there's going to be a better tomorrow?" The government chose not to, in my opinion, do what they could have done by at least eliminating the clawback. At least she would have been able to get another \$200 a month. That would have been a useful thing for her particular budget after she's only left with \$37, but the government decided not to reinstate the clawback that was put in place by the previous government.

1900

The Acting Speaker: The member for Mississauga West has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Delaney: I thank my colleagues for their articulate and forceful comments. The member for Niagara Centre pointed out that I had 300 seconds. I say to the member for Niagara Centre that in politics especially, brevity and punctuality are important. If you can't say in it five minutes, then you're likely never going to say in it 20 minutes. The member for Niagara Centre is going to speak at great length to the same subject and I'm sure that either I or my colleagues will have the pleasure of responding to his comments at great length in some two minutes.

To the member for Peterborough, I concur with you: Go, Petes. People in Mississauga are grateful for all the help that they get from members like the member from Peterborough. This member read our petition last year and he helped us in Mississauga get the funding we needed to get Credit Valley's phase two going, and I say thank you on behalf of the people of Mississauga to the member from Peterborough.

To the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford: His hospital, as he clearly says, needs expansion and it needs it now, so we appreciate his support for our aggressive public infrastructure renewal plans that let the people of

Ontario invest in what matters to them, and nothing matters to them more than keeping Ontarians healthy.

Finally, to my colleague from Timmins-James Bay, who shares my passion for technology: He speaks, as he always does, very forcefully and articulately to the needs of Ontario's most needy. That's why Ontario invests 11 cents of every dollar—almost as much as it spends in education—to help Ontario's most needy people at the time of their lives that they need it most. That's why this government has always been committed to helping the most needy and why it will never waiver from that commitment to ensure the most needy are looked after in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize, for her maiden speech in the Ontario Legislature, the honourable member for Nepean-Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): I'd like to start my maiden speech in this distinguished chamber tonight by first thanking by wonderful husband, Joe, and my beautiful baby daughter, Victoria, as well as my constituents in the great riding of Nepean-Carleton. On March 30, they sent me to this place with the highest percentage of any opposition MPP in Ontario. In doing so, I became the youngest MPP in this Legislature and the first woman to represent Nepean-Carleton at Queen's Park.

Applause.

Ms. MacLeod: Thank you. I'm proud to hold these two historic titles in a riding steeped with Ontario and Canadian history. Nepean-Carleton is a riding that embraces the Rideau River in the city of Ottawa. From the old Goulbourn township to the small village of North Gower, this riding has been strongly represented since Confederation by the likes of Sir John A. Macdonald, George Drew, Walter Baker and Bill Tupper. In recent times, two of my dear friends, John Baird and Pierre Poilievre have been sent to Queen's Park and Parliament Hill as the two youngest members in their respective chambers during their rookie elections. Many will know that the former member of provincial Parliament for Nepean-Carleton is now the Ottawa West-Nepean federal member of Parliament. He is doing very well as the Treasury Board President in Stephen Harper's federal Conservative government and we're very proud of him on this side.

By sending these strong advocates to places of government, the people of Nepean-Carleton have been able to count on their views being known to governments of the day. My commitment to the people of Nepean-Carleton is that every day I am at Queen's Park their views will be known on the floor of this Legislature.

The people of Nepean-Carleton are self-reliant. They believe in strong values and they believe in strong families and safer streets. They work hard for their money and they expect value for their money. The people of Nepean-Carleton are people like Helen Byers, Bill Donaldson, Pam Richardson, Louise Clarke and Georgie Tupper. They're people like Jim and Norma Noonan, Thom Bennett, Donna and Walter Foster, Liz Mac-

Kinnon and Vernon and Helen Foster. They're people like Brian Nelson, Lloyd Cowan, Ian Graham, Brian Cummings, Douglas Collins and D. Aubrey Moodie. They are people who value family and the community they live in. They are dedicated to making Nepean-Carleton the best place to live, work and play in all Ontario.

D. Aubrey Moodie founded what is Nepean and he did it based on family values that were learned on the farm and in the rural communities that surrounded Ottawa, values that we can truly be thankful for today. Self-reliance, hard work and honesty—the archetypical virtues of humanity that when applied to governance made governance work. That spirit still lives today in my community of Nepean-Carleton, where families still work hard for their community and for each other.

In this recent budget, the people of Nepean-Carleton were given an opportunity to judge the McGuinty government and its priorities against their values, and they resoundingly rejected this government, its priorities and its ever-convenient “buy election” budget. Nowhere in the budget were self-reliance, strong families or safer streets valued. In fact, Nepean-Carleton and the city of Ottawa weren't valued at all. Instead, we saw a budget for the GTA where \$244 million was taken from our farmers, out of the agriculture budget; \$82 million was taken from children and youth; and there was no new infrastructure funding announced to my city of Ottawa.

The McGuinty government did little to offer the people of Nepean-Carleton strong leadership. The McGuinty government did nothing to offer the farmers in my community, whether they are from Osgoode, Richmond or Metcalfe, solutions to the crises on the family farm. Farmers were all but forgotten in this budget.

The McGuinty government did nothing to offer young families like mine who live in Stittsville, Greely, Manotick and Barrhaven a better way to make ends meet. Instead, families like mine are paying approximately \$2,000 more a year since this government took office.

The McGuinty government did nothing to offer patients reduced wait times. In fact, just today the Premier confirmed that wait times are on the rise. He did this when the PC health critic, Elizabeth Witmer, questioned him on increased wait times in parts of Ontario.

I can only conclude as a new member of provincial Parliament that this is the “pay more, get less” budget. Nepean-Carleton constituents are paying more in taxes, fees and services, but they are getting far less from their government. My people had a choice between a McGuinty government that cuts and slashes the agriculture budget or the Progressive Conservative Party that defends the family farm, and they chose the Progressive Conservative Party, the party of rural Ontario.

The families of Nepean-Carleton had a choice between the fiscal irresponsibility of this Liberal government or a Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario that demands balanced budgets and scrapping an unaccountable tax on families. On March 30 they chose fiscal accountability and sent a Progressive Conservative

to Queen's Park because families like mine need a break. They need to make sure that that medical tax is not in their pocket because it's going to anything and everything but health care in this province.

Seniors in Nepean-Carleton had a choice between a McGuinty government that creates more bureaucracy—not more doctors, not more nurses and not reduced waiting times—with its local health integration network or the Progressive Conservative Party, the party that wants to explore new options in health care so we can put patients and seniors—not more red tape—first.

The budget lost credibility on day one with the everyday hard-working Ontarian who is struggling to pay the bills. When a government claims a deficit but has a surplus and yet continues to tax families, just as this government does, people lose faith in their representatives. They lose faith in their institutions.

This budget was so wrapped up in government spin that it did nothing for the dignity of government. All this budget has done is to add skepticism in the mind of the public, and skepticism is on the rise with this government. So far this government has broken 50 promises. Imagine our surprise on this side of the chamber when in the 2006 budget a whopping 43 new promises were made. Instead of keeping its promise to balance the budget or to fulfill its commitment not to raise taxes, the McGuinty government chose to embark on a major year-end spending spree with their \$3-billion surplus or, as I like to call it, our tax dollars.

1910

When a government spends itself purposely into deficit when it should be in the black and continues to tax Ontarians, the people of Nepean-Carleton are justifiably concerned. When a government takes a \$2.4-billion tax hike in an illegitimate McGuinty health tax—a tax, mind you, on hard-working families—and then the government claims to provide better health care yet has spent millions of that health tax outside the health sector, you will understand that families are understandably upset. When a government has the audacity to call its leader the education Premier while college professors are on strike and thousands of students are fretting over a lost school year, it is more than reasonable for parents, students and college professors to demand that their government take some leadership on a crisis that you'll remember only came to a head as election day drew near. These are the very sorts of issues that condemned the scandal-ridden federal Liberal Party out of office and into defeat.

Governments must govern and they must act for the good of all people. They must act for all of the people that they represent, not just those seats that they hold in the GTA. They must act for all of Ontario, including eastern Ontario, and specifically the city of Ottawa, where the Premier's own riding is adjacent to mine, Nepean-Carleton. Whether you are a farmer in Nepean-Carleton or live in the GTA or northern Ontario, you should be able to expect that the government will work for you and will treat you equally and with respect, but clearly it is not the case under this current government.

This budget falls down as but another failure of this province's broken and rudderless government that has never been able to find its way out of a hole that it dug for itself in public policy during a bitter-fought election campaign in 2003. So desperate was this government that its front benches would do anything to win. It promised the moon, it promised the stars—a series of promises that it could never keep; a series of promises that I'm sure they never intended to keep.

They've had three budgets, and every one has had a different priority. The first budget was about health. Despite the largest personal tax increase in Ontario, they failed to keep their promise to reduce wait times. Their second budget was about education, and they have massively increased funding to school boards and teacher contracts, but school boards are still facing deficits, and some are even being audited. As I have mentioned, the Liberals still put college students out on the streets rather than in the classrooms.

This budget is supposedly about infrastructure—not in the city of Ottawa, mind you—but the big infrastructure spending that they've announced is coming out of last year's budget. I just told you that it was the education budget. You might be confused. But this is a government that has lost its way or that has never found its way, and this budget and its two predecessor budgets are simple reflections of its makers' lack of vision and lack of leadership.

My party opposes this budget bill, as we have with every other budget bill since the Liberals took office, because we oppose the fiscal mismanagement and tax hikes of this McGuinty government. The people in Nepean–Carleton have spoken loudly too. They oppose this budget bill, and on March 30, they sent a message that they oppose this government.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: I'm so pleased to have been in the chamber for Ms. MacLeod's, the member for Nepean–Carleton's maiden speech or, perhaps more appropriately, her inaugural speech. I'll put this on the record: By the time Ms. MacLeod was finished with that speech, the government members didn't know whether they'd been drilled, punched or bored. She put it to them as straightly as anybody could. I anticipate that Ms. MacLeod will be a vocal and active and effective member who indeed will show up when the House is sitting, who wouldn't miss an opportunity to participate in committee or in the day-to-day routine of the chamber or the work that she may do in her riding or on behalf of her party or the Legislature in the broader sense across the province. So I congratulate her on her effective premiere here at Queen's Park. I admire the enthusiasm with which she pursues the Liberal jugular. I consider that something that's desirable in what is a very adversarial system here. While she went for the throat, she was nonetheless articulate and, I'd say, downright polite. She didn't use a single cuss word.

Laughter.

Mr. Kormos: Well, she didn't. I was waiting for one because I figured she was warming up to one, but not a single cuss word, not a single disparaging remark, not a single ad hominem comment. Rare—the absence of cuss words, I mean, here in this Legislature. I'm pleased to have been part of her audience.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): It's my pleasure to welcome, once again, the new member from Nepean–Carleton.

I would like to use this opportunity to turn your attention to something that you can actually work for your constituents on. I refer specifically to the moving forward on the early learning and child care agreement, which was struck with the government of Canada last year on behalf of families and children all across this country. Let me suggest to you that if you look at our budget this year, you will find that we have worked to sustain the demand that has been expressed by families in Ontario who say they need high-quality child care. But instead of being able to commit to an increase of 25,000 new spaces for Ontario, including more than 1,000 for the Ottawa area, that agreement has been cut short, effective March 2007. Let me suggest to you that one of your quests should be to work with us, to work with this side of the House because, surprisingly, your colleagues have been silent on this over the past several months. It is really quite surprising to me that you would not have the interest of your constituents at heart, as you have said. Here is an opportunity for you to demonstrate that commitment. You are a mother; you should understand. You are here working. Many mothers—in fact, more than 70% of mothers with kids under the age of six have said to us that they require high-quality licensed child care. Please don't forget those mothers in your riding as you work with us to look after their interests.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): It's regrettable that the minister chose the intervention she chose this evening. It's truly unfortunate with the member's maiden speech, but it is typical of this government and increasingly typical of this particular minister.

