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Mardi 30 mai 2006

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estimates**

Ministry of Community
and Social Services

Ministry of Finance

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Services sociaux
et communautaires

Ministère des Finances

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 30 May 2006

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*The committee met at 1539 in room 151.*MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY
AND SOCIAL SERVICES
MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES SOCIAUX
ET COMMUNAUTAIRES

The Acting Chair (Mr. Jim Wilson): We're going to start now. I believe there's one hour and 27 minutes left in the estimates for the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Bisson did have one minute left in the rotation, but given that the NDP aren't here at the moment, we turn it over to the government side, Mr. Arthurs.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): Welcome again, Minister. It's good to have the better part of an hour and a half yet, so we do have some questions and look forward to your responses.

One of the things that I find in my constituency office, and I'm sure it's not unfamiliar to anyone in the Legislature, is questions around the Family Responsibility Office. I understand that in 2003 the Auditor General in fact actually reviewed the FRO operation and found some very serious concerns with respect to the overall issue of customer service and collections of arrears. We hear about the customer service issues because they end up on our doorstep often early on in the process. Frankly, this is something of a legacy issue. I wouldn't want to say it all rests with the former government. Clearly there's some responsibility with eight years of governance to address these kinds of matters, but it's a legacy issue.

The Ombudsman as well looked for drastic improvements in the whole process. So I'm interested in the improvements in customer service and arrears collection that are being made at this point and where you see, as the minister, the FRO operation moving into the future.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I'm going to start answering the question, but then I may turn it over to the assistant deputy minister who is the expert in it.

Yes, in fact, we have dramatically improved customer service. Since 2004, FRO staff have answered approximately 36% more calls each day. The average call centre wait times have decreased from 13 minutes to eight minutes. There has been a 75% increase in the number of

callers who are able to get through on their first attempt. This is a step in the right direction, and we will continue to improve customer service in FRO.

Also, we have improved enforcement. The arrears file review was launched in November 2004 with an ambitious goal of cleaning up almost 39,000 cases, representing \$639 million in arrears. Since that time, 30,000 of the 39,000 cases have been reviewed; \$16 million has been collected on cases where no money was ever received prior to the arrears file review; and there has been over a \$41-million reduction in arrears. There was a procedure put in place to explain to those who need to pay support payments what FRO was all about and to try to establish a friendly relationship with the clients.

FRO has also enhanced its enforcement through its trace-and-locate initiative. As part of FRO's new trace-and-locate initiative, staff have been able to confirm addresses of more than 50% of returned mail. One of the problems that FRO had before was that, of course, people are moving around the province and the country, mail was returned and there was no way they could locate these persons. Now, with this new section, they're able to do that.

Payments of \$197 million have been received as a result of a change in FRO's credit bureau reporting policy. Over 104,000 new notices have been sent to parents about support payments in default.

In June 2004, the Ombudsman noted that there had been considerable improvement to FRO since February of the last year. So I wanted to thank the FRO staff and the assistant deputy minister for the good work they have done.

Mr. Arthurs: That's my question. I know a number of members from our caucus have questions, so I want to make sure we have lots of opportunity.

The Acting Chair: Sure. Mr. Milloy?

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I want to say welcome, Minister, but I think you're probably welcoming me because I'm just subbing in today for David Zimmer. But I wanted to take this opportunity to have you in front of the committee to ask a number of questions about the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Certainly last year we had a very successful round table in my riding with a large number of stakeholders, and there was an incredible amount of optimism and enthusiasm amongst many people from the disabled community, and

those who advocate on their behalf as well, about the strides our government was making.

The one thing I wanted to talk about was the standards development committees which were provided for within the AODA. I just wondered if you could outline a little bit about their role and where you see them going.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Of course, to develop these accessibility standards the act requires that we put together a committee. We established a standards development committee. The role of that committee is to set longer-term objectives to meet the purposes of the AODA, to identify the requirements to meet the objectives and to set timelines for implementing the requirements in up to five-year increments. The committee submits the proposed accessibility standard to the minister, and it is then posted for public review. The committee considers the input from the public and submits a final standards report. The proposed standard is then considered for adoption as a regulation.

I'll turn it over to the expert, who is the assistant deputy minister, Madame Maurice, to complete my answer.

Ms. Andrea Maurice: I'm Andrea Maurice, assistant deputy minister of the accessibility directorate. The minister set out the role of the standards development committees under the legislation. Early this year, two standards development committees were established in the areas of customer service and transportation. These two areas were chosen because of their importance to people with disabilities.