I want to compliment the member from Nepean–Carleton on her maiden speech here this evening. I recall back in my day, back in 1981, first elected, delivering my maiden speech, and what an important occasion it was for me for the opportunity to thank my predecessor at the time, Jim Auld, and all of the people who made it possible for me to become a member of this chamber. Ms. MacLeod talked about John Baird. She has a big pair of shoes to fill. John was, as we all know, an outstanding, outspoken advocate on behalf of eastern Ontario on so many issues of concern, especially the issues related to the well-being of children in this province.

I want to say that Mr. Sterling, Mr. Yakabuski and myself certainly welcome this addition to the ranks in eastern Ontario because we need more spokespersons making the case for eastern Ontario, because this government, as the member pointed out quite clearly, is ignoring eastern Ontario and ignoring rural Ontario. I

wonder why. We talk about the Premier, who supposedly represents—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat. Relax.

I would ask the government members to come to order and allow the member for Leeds–Grenville to finish his two-minute response.

The member for Leeds–Grenville.

1920

Mr. Runciman: I think I lost at least 10 or 12 seconds there.

The fact is that Premier McGuinty supposedly represents an eastern Ontario riding, but we know that he lives in a \$1-million-plus mansion in Forest Hill paid for by the Liberal Party and the taxpayers of Ontario. We know that he's getting his hair cut for \$75 a shot. How many people in eastern Ontario get their hair cut? When he has to go to Hamilton, he avoids gridlock by flying in a taxpayer-paid government plane. He's lost touch with the people of Ontario. Ms. MacLeod is going to stand up for the people of eastern Ontario—something the Premier is not doing.

Mr. Bisson: I want to congratulate the member from Nepean–Carleton because I've got to say that was one of the better maiden speeches I've heard in this House in a long time. She got up on her feet, said it the way it is and talked about what's important to her and the people of her riding. I think she's going to make a wonderful addition to this House. We may not be of the same party, but I do have respect for people who can hold their own in here. For the minister to suggest to the honourable member from Nepean–Carleton, "You've got to trust us and work with us"—ain't they the guys who tried to work with you in the last election? They were onside, right; they wanted to get you elected? My God. One of these days—I know you understand; I'm just wondering if they understand.

I just say to my good friend from Nepean–Carleton, I lost a bit of a friend and colleague, but I see maybe we'll have a renewed friendship in some way in that part of the province, because Mr. Baird and I go back. We were elected at the same time. Mr. Baird and I got to meet Polkaroo at the same time, and one of these days he'll tell you that story.

But to the speech; that's the most important part, and that is the question of what the government chooses to do with the budget. I know that the member from Nepean–Carleton probably sees it a little bit differently than I, but I think we both agree that this government made some choices in this budget that some of us can live with, but there are a whole bunch of choices they didn't make that some people can't live without, and that's really the problem I have with this particular budget.

The government promised, for example, to restore services for children with autism over age six. We know that's an issue that the Premier—and in opposition, Mr. McGuinty—spoke passionately about. I remember him standing in opposition to the Ernie Eves and Mike Harris governments successively, saying how bad it was and

how, if he was elected, he was going to restore autistic services to those children over age six. Did they choose to do that in this budget? Not at all. They chose not to. I think this budget speaks volumes to the things that they didn't do for the most vulnerable in our society.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Nepean–Carleton has two minutes to reply.

Ms. MacLeod: It's my pleasure to respond to the four members. To the member for Niagara Centre, thank you very much for your kind words. I look forward to working with you, and hopefully I'll be as vocal as you in holding this government to account.

To the Minister of Children and Youth Services, as somebody who represented a riding and won by 57.6% of the vote based on this issue alone, I think I am standing up for my residents. Also, during a federal election in which the federal member for Nepean–Carleton actually campaigned on this issue and won by the highest amount of votes of any political party in Ontario, I think I'm standing up for the residents of Nepean–Carleton just fine on this issue. As the only member in this chamber currently speaking with a child under the age of five, I think I know what I'm talking about.

To the member from Leeds–Grenville, I want to applaud him. You'll notice tonight that I, along with my colleagues from Lanark–Carleton and Leeds–Grenville, are the only three members in here from eastern Ontario, the Premier's own area, and I appreciate the work that the two of you, along with John Baird, the former MPP, played in getting the 416 all the way to Ottawa, because that highway is important. The veterans highway is important, and we appreciate that.

Now to my good friend my colleague from Timmins–James Bay, I appreciate your kind words. I picked up on his lament on the broken promise on autism. I want him to know that two days after I was elected by the good people in Nepean–Carleton, I walked with my NDP opponent, Laurel Gibbons, who was a fantastic candidate, and stood outside the Premier's constituency office, reminding the Premier about his broken promise on autism. I came here and, on my second day on the job at Queen's Park, I delivered that petition from Laurel Gibbons, my NDP opponent, because she is an excellent autistic children's advocate.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Will the House come to order, please. Further debate?

Mr. Kormos: I have but 20 minutes, and I regret that. I want to make it quite clear that there's very little in here in terms of budget that benefits folks; there's nothing here that benefits folks in the province of Ontario. I tell you, the most repugnant, objectionable part of this bill is the \$1.2 billion of accelerated tax cuts for banks and insurance companies, both of whom have been doing extremely well and have little to worry about in terms of their incredible and ever-growing revenues.

Choices? Yes, it is about choices. There's a \$3-billion surplus in terms of new, unanticipated revenues. Did the government spend them, as Mr. Bisson from Timmins—

James Bay said, on autism treatment for kids? No. Has the government spent any of that money on keeping its promise to repeal the clawback of child benefits? No. The government invested a chunk of it in a pre-election slush fund to further its own political ends and then invested another \$1.2 billion in tax breaks for banks and insurance companies. That is truly objectionable.

But mark my words, there will not be a single government member voting against this bill. It's a budget bill; I understand that. A vote against a budget bill, should the bill be defeated, is a non-confidence vote. Should Liberal members vote against this bill in good conscience, they'll find themselves in an election campaign. Look, I understand why government members vote for budget bills even if they may not agree with them. But what causes me some of the greatest concern is some of the stuff that's buried deep in this budget bill and has no business being in a budget bill. I say this in a very non-partisan way.

One of the most glaring ones is schedule H of this bill, the amendment to the Municipal Act. At first blush, I suppose many would say it's rather innocuous in and of itself, but what it will do, as of the municipal elections of late fall of this year, 2006, is extend terms for city councils and school boards to four years from three. I think that in and of itself is a sufficiently serious policy matter that it warrants consideration, not only in this legislative chamber but also in committee as a stand-alone matter—I really do.

First, I want to note that there's Toronto and I suppose Ottawa and maybe London, and then there's the rest of Ontario. Most councils aren't full-time councils. I say to you that smaller and small-town councils, where councillors are part-time councillors, have a different set of needs and in many respects a different role than big-city councillors who have staff, who have offices and who are paid as full-time councillors.

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I want to bring to your attention a particular problem that has reared its head—I'll be quite candid—in one of the communities that form the riding of Niagara Centre. It very much has to do with contemplation of extending a three-year council term to a four-year council term. You see, the problem is that the manner in which the government has chosen to slide schedule H, the amendment to the Municipal Act, into this Bill 81, this budget bill, is going to make it impossible to move amendments which will affect, for instance, section 259 of the Municipal Act.

Let me tell you what the problem is down where I come from. It's about attendance requirements. We don't have attendance requirements here at Queen's Park. The standing orders don't provide for them. That's been made shockingly obvious to us over the last couple of days.

Laughter.

Mr. Kormos: Well, wait a minute; be careful. The federal Parliament has attendance requirements. Take a look at the standing orders like I did—and I know you're a student of this kind of stuff, Speaker. You take a look at

the standing orders and you see standing order 15: "Every member, being cognizant of the provisions of the Parliament of Canada Act, is bound to attend the sittings of the House, unless otherwise occupied with parliamentary activities and functions or on public or official business"—bound.

I'm going to carry on with that in a few minutes, because that has very much to do, as you're well aware, with section 259 of the Municipal Act. I know you are, Speaker, so you know that I don't digress at all from a discussion of schedule H, slid into this bill, hidden away deep in this bill, with some pretty significant impacts.

You know, it takes me back. You remember one Senator Andy Thompson? Remember him? He had the whistle blown on him around 1996. He was a senator who would comply—because you see, the Senate had attendance requirements too. He had to show up once every two years or so. Senator Thompson was living in Mexico, and he apparently would show up every two years in the Senate in—see, I don't believe in Senate reform. Abolish the damned thing and let's be rid of it and have it over and done with. It's remarkable. It's remarkable that we in this enlightened, democratic country would allow an unelected group of people to have any role in the legislative process. Don't reform the darned thing; abolish it. Pay them off, give them their pensions, throw in an extra 50 bucks as a little departure gift and send all those senators home, and convert the chamber into office space for backbenchers from all five parties.

The interesting thing about Senator Andy Thompson is that he was the former Liberal leader of Ontario, and it was ironic—I'm talking about attendance requirements under the Municipal Act. What is ironic is that he represented the riding of Dovercourt, which, as you know, is one of the antecedent ridings of Davenport. I don't know what it is about the water in Dovercourt, now known as Davenport. I don't know what it is about the water in that riding, but Senator Andy Thompson would only show up every two years. Finally, he stopped showing up at all. The federal Senate suspended him for contempt and he eventually resigned, bragging that his pension was going to be as much as his net pay was as a senator. So it was, "Up yours. You think you did me any harm? Don't do me any favours."

So we've got a problem down in one of the communities that form part of Niagara Centre, and it's just the reality. It's caused some great public concern as well as some great angst on the council itself. There is one councillor—and don't forget, down where I come from those municipalities are part-time councils. I don't deny part-time councillors the modest stipend they get. Most of them, the vast majority of them, work real hard.

There's a councillor down there who's been showing up once every three months—that's four times a year—so as to comply with the attendance requirements of section 259 of the Municipal Act. Look, I pass no judgment on that. The observation that has been made, though, is that if he can do that for three years in a three-year term,

then somebody could do that for four years in a four-year term. I agree that it shouldn't be the force of law that compels people to attend at their seat in an elected body, whether it's city council, whether it's provincial Parliament, federal Parliament, regional councils or the Senate. It should be an overriding thing.

This is what the Kingston Whig-Standard had to say about Senator Thompson: "His measly 5% attendance rate since the early 1980s indicated a lack of respect for the position and even less regard for the Canadian public who paid his substantial salary. Any self-respecting person would have chosen to quit rather than leech off the public the way Thompson did."

The federal Parliament has attendance records. I gave you standing order 15. Unfortunately, just like the Senate, because the Senate adopted some new attendance records but provided a great deal of leeway, in the federal Parliament it's basically self-reporting, and the penalty, Parliament of Canada Act—I'm quoting from that wonderful read, House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Marleau and Montpetit. I know you've spent a great deal of time with it.

Page 188: "The Parliament of Canada Act provides for deductions for non-attendance from the members' sessional allowance. At the end of each month and at the end of each session, each member is required to provide the Clerk of the House with a statement of the number of days of attendance during the month or session, as the case may be, for which they are entitled to receive their sessional and expense allowances. For the purposes of this declaration, those days on which a member was absent due to illness, a military commitment, the adjournment of the House or because the member was on 'public or official business'"—that's the Mack truck loophole—"are considered days of attendance. Since there is no regulatory mechanism to monitor members' attendance, calculations of members' allowances are made on the basis of their statements and deductions are made only when absences exceed 21 sitting days."

Well, that's a pretty broad standard. I could be proven wrong, and I know there are folks here who would love to do it—they'd jump at the chance—but I dare say I doubt if there's a single member of the federal Parliament who hasn't, once they've calculated their 21 days of just-because-they-didn't-want-to-be-there days, and then of course their days on official or public duty.

It's regrettable that the real test was spoken of in the context of Senator Thompson, and that was Senator Thompson's "lack of respect for the position and even less regard for the Canadian public who paid his substantial salary. Any self-respecting person would have chosen to quit rather than leech off the public the way Thompson did."

So we've got a problem down in Niagara Centre with a part-time city councillor. You see, this is where full-time and part-time are different. Part-time city councillors need their day jobs unless they're retired, they're independently wealthy or they have a source of income,

perhaps business people—some business people. Business people work hard too.

I'm concerned about the potential for abuse of the attendance requirements in the existing Municipal Act if the amendment proposed by the government in schedule H isn't accompanied by a similar amendment around the attendance requirements.

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I want to tell you, I expressed gratitude to research librarian Stefan Jürgens, who compiled for me similar sections of municipal acts from across Canada, including the territories, and if I may go through them just very quickly: Ontario, section 259, three months; Saskatchewan, three months; Prince Edward Island, three months. That means that if you miss council meetings for longer than three months, the seat is declared vacant, but you only have to show up once every three months and you maintain your seat and your salary. No monetary penalties in any of these provisions. Quebec, 90 days, which could conceivably be one or two days less than three months. Interesting: Alberta, eight weeks, 56 days; Yukon, once again three months; BC, 60 days or four meetings; New Brunswick, four meetings; Manitoba, three consecutive regular meetings. They don't count special meetings that might be called outside of the regular timing. Nova Scotia, three consecutive meetings.

The most interesting provision, however, was that of the Northwest Territories, and I raise this because if folks here are going to adopt a four-year term for city councils, we'd better reflect on the need to address amendments to section 259 of the existing Municipal Act. In the Northwest Territories, the territorial statute requires a council to pass a bylaw regarding attendance. That's specifically section 29(c) of their Cities, Towns and Villages Act from the Northwest Territories. It then further indicates section 37, "Council may, by bylaw, provide that a council member who is absent from regular meetings of council, without consent of council, more than a certain number of times specified in the bylaw, is deemed to have resigned."

I think that's an interesting power to give to municipalities to accompany the prospect of an extended term from three years to four years, because I put to you, even in every one of the jurisdictions that I've spoken of, even in places like Manitoba and Nova Scotia, which had some of the most rigid standards—three consecutive meetings—council has the power to, by resolution, exclude any member from that provision. Obviously, if somebody's had an illness in the family, if somebody's had a crisis in their own life—there could be any number of good reasons. But councils and municipalities need the ability to protect themselves from the abuse that is oh so rare but, in the view of some, has been displayed.

I think we should have the power to protect the public against that type of abuse, but of course we can only rely upon the respect for the position and the regard for the Canadian public, who pay our salaries, and the fact that any self-respecting person would choose to quit rather than leech off the public the way, for instance, Senator

Thompson did back in 1980 and 1985 and 1990 and 1996. Of course, I don't make any personal comment about any individual member's absence from this assembly.

I see that folks could well say, "Well, Kormos, why don't you just bring an amendment to schedule H when the bill goes to committee?"—because New Democrats are going to insist that this bill go to committee. No two ways about it, this bill is going to committee. I'll sit in this House myself on second reading and make sure that this bill goes to committee, because I will deny it third reading. You know I can do that and force it into committee. Some may say, "Well, why don't you move an amendment?" Well, you know full well that I can't move an amendment amending section 259 when schedule H is so very narrow. It doesn't open up the Municipal Act; it only addresses subsection 4(1). So you see, an amendment that's in order can only be an amendment to the amendment being proposed by the government to 4(1).

So don't play that game. It's a very serious matter. I think we have some interesting references from other provinces in terms of their standards, including the incredibly creative one from the Northwest Territories, which says that councils "shall" create a bylaw regarding attendance and that that bylaw "may" be one which vacates a seat. Really, isn't that the most flexible, the least arbitrary and one where a council can understand its own community? The difference between full-time councillors and part-time councillors is that I understand that part-time councillors may work shift work in those parts of Ontario where the factories haven't been shut down over the course of the last three years. Lord knows, we're going to see more being shut down if electricity prices continue to climb through the roof. But there may well be shift work obligations. There may be travel obligations.

I think councils may well be in the best position to determine what their attendance standards should be and what the consequences should be for non-attendance, because it will be clear; it will be in a bylaw. I would think any reasonable bylaw would have a provision whereby a person could seek approval of council to miss meetings above and beyond the bylaw requirement.

I raise this as a very real concern that has been expressed from down where I come from. I think we would be doing a disservice, especially in the smaller-town part-time councils, if we didn't ensure consideration of 259 along with schedule H's consideration of section 4.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to the remarks made by the previous member because he has focused on an unusual part of the bill and probably one that—well, we may spend a lot of time on this evening. But I'm happy that I have the opportunity to comment briefly on it tonight.

I want to say to the honourable member that before I was in this place I was on a school board, and our school board had a bylaw with respect to the attendance of trustees. If trustees had missed three regular board meetings, they were asked to resign their seat as a school board trustee, and then the board would appoint another individual. I offer this just as a point of interest for me personally, and I would be very interested to see how this discussion will unfold as the bill goes forward.

I think that it has some merit and it would be an interesting conversation. When we talk about meetings, are we talking about official council meetings or committee meetings of council? What would be incorporated in that? Would there be exceptions if someone fell ill and had to have a heart transplant or another serious procedure that would make them unable to participate in council proceedings, through no fault of their own? They continue to be good representatives, their intention to represent the interests of their community is still intact, but they would have to perhaps write and ask for an extension, or at least the council would have the ability to consider an exception. So I think that's an interesting point that has been raised by the honourable member. Oh, I guess that's my two minutes.

Mr. Runciman: I want to compliment the member from Niagara Centre for his contribution to this debate. I share his concern about the change in this legislation related to municipal council terms. I have to say, all the feedback I've had in my own riding from municipal councils has been non-supportive of the initiative.

I'm not sure how much effort was made to consult with municipal authorities. I doubt very little, if any. I'm not sure how much consultation occurred within the Liberal caucus. My suspicion is virtually nothing. Why this happened—hopefully at some point the minister will be able to adequately explain the rationale behind it.

I have no problem personally with the idea of attendance records in this place or whether it's the municipal or federal level or any agency, board or commission that is utilizing tax dollars. I think it's worthwhile. But I do have a problem with us in this place diminishing our worth. I've seen it happen on so many occasions over so many years, whether it's committee travel that has been virtually eliminated because we're so sensitive to any public criticism—we seem to draw the media spotlight more than other levels of government. Our salaries—it's been pointed out now that a backbencher at the federal level now makes as much as the Premier of the province of Ontario. We have the same ridings with a significantly heavier workload than federal members do. I think that's the reality.

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We've done away with pensions at the provincial level. How many people in the province—

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Who did that?

Mr. Runciman: You voted for it. Everyone in this House voted for it. I'm talking about us diminishing our own worth.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Not pensions, Bob.

Mr. Runciman: Yes, we did. You're wrong. You are wrong, as you frequently are. Everybody in this House voted for it.

Severances—we can go on and on. I'm trying to make a case for us damaging ourselves on such a regular basis, and then I get an interjection like that which is not based in fact.

I think those are the considerations we have to weigh in the days ahead. But certainly in terms of attendance records, I'm supportive and I think it's a fair way to go.

Mr. Bisson: As always, the member from Niagara Centre raises points that are, I think, to the point, to put it simply, and he does so quite well. Like me, he believes the government made some choices in this budget. Quite frankly, it was all about choices, choices about who they wanted to stand up for. The member pointed out that they stood up for banks. They thought it was good enough for banks to get a tax break, so some of the richest organizations in this province can get yet another tax break while people who are on social assistance, who would benefit by being able to keep the clawback that's taken from their baby bonus cheques—no choices there to help them.

The whole question of what we do with autistic children is an issue that keeps on coming back. Yet again last week I had a constituent of mine contact my office. Their son is now eight years old and doesn't get the type of intensive therapy he needs to deal with his autism. The parents are at their wits' end. The school board is not able to provide the type of services that he wants. He's not able to get, because of this decision that was made, the type of services offered to children under age six. This particular parent came in and told me, "Listen. I don't care what the politics are. The government promised this, so why don't they do it?" When I said, "Governments make choices. In this case, they made the bad choice," this particular parent didn't appreciate either the choice or, quite frankly, the advice, in the sense that she had to try to deal with it the best she could because this government didn't seem to want to overturn that particular decision. It's hard when you look at a parent who's in that kind of situation, that kind of crisis, and you know that the government has made its mind up.

My colleague Shelley Martel has raised this in the House hundreds of times. We've brought the parents in, we've brought the kids in, we've done everything to try to get this government to move. The parents have taken them to court and this government fights them in court. I say this government made some choices—to support banks but not autistic kids—that are beyond the pale.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I appreciate the opportunity to add just a couple of comments in approximately two minutes to the member from Niagara Centre. Much of his time was obviously spent focusing on an element of the budget measures bill that deals with municipalities, so I want to talk in that context, about municipalities and why I believe they've been as receptive as they have been to this budget.

I want to comment on things like the extension of the gas tax. In October of this year it will be at two cents per litre for public transit in municipalities throughout Ontario that have transit systems and those that access transit systems in some other fashion. It's being extended to include not only capital costs but the capacity to incorporate it into their operating costs to best use those funds. I think municipalities are pleased that over the mandate to this point we've achieved that goal of two cents per litre of gas for that purpose.

Municipalities are clearly pleased that there's some \$400 million being spent in ridings and communities throughout the province of Ontario, in each and every one of them, to allow them to fund roads and bridges, to rebuild some of the physical infrastructure that's been sorely neglected. The money is much needed and will be extremely well used. That's so that every municipality—and practically every constituent—benefits from the use of those roads and bridges, whether it's for their personal use or for business purposes.

The family health teams are being funded through this process. The additional 50 will bring it to the full 150 we had planned on. I'm pleased that the first one in Durham will be on the west side of Durham region, in my riding. That's the first family health team for a population of half a million. So it's not as though there a lot of them, but nonetheless it's fulfilling that obligation on the health front. Municipalities that need to attract doctors to supply their constituents with good health care are extremely pleased when they see 150 health teams now approved and rolling out in the process. There is any number of other elements where municipalities are extremely pleased with this budget, as are their constituents.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Niagara Centre has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kormos: I find it irresistible to point out once again that the highlight of this budget is a \$1.2-billion tax break—an accelerated tax break—for banks and insurance companies. I just shudder at the incredible coziness between this government and those big banks, with their high-priced CEOs, and the insurance companies—highway robbers at best. I just shudder at the coziness between this government and those financial institutions, which have enjoyed record profits, that would allow them to be the beneficiaries of \$1.2 billion of that \$3 billion of newly found revenue, when kids with autism get left behind and when those families, those moms, mostly single moms, the lowest-income people in this province, are still having their child benefit clawed back by a government led by Dalton McGuinty, who promised, swore—Scout's honour—that he was going to roll back the clawback.

I want to get back to schedule H—and I appreciate the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Of course, if you take a look at the respective provincial statutes that are referred to, they take into consideration regular meetings and the need for exceptions and exemptions for sickness and bona fide absences. That's why I made reference to the federal parliamentary rules, which

do the same. But I really believe that we should be giving municipalities the power, the obligation, as does the Northwest Territories, to create bylaw standards and include the power to vacate a seat should there be a violation of that bylaw.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest):

It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to add a few words to the debate this evening on Bill 81, the Budget Measures—

Applause.

Mr. Berardinetti: Thank you for the applause, because I do have some people watching at home, including my mother, my father and my lovely wife, whom I say hello to.

I just wanted to start off by saying—

Interjection.

Mr. Berardinetti: Well, I have a few things to say, and I will get to my wife in a second as well.

I wanted to say first of all that this budget in front of us today is a budget for the people of Ontario; it's a budget for the voters of Ontario. I just want to quote something I have in front of me that comes from a former United States President. He spoke on the issue of budgets and budgeting. He said, "Let us never forget that government is ourselves and not an alien power over us. The ultimate rulers of our democracy are not a President and senators and congressmen and government officials, but the voters of this country."

Very much in that vein, I want to say tonight that the voters of this province are the ones who ultimately make the decisions. They decide who to elect and what government to elect, which in turn decides what policies to implement that best suit the people of that particular province or that government. The budget in front of us today, which I'll talk more about in a few minutes, does address the issues of the people of this province.