The committees have been working very aggressively and diligently. They began their meetings in February. They meet monthly, two days a month. They have just completed their fourth monthly meetings. They're at the position that they have developed long-term objectives, they have developed some of the requirements, and now they're considering information that they are receiving from some studies we're doing on costing and the readiness of various sectors to implement the standards. So we're really very pleased with the progress that those two committees are making.

Three more standards, what we're calling core standards, that will apply across public and private sectors have been announced, and they are standards in the areas of employment, information and communications, and the built environment. Hopefully, the minister will soon be announcing the timing of when new standards development committees will be established.

1550

Mr. Milloy: Can I just follow up on the whole issue of accessibility? The one thing I found—as I said, we had a very successful half-day round table—is that I think in the past some people have seen accessibility issues or changes that have to be brought in—for example, to a business—as being burdensome. I think, and I'm hoping, that sort of mindset is changing and people start to recognize that making your place of business, for example, much more accessible can have benefits and sends out some positive signals, not just to the disabled com-

munity, but also to seniors who may be in wheelchairs or have walkers or even to people with strollers—just allowing for that broad range of people to have access to the area. I know, Minister, that you've been working on trying to foster this sort of positive view of it, and I just wondered if you'd comment on some of the initiatives there.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Yes, indeed. More and more businesses are seeing accessibility as an added value to their business. It's not just the right thing to do, but it's the smart thing to do. It does help the business. Right now, the percentage of people with disabilities in Ontario is around 15%. It's going to double, because the baby boomers are getting older.

This morning, for example, I visited the Shaw Festival. They are one of the participants in our program that has been put forward to support businesses to render their business more accessible. They have seen—it's the Shaw Festival, and it's amazing. They were very clear in saying that when you build or when you do an addition to your property or you do a rehabilitation, it's a lot cheaper to work on accessibility. I was asking the executive director how much extra it costs. She said not really anything, because it was built into the design, and when you build an addition, it doesn't cost very much more. We know that people with disabilities and seniors have large buying power, and if we capitalize on that by improving accessibility to businesses, the business will be more advantageous or more fruitful. I'll turn it over to Madame Maurice to give other examples and numbers that are very telling.

Ms. Maurice: Thank you, Minister. The minister mentioned, and you, sir, have mentioned, the sort of demographic imperative of an aging society. By 2025, 20% of us will be seniors. I'll be in that category myself. So we're all hoping for an accessible society.

I should say that we believe the new legislation will benefit all Ontarians. We believe accessibility, whether it's accessible customer services, whether it's an accessible physical environment, just has benefits for all members of society. Whether it's a mom pushing a baby in a stroller or folks who are just looking for excellent customer service, if our businesses can learn to serve everyone well, then we'll all benefit.

The minister mentioned the partnership program that she visited this morning at the Shaw Festival. This is part of, we think, our very good program called EnAbling Change, where we seek strategic partnerships with the business community to improve accessibility. For this particular program, which we called Building Champions, the Canadian Standards Association developed an accessible customer service guideline and then did training of seven different businesses, including the Shaw, on accessible customer service. We think we've seen some really quite impressive results coming out of that. We are soon launching some new partnerships under that program.

I think it's important that, as our standards development committees work to develop standards under the

legislation, we are also out in the community raising awareness of accessibility and identifying the champions and all the good work that has been done out in the community. That really started under the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, where there's really some very exemplary work being done by municipalities, as well as hospitals, colleges, universities and school boards. There's a lot happening, and while the standards are at the heart of the legislation, we know this is all about changing attitudes and raising awareness and introducing business to the benefits of accessibility.

Mr. Milloy: I just realized that I used the wrong—I think when I started off I said the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and of course the new act is Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities. I think there is some confusion, because it's a different act that is sort of built upon the other. What are the major differences in terms of the newer act?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: The difference is that the new act applies to every public place. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the other act, the former act, applied only to government, to provincial, municipal and not-for-profit. This one is for all public places and the private sector.