I'm pleased to introduce today in the east gallery a friend of mine whom I went to high school with. His name is Ivan Sutton, and he's visiting from Calgary, Alberta. Mr. Sutton used to live in Ontario, and has moved out to Calgary, Alberta. If what I'm saying is incorrect, I would ask Mr. Sutton to wave his hand or point out otherwise, but I know we have spoken about this. He's from Alberta, and everyone seems to think that Alberta has everything going well and Mr. Klein is handing out big cheques to everybody and Ontario is in the pits. But do you know what? It's not true.

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Mr. Sutton drove from Calgary, Alberta, all the way to Toronto, all the way to Scarborough, Ontario. He said to me that when he got into Ontario, the roads were really good. In fact, in Toronto, the roads were really good. He said to me that he can move around in Toronto in his vehicle without the gridlock that he experiences in Calgary, Alberta. Who would think that Calgary, Alberta, has gridlock, that Calgary, Alberta doesn't have a proper subway system in place and that Calgary, Alberta, doesn't have a proper transit system in place? Here in

Ontario, and in Toronto especially, we have a transit system and we have a road system that is good but that needs improvement. Our government, through the finance minister, in the budget that was introduced just recently, decided to invest a large amount of money, \$1.2 billion, in Move Ontario, a program to improve and put investments into public transit, municipal roads and bridges, to help move people and goods faster so they can create jobs and build a stronger economy. Our government is saying that we know we have a good system, but we can make it better, and by making that system better people will invest and stay in Ontario and will grow and raise their businesses in Ontario.

In this budget, \$1.9 billion is put in for additional health care funding for 2006-07, for more doctors and nurses, shorter waiting times, more medical school spaces, and initiatives to promote good health and prevent illness. In regard to this \$1.9-billion investment, it's real and it's having an effect, it's having an impact. On Easter Sunday, I was with my family and we had Easter dinner. One of my family members mentioned, "You know, in the hospital it's easier now to get knee surgery done. It's easier to get hip surgery done. The wait lines are not as long as they used to be." This is a direct effect of what our government has done.

I have a brother who has young children in our school system—and I've noticed the class sizes. He said to me, "You know, my children, two of my daughters, are in schools now and in classrooms where the class is so small that the teacher actually spends more time with that student, with that child." That's a real significant change that came about in October 2003 when the people of Ontario voted and elected a Liberal government under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty and our then Education Minister, Gerard Kennedy, now followed by Sandra Pupatello. They are working to make our education system better.

By golly, these are the things that are important to the people of Ontario, because when all is said and done, if you don't have a good education system, if you don't have a good health system, if you don't have a good road system, then you don't have a good government and you don't have a good civilization. You don't have a good way of running a province.

My father is retired—75 years old, God bless him. He's at home watching tonight. He has said to me that he has to use a doctor on a regular basis. Five, six, seven years ago he had difficulty finding a doctor when his former doctor passed on. He had difficulty getting into the health care system and getting the kind of service he needs. He doesn't have that problem now. He's able to find a doctor and get the kind of help he needs. I don't mean to leave out my mother. She, too, is in the same situation, where before it took longer to get the help she needed from her health care system. Now she has access.

It's not perfect, but we're working towards it. It's work in progress. It's something that this government is committed to. As has been stated several times, this budget is only part of a larger plan. This 2006 budget is

the third part of a four-year plan to strengthen Ontario's economic advantage by strengthening our people. That's the key word.

I remember when President Clinton ran for office and people said to him, and it's now well quoted and well known, "It's the economy, stupid." I think the key word today, if we were to take that same phraseology, is, "It's the people, stupid." That's our only investment, when all is said and done, because if we have a healthy population, if we have people in our province who are healthy and well educated, have a good transportation system and are able to get to their jobs, have proper day care and a good system of being able to function as people in Ontario, then we have a healthy province. Why else would Toyota decide to bring a major operation, a large plant, into this province? Why would other industries decide to invest and come into this province? They know that available to them here in Ontario are a health care system and an education system second to none in the world.

Speaking of education, and it's an issue of education—and I don't mean to be negative at all—there was a devastation left by the Mike Harris government. I say this with the greatest of respect to those members who are here and work hard for the Conservative Party. But when Mike Harris raised tuition fees to the extent that he did, it affected a lot of people, a lot of students. My wife was one of them at the time, in the early years of Mike Harris. Those student loans are impacting us to this day.

This government, on the other hand, through our Minister of Colleges and Universities has invested millions and millions of dollars in an education program to help administer a better-financed education system for people who are in university, in college, in post-secondary education, trying to get proper training. That's important. That makes a difference. That makes the difference sometimes in whether or not you decide to go to school, whether or not to continue with a post-secondary education or to stop your education altogether and just go out and get a job.

We have made certain decisions. We're not going to make everybody happy. We all know that. Back in Alberta, Ralph Klein has handed out cheques. Getting back to my friend Ivan Sutton over there, he got a cheque for 400 bucks or so from Mr. Klein, and he will probably get another one next year. But we got our cheques as well here. We got \$200 from Mike Harris, all of us, and I don't think that really was a high priority when it comes to running our government.

People can say all sorts of things about our system, decisions we have made, our decision to go forward in a certain direction, but at the end of the day we have decided to focus on the people of Ontario. We've decided to focus on making them live and be nurtured in a healthy environment, not one that is going to become a social welfare state but one that's going to bring out the best in individuals, one that's going to provide opportunities to people. This budget does that. It's not perfect—nothing is. There are always going to be people who are going to

say, "You could have done more," or "You could do more," but we are doing as much as we can and we are making our decisions in places that we think are most important. I'm happy with this budget.

I just wanted to add something briefly about transit as well. I'm going to get a little bit parochial here, representing Scarborough. I remember my days on Scarborough council, when the Toronto Transit Commission didn't have money, unlike today when all sorts of money is being infused into the transit system. When the Conservative government was in power, and even before then, cuts were made to transit. And what happened as a result was that you didn't have the routes on College Street, Dundas Street or Queen Street cut down. It was the routes in the sticks, the ones in the so-called suburbs at the time: McCowan Road, Brimley Road, Neilson and other streets in the outer parts of Scarborough. Mary Anne Chambers, the member from Scarborough East, would know as well that these were the routes that were cut. A person would have to wait an hour to get on a bus. And no one in this day and time is going to do that. Some do, but it's relatively impractical to do so, to wait an hour for a bus. That's why people buy more cars, which leads to more congestion, which ultimately leads to more smog on the roads, which leads to more asthma and more health problems.

What we're trying to say, and what the government is trying to do, is to bring back investment into the transit system, to bring back our buses and to run them regularly, not once an hour on McCowan Road, not once an hour on Danforth Road, not once an hour on Neilson Road, not once an hour on Ellesmere Avenue, but maybe once every 20 minutes for the good people of Scarborough, just like the good people of Welland the member for Niagara Centre likes to speak to and defend.

The people of Scarborough have a right as well to a proper transit system, the right to go on the bus, use the bus and have more of them. What we're doing, even where there are two cents per litre being given to the Toronto Transit Commission, is allowing money to be put not only in the capital structure, but in the operating structure, so that we can hire the right number of bus drivers so that they can go out there and drive the buses, streetcars, rapid transit and subway system that get people to and from their work, their schools, their doctor appointments, their dentist appointments and their other appointments that are so important.

2010

These are the decisions that were being made and these are the things that will have a long-term impact. When all is said and done, a person like Ivan Sutton, who left here and decided to go to Alberta, will probably end up back in Ontario, back in Toronto, back doing business here, because he's going to realize—and he's already said this to me—that Toronto is actually a pretty darned good place and Ontario is a pretty darned good province. We can talk all we want about Alberta this and Alberta that, BC this and BC that, and Quebec this and Quebec

that, but when all is said and done, Ontario is the driving engine of this country.

I'm happy today to stand, speak and support this budget, which has so many elements that are so positive, that create so many good things that are being used for things like \$118 million to help at-risk youth and vulnerable adults and families. That's very important to do. You want to help those who are most vulnerable. You want to be able to help your poor. You want to be able to raise your minimum wage. You want to be able to provide those kinds of things to those who are in the most need. Again, we can't do everything for everybody; I don't think any government ever has. But at the end of the day, the feedback that I've gotten from my people in Scarborough whom I've spoken to, and others elsewhere, even as far away as Calgary, Alberta, is that this budget is good for the people of Ontario.

So I'm pleased to rise today to support this budget and to say that as part of the plan to get Ontario back on track, this budget is playing an instrumental role. I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to this particular budget today, and I look forward to hearing questions and comments from my colleagues around here today.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Runciman: I appreciate the opportunity to comment. I found it quite interesting that the member for Scarborough Southwest—I gather it depends on how you interpret his comments, but I would suggest that some might interpret his comments relating to Calgary and Alberta as a slam, as a criticism of the great province of Alberta and the great city of Calgary: talking about the fact that they have gridlock challenges, they don't have a subway and suggesting gridlock is even worse in Calgary than it might be in the city of Toronto. And he made other references to the province of Alberta and Premier Klein.

I think it's unfortunate that we're engaging in that kind of a jurisdictional blame game, but it seems to be so typical of this government. With the new federal government in office less than two weeks, we saw in the House, on a daily basis, ministers and members getting up and slamming the new federal government, attacking them, calling on us as opposition members to call our federal colleagues to get this straightened out or that straightened out.

To me, this is cynical politics, politics at its worst, because what we want to do is find ways to work with the new government, I would think. Whether it's in daycare, whether it's in justice issues or whether it's in infrastructure and the transit system, we don't want to be alienating these people—unless there's some kind of political motivation behind this, and I believe that's the end game here. If you read Warren's Kinsella's recent comments, he wants this divide between the provincial government and the federal Conservative government. He wants an enemy, he wants a bogeyman so that Mr. McGuinty and his friends can fight the federal govern-

ment, and hopefully, that division will get them re-elected. It ain't gonna work.

Mr. Kormos: I ideologically disagree with most of what Mr. Berardinetti is ever going to say, but I want to tell you, he has demonstrated himself to be one of the better speakers in his caucus here in this legislative chamber. He's not afraid to defy his whip, who wants to try to shut down backbenchers, and say, "No, I'm paid to come here and speak on behalf of my constituents," and Mr. Berardinetti does. He says to the whip, "Go pound salt. You can put it where the moon don't shine. You can't tell me what to do." Mr. Berardinetti stands up to the whip. Mr. Berardinetti knows that his primary job is to speak on behalf of his constituents. As I say, he has impressed me with an ability to work well, perform well on his feet. I encourage some of his colleagues to emulate his strength of conviction.

One of the things, of course, that Mr. Berardinetti did early on in his career here was move the well-known—in some circles, notorious—bill regarding gender pricing. I defended that bill just because of my commitment to human rights and equality, and I want to explain it, because he was complaining about the price of Toronto haircuts.

The problem is, Steve Baltich, down in Welland, went on vacation. He went out to Vancouver to visit his daughter who lives on one of the islands, a beautiful young woman. So I went down to Carmen, down at the Sheraton Centre, to get a boot shine and figured I was going to get a haircut at the same time. I saw David at British Hairlines, formerly DiFrancesco Hairstyling at the Sheraton Centre Hotel, a wonderful haircutting place downstairs. They were cutting my hair and he told me what the price was. The price happened to be twice as much as I pay in Welland, so I said, "You take off twice as much then, David," and I think he did a fine job.

So British Hairlines, David down at the Sheraton Centre. Get a boot shine while you're there, and you won't have to worry about any discrimination in terms of gender pricing, I tell you that, Mr. Berardinetti.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I'd like to begin by congratulating my colleague from Scarborough Southwest for his presentation tonight and also welcome his friend Mr. Sutton, here from Alberta, and say that we hope he'll come back and join us in Ontario very soon.

Before commenting, though, on Mr. Berardinetti's speech. I have to correct the record. The member from Nepean-Carleton, whom I congratulate on her maiden speech here tonight, said she was the only member in the House who had a child under the age of five and I'd be remiss if I did not mention my son, John Patrick, all of six months last Saturday, who has gone to bed and could not watch it tonight.

As a new father, I must say that I'm very proud of this budget, and I'm proud of this budget because of the types of measures that my friend the member from Scarborough Southwest mentioned, because budgets are about choices. As he pointed out, we made a choice to address a number of deficits here in our province, a

deficit in terms of health care, and in my own community we've seen investments in hospital capital, wait times, four new family health teams.

In terms of education, I believe there was over \$400 million in this budget which has been invested for things like smaller classes and more textbooks and specialty teachers. And, of course, our strong communities: I have to commend the member from Scarborough Southwest who spoke about some of the infrastructure problems that are faced by our province which were addressed in this recent budget and will go a long way to addressing the deficit in that area.

Also one in terms of skills and learning, and he spoke rather passionately about the money that has gone into post-secondary education. Also into areas of research: In my own community, we saw significant investment in the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics and the Institute of Quantum Computing. The types of investments which are made today are going to have a real payoff down the road.

Once again, I congratulate my colleague and concur with the points that he raised.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I'd like to comment on this Budget Measures Act. I want to raise the issue of truth in budgeting. Before I do that, I'm not sure the member from Kitchener Centre actually was in the Legislature when that comment was made about the age of children. I don't recall seeing him sitting there. Anyway, that could be a point of privilege or—

Mr. Milloy: I was sitting right there.

Mr. Barrett: Were you in your seat? I'm not going to debate that.

I want to talk about truth in budgeting. The member for Leeds-Grenville just indicated to what lengths the members opposite will go to slam the federal government, and I would ask the members opposite to take a look at what the federal government has just done with the introduction of their Federal Accountability Act, a major piece of legislation brought in by the President of the Treasury Board, John Baird—I was speaking with him this evening—and implemented by his able parliamentary secretary, Pierre Poilievre, whom I recently met at a dairy farm, as I recall.

2020

Truth in budgeting is one of the chapters in this book recently introduced by our new federal government. They're going to do two things. They're going to create a position of parliamentary budget officer. The budget officer will operate through the library and will be empowered to do objective analysis of the books, the finances and trends in the economy. The parliamentary budget officer will undertake economic and fiscal research, as requested, and will do estimates of the financial cost of various government proposals.

The second major initiative of this truth-in-budgeting approach will be the provision of quarterly updates on government fiscal forecasts. It's something we see in the private sector. I would suggest to members across the way that some of these ideas are well worth looking at.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Scarborough Southwest has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Berardinetti: I want to thank the members from Leeds–Grenville, Niagara Centre, Kitchener Centre and Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant for their comments regarding my speech. We're not always going to agree on everything, whether it be the price of haircuts or the issue regarding pensions and so on. But I just wanted to say, in closing, that this budget is good for the people of Ontario, as I indicated earlier.

One thing that I really want to stress is the issue of education. I'm going to end with another quote. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in." This government is very engaged in the issue of education: \$6.2 billion in the Reaching Higher investment for post-secondary education—that's \$6.2 billion—and \$424 million more for education in 2006-07 to help students succeed through smaller JK to grade 3 classes, better math and literacy test scores and improved high school completion rates.

I attended the public schools of this province. I went to Ionview Public School and Winston Churchill Collegiate in Scarborough. They were excellent schools, and I highly recommend that anyone should be able to put their kids through public school. I didn't attend private school. I didn't attend any special school. I didn't even attend the Catholic school. I went to a public school in Scarborough, and I'm proud of it. The teachers were great; they were professional; they were number one. I think that that system should be allowed to continue to exist. This government is investing a lot of money to make sure that happens.

I also attended the universities in this province as well—three of them: University of Toronto, University of Windsor and York University. They were all fine universities. And I paid all my tuition fees as well, so they're all paid off, because they were before Mike Harris came to power.

Interjection: They were a lot cheaper back then.

Mr. Berardinetti: And they were a lot cheaper back then.

In closing, this budget addresses a number of things, including education. I'm proud of that.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Runciman: I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate this evening. I found it interesting that the member for Kitchener Centre, in his two-minute response a little while ago, was talking about budgets being all about choices, which is self-evident. Obviously, not just the priorities but I think the political implications were clearly part and parcel of the decision-making process with respect to the drafting of this budget. If you look at the impacts and the reactions, there were decisions taken—and I would think very difficult decisions in some respects, when you're writing off some

of your own colleagues, but I think, politically, that's in effect what has happened here.

I think a cold, calculated decision was made by unelected people, essentially those people planning the next provincial election, as to what their best chances are of retaining a majority government in Ontario, looking at the budget and what you can do to ensure, as best you can, the security of those seats that you think you have a better advantage in, in terms of retention. And I think those decisions were taken to the detriment of small-town, rural Ontario.

In essence—I said this very briefly in a comment a couple of weeks ago, and I know I got some reaction from some of the Liberal backbenchers—I think what in effect has happened here is that the decision-makers in the Liberal government, who are for the most part not elected officials, have made a decision that they're going to write off at least 20 seats. That's a best-case scenario, I believe. That's based on my observations around this place for 25 years.

I've dealt with governments of the Liberal stripe and NDP stripe, and I know that it's difficult for backbenchers and, for that matter, perhaps even members of the executive council to accept that that will be their fate. I think that the reality is the best-case scenario, if the Liberal government wishes to retain a reduced majority in the next election, is that they're going to lose at least 20 seats, and those seats are going to be essentially in small-town, rural Ontario.

They made a calculated decision to make their significant investments in urban Ontario, primarily in the environs of Toronto, to the detriment of so many smaller municipalities and especially those who are dependent on the agricultural sector in the province. We've seen the boycotts from the agricultural sector, boycotting the food centres this last week or so, starving the grocery stores. I think we're going to see more and more of that as the days go by, unless there's some increased support forthcoming, and it doesn't look like it's going to be the case, at least not from the provincial perspective, as we know that many farmers are simply not in the position financially to invest in new crops this spring. That's part of the challenge, and that has a ripple effect throughout rural, small-town economies.

The best-case scenario is, as I said, writing off at least 20 seats. The worst-case scenario is 30 to 35 seats, which means they're going to lose government. I believe this is going to be a tough election a year from now. I don't think it's going to be a cakewalk for anybody. I think it's going to be a difficult, tough election, but I've encouraged members in the Liberal ranks who represent ridings much like mine, much like the member for Nepean–Carleton's, to speak out on those issues, where government initiatives are damaging their communities, damaging rural Ontario, not providing the assistance that's required in small-town, rural Ontario. Speak out and speak up, and you may defy the odds, because I will tell you, people do respect members of this place who take a stand which may not conform with the message of

the day from the government of the day. I've seen that happen on so many occasions. I happen to be a case in point. Early on in my tenure, I opposed Mr. Davis's decision to buy an oil company, Suncor. I think my resistance to that as a government backbencher at the time has stood me in good stead over the years. I would encourage you to think about it.

I know that we see members getting up, despite criticisms from their own riding media and despite hearing it from their own constituents, who feel an obligation to get up and once again spin the government line, read the lines that are provided to them by these unelected advisers making much more money than they are in terms of salary, with good pensions and enhanced severance, sitting in some corner office, telling them what they should say.

Remember, you are the people who were elected. You're the folks who are in this place today because people in your ridings got out and put an X beside your name, because they wanted you to stand up and speak out on their behalf, not simply read text prepared by some unelected, high-paid adviser in the Premier's office.

It's not just this place. I've seen it for so many years where it doesn't matter what party's in power. Hopefully, John Tory, when he becomes Premier here, is going to change this. I believe he's committed to changing this so we don't have the power vested in the Premier's office and all the team of unelected advisers that we've seen, whether it's a Liberal, NDP or Conservative government of the past. That happens at the federal level as well. I think democracy in this country has suffered as a result of that concentration of power in the hands of unelected advisers and officials in the Premier's or Prime Minister's offices in this country and in the provinces across this great nation.

2030

I want to talk a bit about eastern Ontario. My colleague the member for Nepean–Carleton, Ms. MacLeod, in her maiden speech talked about what she's seeing in her own riding. We had a statement she delivered in the House today. The member from Orillia, Mr. Dunlop, also spoke about the rural sector. In eastern Ontario, I want to focus on primarily what's happening in both the rural and agricultural sectors, but also in the manufacturing sector, which is really being devastated. There is absolutely no attention being paid to the crisis. I believe it is a growing crisis in small-town, rural Ontario in terms of the loss of manufacturing jobs, which are unlikely to return once they're gone. These are plants that have been in place for 50, 60, 70 years.

The Hathaway shirt factory in Prescott in my riding closed down. The history of Hathaway in Canada is rooted in Prescott, Ontario. That's where Hathaway began in Canada. Now that operation has closed. They're gone forever from the place in which they began their businesses in this country. We saw RCA move out of Prescott. We saw Newell Manufacturing move out of Prescott. This is a town of 5,000 people—a town of 5,000 people losing significant manufacturing over a period of

a few years. I think you can have some appreciation of the impact that has on the economy and on the tax base, on the ability of a small municipality to provide the necessary services to their taxpaying constituents and others who can't pay taxes.

I'll continue with my own riding for a moment. In Brockville, we've seen the closure of SCI: 1,100 jobs moving to Montreal and the United States and some to Mexico. We saw Mahle Manufacturing in Gananoque close recently—another significant job loss. Black and Decker moved out of Brockville. Phillips Cables closed down its complete plant operations in Brockville. Recently, we heard of Nestlé closing its manufacturing operations in Chesterville—again, a long history in that community and very significant to the economic well-being of that particular part of eastern Ontario. Domtar in Cornwall—I think it was 1,200 jobs, and the final lock on the door was a week or two ago. You can imagine the impact of 1,200 jobs being lost in the city of Cornwall. Morrisburg lost—I can't think of the name off the top of my head, but it was a textile operation again—150 to 200 jobs in the Morrisburg area. We've seen manufacturing operations closing down in Belleville recently and throughout eastern Ontario. Province-wide, 80,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in the last calendar year. Projections are that there might be up to 100,000 manufacturing jobs lost this coming year.

I want to focus on eastern Ontario with the exception of Ottawa, which has had its own challenges and struggles and was essentially ignored by the budget in terms of infrastructure funding and so many other areas where they could have provided assistance. But Ottawa and the city of Kingston have done reasonably well over the years. They've had some challenges as well, I'll admit. But outside of Ottawa and Kingston, I recall a study done some years ago by the federal government showing that poverty levels in pockets of eastern Ontario were the greatest in all of the province of Ontario, pockets around Cornwall and some of the areas in Mr. Yakubuski's riding, with people living in desperate circumstances. That situation has only worsened over the past two or three years with the loss of good manufacturing jobs and the ripple impact that has on the providers to those businesses and the providers of good and services to the employees of those businesses.

We see so many in the agricultural sector who are in desperate circumstances. Unless you get out and actually meet and talk to these people, I don't think you have a real understanding or comprehension. I've said in this House before that I hope the Minister of Agriculture—maybe she's done this already—would look, especially when the House is in break period, at having a number of trips into rural Ontario, bus trips, whatever, to meet people, spend a day talking to them, taking with her the colleagues who represent urban Ontario, the Toronto area, who perhaps don't have the understanding and appreciation that I suspect she would have as a representative of that part of the province.

The federal member, Gord Brown, and I spent a day a couple of months ago touring farms: beef farms, dairy farms, hog farms and poultry. But we also met with a whole range of people impacted by what's happening in rural Ontario, not just the farmers themselves: implement dealers, seed dealers, bank managers, grocery store operators, people who were all suffering, who have extended lines of credit to try and keep their friends and neighbours afloat during this extremely difficult period.

I guess it's all in having an appreciation of how important the agricultural sector is to our heritage and to small-town Ontario. We see an attack on that. We've seen the creation of an organization called the Lanark Landowners Association. I have an offshoot of that in my own riding, the Leeds and Grenville Landowners Association. You can agree or disagree with their tactics, but I have to say that I think many of the positions they take are valid and are accurate observations and reflections of the growing anger in rural Ontario.

For example, we have these decisions about markets and selling pies, where organizations for 50 or 60 years have been supporting the local church by having a bake sale or having potluck dinners at the local church hall. We have these storm troopers coming in, closing these operations down and saying, "You can't do this without some certified kitchen. All this material has to be produced in a government-approved, centralized kitchen." You have the bureaucrats in their ivory towers in Toronto telling these people, who for decades and decades have been doing this—it's part of the culture of small-town rural Ontario. Now we have these bureaucrats, who supposedly are directed by the members of this elected assembly, telling rural Ontarians, "No, you can't do that any longer. You can't sell ungraded eggs at the side of the road at your farm. You can't do this. You can't do that. You have no property rights," etc. You can understand their frustration, and sometimes I don't support it. I'm a supporter of supply management and my party is a supporter of supply management, so I think there are situations where the case goes beyond the pale.

2040

But there are so many other instances where this government and this assembly—I think we have to take responsibility on our shoulders, especially those of us who represent small-town, rural Ontario, to speak up on behalf of these people and make sure their voice is heard. That is one of their ongoing and legitimate frustrations, that their voices aren't being heard enough. Quite often, especially in government ranks—and I'm not trying to be partisan with respect to the fact that we have a Liberal government of the day; it probably happened with the Conservative and NDP governments as well, that people are intimidated and don't get up and don't speak on behalf of their constituents, people who have very legitimate concerns about the intrusions of government and its bureaucratic arms throughout the province of Ontario, with little appreciation or understanding, let alone empathy, for the great historic traditions of this province in rural Ontario. More and more of us have to

start doing that. If that means going on the front lines—and I have to give my colleague Mr. Barrett, whose riding is Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant, credit because he's taken a very activist role in this, and I'm sure that some people will be critical of him for doing that. But when we've talked about the tractor blockades on the 401 to express frustration, or wherever it might be, Mr. Barrett has been front and centre. He has had the courage of his convictions. He's standing up for the people he represents and he's doing it extremely well. As long as he wants to run for re-election in this place, he will be re-elected, because he does have the courage of his convictions. Regrettably, we don't hear enough of that or see enough of that in this place. I would encourage my colleagues across the floor to think about that, to think about it in the next year as we approach the election.

Obviously, we're already seeing things designed to assist the government in its re-election bid. I was reading Mr. Kinsella's comments recently. Mr. Kinsella, for those who are watching and don't know, is a high-priced Liberal adviser who used to work with that renowned group in Ottawa led by Mr. Chrétien, who got caught up in a little thing called the sponsorship scandal. Mr. Kinsella is a key adviser to Mr. McGuinty in terms of preparation for the next provincial election. He is also being well reimbursed by a whole range of people who want access to the Liberal government. Most recently, it was brought to our attention, he is being paid \$100,000 by boards of education. Now, where do boards of education get their money? I think it's from taxpayers. They're paying Mr. Kinsella \$100,000 to have access and hopefully persuade the Liberal government of their cause. That's the sort of thing that's going on. But Mr. Kinsella was talking about the Premier, Mr. McGuinty, as Joe Schmo. He said that Dalton McGuinty is Joe Schmo and the province is full of Joe Schmos. I think at one point maybe Mr. McGuinty was Joe Schmo, but he isn't any longer, and he's supposed to be representing eastern Ontario. He's now living in a mansion in Forest Hill paid for, essentially, by taxpayers through the Liberal Party of Ontario. He's getting very expensive haircuts, driving in a limo, escorted by OPP. When he has to face traffic jams going to Hamilton, he has a taxpayer-funded airplane fly him to Hamilton. His days as Joe Schmo are over, and I think he has effectively lost touch with the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Bisson: I have just a couple of comments on the speech we just heard. There was a bit of a theme in one part of it that I think a number of us are starting to feel, especially in the rural and northern parts of this province, and that is a move on the part of the provincial government to stop what we're seeing in out-migration from those communities into larger centres. If we don't get our heads around this particular issue, I think it's not only going to negatively effect, obviously, those rural and northern communities that lose people to the Toronto economies of the world and others, but at the end of the day it hurts us all. This province only works well, in my

view, if all sums of it are able to benefit in some way from what's happening in the economy. What we've got in places like Toronto and others is a synergy; the economy is large enough on its own, despite whichever government is there, to fuel itself as an economy—just the fact that investors are all in one area, the transportation system is such, banking services and capital are available in close proximity, telecommunications. All of that lends itself well to the economy running well in places like Toronto, the GTA and other areas.

But what we're seeing is that there is really no policy on the part of the provincial government—and I think that's what Mr. Runciman was trying to speak to—to really look at how you deal with economic development in those other areas of the province. How do you make sure there's a growing economy in the eastern part of the province? How do you make sure there's a growing economy in the northern part of this province or other parts of Ontario? I think that's a sense in which a lot of people are feeling frustrated with this government. You look at the closure of the mill in Cornwall. People said, "Where is the government?" It was nowhere to be found. You find closures of sawmills and paper mills in northern Ontario. Entire communities, like Kenora, Chapleau, Kirkland Lake, Opasatika, Terrace Bay and Thunder Bay, are devastated, and the government's response is almost deafening. I think people are starting to feel, "Where is this government when it comes to these issues? Who's speaking for me?" I think that's what the member was trying—

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: As a member from eastern Ontario, I would like to remind the member from Leeds–Grenville that I wish he had been such a strong advocate for eastern Ontario when they were in government. Maybe then that government wouldn't have downloaded 40% of the provincial highways onto the municipalities in eastern Ontario. That was a burden that was beyond their ability to bear.

Our government has come along and, partnering with our federal government, implemented the COMRIF program. Municipalities are very appreciative of the investment that this government has undertaken to make in rural infrastructure. I would also remind the honourable member that we've chosen to invest in Move Ontario, which is providing \$400 million for rural municipalities across Ontario so that they can invest in roads and bridges without qualification; they don't have to apply through the COMRIF process. We have invested in rural schools, in family health teams that will enable families across rural Ontario to access primary care through family health teams.

But I was most intrigued with the honourable member's comments about the landowners, and his statement that he is in communion with what they represent, the ideals that they represent. Landowners are against supply management; landowners are against food safety. Obviously, the honourable member doesn't see any problem in selling ungraded eggs. It would appear that

he's not in favour of food safety either. He's prepared to overlook the need for that. The landowners are against supplying support to farmers in times of need, and our government believes that we need to support our farmers. We want to work with our farmers and our federal government. I think it's very unfortunate that the honourable member would follow what I believe to be unsound policies. It will certainly be something I will be bringing to the attention of supply management folks, if that is your party's position.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'm pleased to be able to offer a few comments in response to those made by the member from Leeds-Grenville. I think one of the hallmarks of the comments he made was recognizing the very important role the government plays in providing the right climate for job creation. In fact, when we look at this province in the last year, we see a pretty dismal record, quite frankly, in the area of job losses, particularly in specific areas—manufacturing, and also in the primary areas of lumbering and paper mills and places like that. Certainly, when you look at the fact that without a job a family loses a great deal in terms of its ability to function, it also has an impact on the community at large. He referenced the kinds of problems that we see in rural Ontario, where agricultural policies are leading to devastation, where farmers are unable to plant, to put seeds in the ground, to make that kind of investment in their own personal financial future.

I spoke to an individual affected by job loss in Thunder Bay. It was interesting, because it's such a short turnaround time before that one job loss translates into a community being devastated. It was clear by his wife's occupation that she felt the immediate pinch in her business by the number of people who'd lost their jobs unable then to do business with her. That's what we're looking at with this government.

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Mr. Arthurs: I appreciate the two minutes. I must say, I'm somewhat disappointed in the comments of the member for Leeds-Grenville, with some 25 years. The middle part of his comments, from a parliamentary perspective—Her Majesty's loyal opposition to hold governments to account—was reasonable. I didn't agree with his speech, but the middle part was reasonable on his role. I must say, the first seven and a half minutes and the last two minutes disappointed me. I can only refer to them as a form of political intimidation—spending an inordinate amount of time talking about the number of seats that a government might lose in a pending election, about salaries and pensions and enhanced severances and advisers, and referencing the Premier and his work and the schedule he keeps and choosing, because of his business, to live here in Toronto, but disparagingly so, and the form of home he may be residing in currently or the nature of his haircuts or how he has to travel and have the security that any Premier would have in this province. I think that's an unfortunate use of the time available, some 20 minutes.

I would think that as someone with 25 years here, or thereabouts, the member for Leeds-Grenville, having served in opposition and in government, quite frankly would have far more to offer to the budget debate in his 20 minutes than using half of the time for that type of approach to the budget. As a member of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, Her Majesty's official opposition, his comments in respect to how he sees the budget, to hold governments to account, are the right things to do, and it's how the time should be spent—in spite of the fact that we've contributed some \$800 million over three years for income support for farmers, \$125 million recently for the grain and oilseeds part of the business, as a clear effort to ensure that we can provide a hand up in support to the farming community. That's only one example of some of the things we're doing, and I wish the member had spent more time talking about the budget and less about those other things.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments.

The member for Leeds-Grenville has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Runciman: I thank all members who participated in responses. It's always interesting when a Liberal gets up and chastises a member of the opposition for being critical of the Liberal government. Those of us who've been around here for a while recall the vicious and very often personal attacks by the Liberal Party when they were in opposition, so it's pretty difficult to swallow this sort of view on how deeply offended they are when they feel some heat with respect to what I think are justifiable criticisms and observations about them in government and some of their representatives.

I also found it interesting with the Minister of Agriculture to talk about food safety. I think of the folks back in my riding, the Philippsville Women's Institute and others, who like to hold potluck dinners, and listen to what this minister has to say, this minister, who supposedly represents rural Ontario, getting up and defending the bureaucratic jackbooters who want to close down these kinds of historic operations in rural Ontario.

The reality is, this is a Toronto-centric government. If the minister is talking to people in rural Ontario, she'll get that kind of feedback from them. They are very upset about the budget; they're very upset about the focus on Toronto, to the detriment of small-town, rural Ontario. Just look at the makeup of the cabinet: Almost 50% of the cabinet are representatives of the city of Toronto. This is where they believe their electoral well-being is in terms of a possible re-election next year, and that is their primary focus. The rest of us, especially those of us in small-town, rural Ontario, are suffering as a result of it.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Bisson: Let me try. It being almost 9:30 of the clock—I just thought I'd test the waters, see if you people here are paying attention at about five to 9. I notice I have some supporters out there.

I want to say, Speaker, that I am more than pleased to participate tonight in this budget speech. And I must say, as whip, I couldn't have picked a worse Chair.

Anyway, I want to put on the record a number of things that I know my colleague from Ottawa–Nepean and my friends from other parts of the province are going to agree with, that is, a real sense that this government has kind of lost its drift; it's out on the ocean somewhere and nobody really knows where it's going, and we had better hope we don't find an iceberg soon, because if it finds us, God help us, I don't know if we're going to be able to steer around it.

Let me give you a couple of reasons why I feel that way. I represent northeastern Ontario. My riding is Timmins–James Bay. It takes up most of northeastern Ontario, most of the geography stemming from Timmins up to Hudson's Bay, from the Quebec border out to about Lake Nipigon. We're really hurting. There's no nice way of putting it. Government likes to say, "Look at this. Jobs are going to be going up and things are just going to be rosy." But in the city of Timmins, let me tell you, if it weren't for mining, we would be doing really bad. We're lucky that the mining sector is doing well, that gold prices are up, base metal prices are up. Despite anything anybody else does, when gold prices are up and base metal prices are up, the mining sector does well, and because of that, there's some good, positive activity happening in our community.

In fact, I want to start this on a positive note. A couple of weeks ago, I was at the Porcupine Prospectors Association annual ball. I've gone to many of these over the years. I've been a member here for some 16 or 17 years, and I have been to a lot of them. I have been to a number of them where you get a bunch of explorationists and a bunch of geologists in the room and, boy oh boy, it couldn't have been a grimmer place. But this last time Charlie Angus, my federal counterpart, and I, along with the mayor, Vic Power, were there and I have never seen so many geologists and explorationists in a better mood because of what's happening with the price of gold and copper. That's really nice to see for a change. That industry has really seen some tough times over the years, and it has taken a real change for the positive with the change we've seen in the base price of metals.

If we could only get forestry working just as well, we'd just be swimming in money in northern Ontario. I want to start on this point, to say what I said earlier in response of one of the speeches: The economy of Ontario, in my view, only works well if all parts are doing well. If the agricultural sector is healthy, if the mining and forestry sectors are healthy, pulp and paper, manufacturing, if all of it is healthy, then all of us can prosper to some degree. The problem we have is that our economies are very much regionalized across this province. That's just the history of it. I don't blame any particular government for how the economy is structured today. That has been the doing of the private sector and, to some degree, governments over the years when it

comes to how we have established infrastructure and how business has developed over the years.

There was a time, specifically for us in northern Ontario, when forestry and mining were doing well, that we were doing extremely well. There was lots of employment. Young people wanted to stay in their communities and people wanted to come into our communities to get jobs. Businesses wanted to go there to establish, to make money. Everything worked well for everyone, including the province of Ontario, because as it turns out, forestry and mining are great big exporters in Ontario and do a lot when it comes to evening out our balance of trade with the United States and others because those are some of the main commodities of the province. It just happens that at this time we're at a juncture in the economy where mining is doing well but forestry is not doing so well—it's doing pretty badly, quite frankly—and we find ourselves in a situation where there's this huge restructuring going on in industry and the government doesn't seem to know how to respond. It's really bewildering.

I was speaking earlier today at the wood conference of the Steelworkers. It used to be the old IWA 2955. It represents all the sawmill workers and woodland workers from about David Ramsay's riding and mine, Charlie Angus's riding, across northeastern Ontario. We were having a chat and they were saying what the problems are in their industry. There are many. This provincial government is trying now to say, "It's all the softwood lumber dispute." I remind members of this assembly that we've been dealing with this dispute since the beginning of free trade. This is the fifth time that we've had actions against the United States in regard to their trying to say that we're somehow subsidizing the forestry sector where all tribunals—in fact, one just came back last week saying that's not the case. So this is nothing new. It happened in the 1990s, it's happened since and it's going to happen again. We're going to win this one. The Americans are just going to back to doing what they do best, and that is being a protectionist economy.

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Let's put it where it is. The Americans talk a great line when it comes to being the defenders of the free world and the biggest free market economy, but the only thing free about it is their access. Americans are very good at wanting to have access to everybody else's markets and everybody else's economies and opportunities, but when it comes to us to getting access to theirs, it's a different thing. Take a look at what happened in the agricultural industries when it came to our producers in the meat sectors in cattle and pigs and others. The Americans closed the borders for how long, and how crippling was that to our industry?

Let's take a look at the subsidization that the Americans have on their grain and oilseed producers. What are the numbers, Minister of Agriculture, if you can help me? I understand it's about \$250 per acre that the Americans are subsidizing their producers against ours. What are the numbers? Help me. She doesn't know

offhand. That's what happens to politicians, I guess. Sometimes we see a number, and when we try to refer to it weeks later, it ain't there. But the point is that the Americans are great big subsidizers to their agricultural industry. They then point the finger at us with our forestry industry and say, "Look at how protectionist you are." We're not even subsidizing the industry. They're subsidizing their agricultural industry and they call us protectionist? My, I've seen everything.

My point is that we can't pass this crisis in forestry off to what's going on in the softwood lumber industry. The reality is that there are some issues we need to deal with here within the province. People are waiting for this government to respond to the key economic issues within the forestry sector. The biggest one is hydro—surprise, surprise. If you're operating a pulp and paper mill somewhere in Ontario, be it Cornwall, Kenora, Kapuskasing or Elliot—I was going to say Elliot Lake; they'd love to have one—or Espanola, the issue is the same: Electricity prices will drive you out of business. I sat down, along with my leader, with industry leaders from Tembec, Abitibi and Domtar, and they've all said the same thing to us. They said, "Listen, if we have to invest money in our pulp and paper industry, it isn't going to be in Ontario, and the prime reason is electricity cost." They're saying it flat out. They're not about to make major investments in Ontario, and if you don't make those major investments in those mills today, they're not going to be here 15 years from now because they won't be competitive. You've got to invest the money today to make sure you're competitive tomorrow, to make sure you have the best technologies, to make sure you're as efficient as you can be.

God knows that the Ontario industry is amongst the most competitive in the world, but we're going to lose that competitiveness because industry does not have the confidence to invest money in this province in their own mills. Why? Because they can buy electricity for between a third and a half of the cost in the provinces of Quebec and Manitoba. The Premier stood up the other day in the House to answer a question from my leader, I think it was, or it might have been another member, saying, "Well, Quebec has abundant hydroelectricity prospects, and Manitoba has the same." Like we don't? Has anybody looked at the number of rivers in this province and how much electricity we actually generate from our rivers? Yes, we have a bit of a crunch going on right now, but I think that crunch is being artificially created to a certain extent by this government in its bid to boost nuclear power. I think at the end of the day that's going to kill us. The whole coal issue: You can't take 7,500 megawatts out of the system and expect to not have a hiccup in the system. If the goal is to eliminate coal, that's laudable, but you've got to do it in such a way that there's a replacement there that's efficient for consumers to pay.

We need to take a look at the issue of conservation much more seriously. The amount of money we spend on conservation is a pittance compared to what we could be

spending, which would allow us not to have to invest in nuclear and drive up the price of electricity again. Plus, this government's bid to continue down the road of privatization and deregulation in the hydro industry is madness. It doesn't work. It hasn't worked anywhere. Why do you think it's going to work here? They tried it in Alberta. They tried it in California. They tried in the UK. It doesn't work.

At the end of the day, one of the cornerstones of the Ontario economy is—or was, I should say—supplying electricity at cost to our industry. If you were establishing a plant in Kapuskasing to make pulp and paper, one of your competitive advantages was low electricity prices. Why? Well, that one was of the ways that we gave our companies a little bit of an edge without subsidizing them. We weren't subsidizing industry. What we were doing was supplying electricity at cost, and that is part of the incentive for working in Ontario. So people that needed a lot of electricity—in the mining industry, manufacturing, forestry and others—established themselves here because of that, and we're going to get rid of that. It's beyond me. When I talked to the Steelworkers this morning or when I talk to people in industry, they shake their heads. Poor Terry Skiffington, who's the manager at Tembec. The first thing he does every day and the second thing he does every day and the last thing he does every day is look at the price of electricity. This guy has got other things to do than just watch the price of hydro; he's got to run a mill. But they're so concerned about the price of hydro, they've got to keep an eye on it almost every second to make the decisions about what's going to happen with production that minute, that day. I say to the government, if you're going to do something to address the issues affecting industry, you've got to look at electricity costs.

The other thing you need to do, quite frankly, is that we need to have some forestry policy here, economic development policy designed for the forestry sector, something that has not been done. If the government does that, maybe then there will be confidence. But I don't see it at this point. People ask, why is the government prepared to support—and rightfully so, no argument—subway expansion for Toronto? Wonderful. The film industry in Toronto? Wonderful—great support; nothing wrong with that. Support the automotive industry in southern Ontario? Great; nothing wrong with that. "But why won't you support us?" they say. And it's the same thing across rural and northern Ontario, the whole sense that this government has a policy that says, "Rural and northern Ontario? Where is that? Can somebody show me the road map? Heard about that somewhere. Somebody spoke about that last week, didn't they?" And nothing gets done.

I know how frustrating it is for some of my colleagues on the government side. I've seen the articles. I've been in your communities, as you've been in mine over the years. I understand how difficult it is. I just say we've got to wrestle that one some way, because otherwise it's

going to be a really tough time down the road when it comes to what happens in forestry.

The other thing that is bothering me in the economy—I started to speak about it but I got a little bit sidetracked because I got on my hydro hobbyhorse and my hobbyhorse around forestry, because those are the issues that are often front and centre in my mind. But it's the issue of regionalization. There is this really growing sense that there is no policy to figure out how to assist the northern and rural economies in this province. I come back to my point. If we're able to support our economies in rural and northern Ontario, the rest is going to take care of itself. Toronto? I love Toronto. Toronto is a wonderful city. But the economy of Toronto is going to work no matter what you do. There are how many millions of people in this area and the investors are here and the transportation infrastructure is here. Barring doing something catastrophically stupid, the economy around the GTA is going to work fine. But if we were to concentrate on making sure that central, northern and rural Ontario were doing well economically through policies that make sense to assist the entrepreneurs to get things going, then the rest of it is going to take care of itself. Because where are they are going to buy their supplies and services anyway? They're going to buy them in Toronto, in the GTA.

Imagine if we had a value-added industry in northern Ontario in the woods industry as they have in Holland per capita. There is more value-added going on in Holland than there is in all of Ontario, and they don't even have a forest to cut down. We do, and we do it well and we replant it. But imagine if we were to have the types of incentives we need. For example, you can't access capital north of French River. My good friend Michael Gravelle knows that. How many entrepreneurs have we dealt with who say, "I go to the bank and there's this unwritten policy that they don't lend money north of the French liver—River"? North of the French liver too. My French liver can only take so much. It's all those late nights and wine and whatever. "My French liver"—that was funny. Even I laugh at myself on that one. And some livers are bigger than others, but that's another story.

Anyway, my point is that north of the French River it's hard to get money, so we need to find some way either to get the banks to assist, or if not them, then for us to create the type of investment vehicles that allow them to access capital. We need to support entrepreneurs in taking a look at, if they have an idea, helping them put together the business plans. We do this stuff to an extent—the northern Ontario heritage fund and FedNor and other programs support them somewhat—but there's really no one place people can go where those types of services are available in a way that works for them in developing their business plans, in taking a look at the markets, in looking at the transportation issues: How do you get your goods to market? How do you get your raw materials to your mill? How do you get your raw materials and your supplies to your mill in a way that's cost-efficient so you can compete with the guy who's

trying to put you out of business somewhere in the GTA or China or wherever it might be? We need to have those types of policies to assist our entrepreneurs to do that kind of economic activity. We need to seriously look at this issue to make sure that central, rural, northern, eastern and southwestern Ontario are able to thrive when it comes to the rural and northern economies so that at the end of the day we all do well. If we do, Toronto will do well, because that's where they're going to buy most of their supplies and services to get their mills going or whatever it is they're going to build.

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There seems to be this sense of regionalization. One of the things that drove somebody crazy—I was at a meeting in my constituency a couple of weeks ago—was on the LHINs issue, the local health integration network that is now being set up in North Bay for all of the area in northeastern Ontario. It would be like somebody sitting in Sarnia having to go to a LHIN meeting in Toronto—even farther. It's really far. So people first feel disconnected. But what's now going on is this real sense that there's going to be a regionalization of services. We just found out that the alcohol addiction services are going to be regionalized. That's going to drive people over the edge. Those communities that are the most economically hurt, which probably need addiction services the most, are going to have to travel their people further to get treatment. That doesn't work. People don't travel great distances when they're crying out for help. They cry out for help for a few minutes, and if we get them in time, they end up in a centre; if they don't, they keep on drinking or whatever the abuse might be. And there's a CCAC move. They're going to be regionalizing the community care access centres. Small communities are saying, "It's hard enough in Smooth Rock Falls to get Timmins to pay attention to us. Imagine where we'll be if it's North Bay." There's a real sense that there's a regionalization of services going on.

It's not just for me. I'm sure that in Parry Sound and others we all have the same issues. My point is that government needs to pay attention to those parts of the province that need their attention the most. I'll say it again. This is not a bash on Toronto. I love Toronto, the GTA, the people here, the economy; it's great. But we need to make sure that we take care of the outlying areas, because at the end of the day, if you take care of them, Toronto and others will do fine. There seems to be a sense that that is not happening to the degree it should be. I heard one of the Liberal members heckling Mr. Runciman, I think it was, about 31,000 jobs last month. I sort of sat there and went, "Yeah, probably all around the GTA." I don't doubt it. There probably were 31,000; probably a lot of part-time and low-wage jobs in there, but I'm sure there are some good ones too. But how many in Parry Sound—Muskoka and how many in Nepean and how many in Timmins and how many in Chapleau and how many in Thunder Bay and how many in Kenora?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Mining jobs.

Mr. Bisson: But I'm saying—I started this whole thing out by saying that mining is good, but there has been a net loss in jobs in northern Ontario because of what we've seen in forestry.

I just say to members, be careful. I'm happy that Toronto is doing well—it's great, it's wonderful—but God, we want some of that too. At the end of the day, who is served well if all the young people in communities like mine end up in Toronto? Nobody is served well by that. The families aren't served well, the kids aren't served well and I would argue that Toronto is not served well, because it adds to the multitude of problems that come with administrating a large city with many, many people. In my view, you're better off having the outlying areas doing well and supporting themselves and prospering so at the end of the day we're all able to participate in a way that makes some sense.

I've only got a minute left, and I just want to end on this note, and I hope I can do it in 58 seconds. Yesterday, I was at the funeral of the little girl who died in the house fire in Kashechewan. It was really something to be at. I've been to a number of these, and the Mushkegowuk Cree have an amazing way of healing themselves. We were at the ceremony yesterday, and it went on for about five hours, because everybody in the community who wanted to get up and said something about what had happened and talked about the little girl and the wonderful person she was and the life she gave the community. I couldn't help but sit there and think to myself, "If only the rest of us had that attitude." They're amazing people to go through the difficulties they do—we know what they are—and at the end of the day still have hope. It just floors me when I work with the people. I just end on this point: We need to work together to come up with a regional solution for fire services and emergency services in those communities. It's unacceptable that you don't have a fire department and police services or ambulance service in communities like Kashechewan where people die because the basic services aren't there. I call on you to help.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): Obviously, I listened very intently to the comments by the member from Timmins–James Bay, and certainly there's nobody in the Legislature who would argue about the crisis that we've been facing with the forestry sector in northern Ontario. But it's difficult to sit here and listen to those remarks when the member will not acknowledge the response that our government has had to that crisis. One talks about the help that's gone to various other sectors. In fact, we couldn't wait for the budget to come out in order to provide the help we needed. In February, \$220 million was provided, once again, to have the province pay for the cost of forestry access roads. The member may not particularly like to hear this, but it was his own government that began to download those particular costs to the companies, which

were not at all pleased to see it happen. We uploaded those costs again. We put a rebate on stumpage fees. We have the \$150-million prosperity fund to help companies with their energy projects, which are going to be rolling out very soon. The Ontario Forest Industry Association has noted that no government has been more helpful than our government, and more substantially helpful in a financial sense, in the history of this province.

I'm not suggesting this is the end of the story or there's not more we do. We know there are some real some challenges related to the energy file, and I'm delighted to have the Premier talking about the possibility of regionalized pricing.

I also want to say, with the few seconds I have left, that nobody tonight has talked about the one great choice that was made in this budget, which was to provide the insulin pump for children with diabetes. You talk about choices. It was a great choice that was made. We know that the lives of 6,500 young people are going to be improved in a dramatic way because of the provision of insulin pumps and the supplies associated with them. I'm very proud of that. We all should be in this House. It was a great triumph for us all.

Mr. Barrett: I enjoyed the comments of the member from Timmins–James Bay. When you're debating the Budget Measures Act, Bill 81, it does get a little dry, and it was refreshing to have him talk about his French liver. I myself am from a family of long livers. Many of us here may well be descended from nobility. I think of cirrhosis of the liver. Maybe this comes to mind because I spent 20 years working for the Addiction Research Foundation.

I want to take a look at schedule O of the Tobacco Tax Act, which is contained in part in the Budget Measures Act. It focuses on, yet again, additional measures incorporated in this legislation with respect to enforcement. This would be enforcement with respect to excise and duties. Obviously, this government is losing control of the tobacco economy and obviously has completely lost control of the underground tobacco economy. So schedule O amendments are proposed to the Tobacco Tax Act to strengthen Ontario's tobacco-related enforcement activities, including enhancements to allow greater information sharing amongst provincial, municipal and federal counterparts. We have an astounding situation. I just think of one native community, Six Nations, within my riding. Organized crime has pretty well taken over the sale and the availability—in part, the manufacture—of tobacco products, certainly on other reserves. Six Nations has a legitimate manufacturing facility that is under the auspices of the federal government.

Mr. Leal: I listened intently to the member from James Bay. I had the opportunity to be in Timmins not too long ago on behalf of the Minister of Energy. It was an opportunity for me to hear first-hand, as he very accurately described, of the positive nature right now in terms of the mining industry, particularly with the development of the De Beers mine and the opportunity for the Attawapiskat First Nation people to train for those

jobs, and rightfully so, because that's a resource within that area.

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One of the difficulties in the forestry industry is that many manufacturers thought we were always going to have the 63-cent dollar. Many of them took the opportunity and made substantial profits during those days of the dollar at 63 cents but failed to invest for the future. Other companies that looked ahead and saw that the dollar was going to appreciate because of the fundamental strength of the Canadian economy took the opportunity to invest in new manufacturing, new machinery, new processes, and they're the ones throughout this province that are able to survive. In fact, in my hometown of Peterborough—there's some talk about doom and gloom in eastern Ontario—General Electric has just added 200 people to the workforce in my community.

The other thing that I've never quite understood about the NDP position is their approach to nuclear energy. In Ontario today there are 30,000 jobs directly related to the nuclear industry, and those 30,000 jobs by and large are high-paid, unionized jobs that are based on a lot of research and development. You would think at least that you'd want to look at that as part of our mix to provide for the future. If you want to talk about small-town Ontario, General Electric has an operation in Arnprior that makes fuel bundles, and Port Hope and several other communities. So when we talk about power for the future and the options we have, I think we should remind ourselves that in a lot of small-town Ontario there are very advanced manufacturers in this area.

Ms. MacLeod: I'd like to commend my colleague from the New Democratic Party, Gilles Bisson of Timmins–James Bay. I enjoyed his comedic relief, but I also applaud him for standing up for rural communities.

Interjection.

Ms. MacLeod: Oh, he's very funny. For the eight days I've been here, he's been very funny.

I applaud him for standing up for rural Ontario, as I represent a very vast riding with a large rural component.

I'm wondering if the honourable member has any thoughts on accountability in this government. My colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk mentioned the Federal Accountability Act, of which people in Nepean–Carleton are very proud because the previous member, who is now the Treasury Board president, John Baird, was the minister responsible for ushering that in. But we're also very proud because the parliamentary secretary to the Treasury Board is the member of Parliament for Nepean–Carleton, Pierre Poilievre. He was largely responsible for drafting the whistle-blower protection portion of the accountability act. I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts and/or ideas on how perhaps our current government, the Liberal government, might be able to adopt some similar legislation and make it more accountable and keep a few more promises, and how that might benefit your area of Ontario, in fact all of rural Ontario; for example, maybe making the Ministry of Agriculture a

lead ministry, as was the promise in 2003, and maybe restoring some of the \$244 million cut from the agriculture budget or the 56%—or is it 51%?—that was stripped from the grain and oilseed producers.

Anyway, I've just been here eight days. I'm very much enjoying learning, being very proud of the constituents in Nepean–Carleton and wanting to fight for their interests, and I just wanted to know if you have any thoughts.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Timmins–James Bay has two minutes to reply.

Applause.

Mr. Bisson: I very much appreciate the warm round of applause from all my colleagues in the House.

To all of you, the members from Nepean–Carleton, Peterborough, Haldimand–Norfolk, and Thunder Bay–Superior, I just say—first of all to the member for Thunder Bay–Superior, I made those comments today at the Steelworker thing about the five bucks on the delivered wood costs, but our point is that it doesn't cut the grade. We've still got problems. That's the point I was trying to make.

In regards to my good friend from Haldimand–Norfolk, I thought it was pretty good humour. I never thought about that. What was the line you used? I had to write it down. I talked about my French liver and you talked about your being a long liver. I thought that's not bad at all—pretty good.

The member from Peterborough, I heard your comments. I couldn't agree with you less.

And to my good friend from Nepean–Carleton, yes, you have to have a sense of humour in this place, otherwise you'll never survive. If you've been here eight days, you've figured it out a lot quicker than most. Quite frankly, we need to keep our humour amongst us, otherwise this place will drive you crazy. Certainly, the rigors of the job, as we all know, will drive you crazy. We are serving because we choose to serve, but we all know, across the aisles, no matter what party you come from, there are a lot of demands on your time from your constituents, your constituency office, your government portfolio, whatever my critic's portfolio might be. What happens in this place is important, but we shouldn't take ourselves so seriously that at the end of the day we can't laugh at ourselves or amongst ourselves about particular issues.

I'm going to challenge the next person who gets up in the House to suggest the following: that we move adjournment of the debate to the next date.

Mr. Wilkinson: I want to welcome the new member for Nepean–Carleton. I would say, with all due respect to her inaugural speech, you might want to talk to your colleagues a bit about the history of this place; talk about accountability and represent a party that perpetrated that great electoral fraud known as the Magna budget. When we talk about accountability, when we talk about John Baird, who used to be here—I know that there is no Catholic like a convert Catholic, and I say that as a Catholic. There is none who sees more than those who

have been down the dark path. I'm sure Mr. Baird is a great believer in accountability now that he has a new day in Ottawa, because he was part of a government that perpetrated this fraud, running around the province saying that everything was balanced. And then I hear from other members from the north and the rural areas and they tell us how bad things are.

Let's just deal with the facts in my own riding of Perth–Middlesex. When we were doing the finance subcommittee, I had a chance to talk to the three great economists we had in: Roger Martin, the dean of the Rotman School of Management; Warren Jestin, chief economist of Scotiabank; and Hugh Mackenzie, who is a research associate with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. I laid out for them, "Basically what you've said is that we've got ourselves in a pickle because previously we were cutting taxes"—now, who was doing that? Oh yes, that would be the previous government—"while we were still in deficit." So we ended up with a surplus of deficits. They told us infrastructure—fiscal, social and energy. That is what these learned gentlemen were telling us, that we have this surplus of deficits that was inherited.

Despite that, I vote for this budget quite simply because I know in my own riding, in Perth–Middlesex, when we took office, we were transferring, through our municipal partners, some \$22.5 million a year. Do you know how much we're transferring now?

Interjections: How much?

Mr. Wilkinson: The \$22 million plus \$8.4 million—37% more to my municipalities, and they're quite thankful. We just delivered a cheque for \$400,000 in Perth county to help upload land ambulance, something the previous government downloaded. Public health is now at 65%, going to 75%. It was at 50%. I just delivered \$9.3 million for needed roads and bridges in my riding.

Do you know what happened? The property taxes in Perth county are down. They're not up, they're down, because we're the uploaders, not the downloaders. That's not our history in this place. We're the uploaders. I know in the two hospitals in my own riding, in Stratford General Hospital we've announced \$20 million for redevelopment, and in Listowel Memorial Hospital we've announced \$7.8 million for redevelopment. Cranes are in the sky, holes in the ground. We have another nursing home, Knollcrest, being redeveloped, \$3.5 million; a new CAT scan at Stratford General Hospital, \$1.7 million; five family health teams. My God.

What I find interesting is Mr. Tory. Mr. Tory was quite interesting, and the members of the opposition were saying it yet again, that there wasn't enough money for farmers. But what is Mr. Tory's position? "That was not enough money, but if it had been up to me, I wouldn't have given them the money. I would have balanced the budget two years earlier." You can't have it both ways. When my farmers found out that the member from Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Gray/Rosedale is running around in rural Ontario saying that somehow, "I'm your saviour," he has to explain the fact that, if given the choice, he told the press quite clearly, "I would not have given that money. We should not have done that. I wouldn't have given money for roads and bridges. I would have balanced early."

We all have to make choices. We'll all have to stand in this place and be counted on the budget. And you're either for it or agin it, as they say. There will be people standing up and clearly saying to everybody in their ridings that they're against the initiatives of our budget, and that will be quite interesting.

The Acting Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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