The Acting Chair: Mr. McNeely, there's about four minutes left.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Minister, I remember that a while back, you and Minister Papatello, then-minister responsible for women's issues, had an announcement that would help our education professionals receive the training to provide appropriate supports to students who may be exposed to domestic violence. I know that in our area, there are many francophone women and children in Ontario who are going to benefit from the initiative through the funding from this ministry. Have you had feedback from any of the women who have been involved in this initiative?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Yes, indeed. I was with Minister Papatello earlier this year when we did the announcement with the school board. The funding is being provided by the women's directorate for an expert panel formed to develop material and strategy for training elementary schoolteachers, counsellors—everyone involved with the students. This panel is comprised of education experts from the francophone school system. The panel is currently finalizing core curriculum. It's a curriculum they want to develop to train all those involved in the school to be able to recognize a child who has witnessed domestic violence in their home. There is, of course, a similar panel for anglophones too, not just for francophones. We want to be able to identify children who are witnesses of domestic violence and be able to refer these families or children to the appropriate person who can support them and help them to get out of this situation of violence. We don't have the curriculum ready yet; it's in preparation. We will be able to roll out the training and the curriculum for the next school year.

The Acting Chair: Thanks very much. There are a couple of minutes left. Any more questions from the government side? More comments?

1600

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm going to ask you a couple of what I hope are fairly brief questions regarding violence against women. One of the issues, especially in the area that I come from, which is a very diverse multicultural area with an awful lot of churn, is second-stage and transitional housing, and these are very essential for women and children who need to escape domestic violence. Tell me a little bit about some of the priorities in your ministry and some of the investments you've made in that regard.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: First of all, there have been 27 second-stage housing providers, with 351 units for victims of domestic violence. In the last two years, second-stage housing providers have benefited from the important initiative announced by the government. In 2004-05, second-stage housing providers received one-time funding of over \$700,000 for minor capital. In 2005-06, second-stage housing providers received \$1.4 million ongoing funding for counselling and enhancement of the transitional and housing support program. In addition, the \$2-million increase to shelter and second-stage housing providers announced in February provided a target increase to the lowest-funded shelter. So all of this will help those in situations of domestic violence.

The Acting Speaker: We'll move on now to Mr. Martiniuk.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): Good afternoon, Madam Minister, once again.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Good afternoon.

Mr. Martiniuk: I have 20 minutes, and you are done with me or I'm done with you—one or the other.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: I hope the experience was not that bad.

Mr. Martiniuk: No, no. I wasn't suggesting it was bad; it was just my manner.

I'd like to deal with a constituent. It troubles me, because this constituent wrote to you on May 2, and I'm going to read the letter into the record. I saw her subsequently on May 19, and we discussed not so much your letter but her problem. She has a problem with a group home.

I should say that after meeting with this lady, 10 years of experience as an MPP and some 40 years of experience prior to that time as a lawyer led me to infer that she's not a NIMBY. She's not one of these persons who feels that it shouldn't be located in her area. She was a senior citizen, a most reasonable person. However, every time she turns around for either information or help, doors close. Quite frankly, I felt like I closed the door on her too. How could I help her?

She went to the police and indicated some problems, and they told her not to worry. She asked them for statistics as to what had happened in her area: Had there been an increase in crime? They refused to share that. They have an excellent police force, so I'm not knocking the police. However, they seemed to be uncooperative to her. A police force doesn't really take due account of break-ins of residences. Strangely enough, in our modern

day, that is not a severe crime. It is a severe crime in my eyes, and in her eyes, because her house was broken into and ransacked. The tribulation, the stress, especially for seniors, of having your house and your space intruded on and having things of value and love destroyed needlessly can be a most traumatic experience. So the police are letting her down, she feels. The city is letting her down.

I'd like to read this letter because it's a well-written letter and it indicates the frustration of myself, too, as an MPP, coming to grips with the problem, and certainly the frustration of this lady.

I should say that the group home in question is a brand new building, and it's quite beautiful from the outside. I think I've been inside actually. It's an addition to the area in the sense that it looks like a rather substantial home in an area which I would describe as very neat and well cared for—however, mixed. When I say “mixed,” big homes, small homes, it's all a bit of a jumble, so it's not a very expensive area in our city. However, it is neat and well kept.

This letter from my constituent, Joyce Spring, was addressed to you, Madam Minister, on May 2, and it reads:

“It is my understanding that your ministry is responsible for supporting the services provided through community-based agencies. It is one of these community-based agencies, Argus Residence for Young People, in Cambridge, Ontario, that is the reason for this letter.

“Argus Residence claims to be a residence for young people. In fact, it is being used as a halfway and crisis intervention house. Men in their mid-20s, newly released from jail and completely unsupervised, are in residence. While the neighbourhood has no objections to the facility, it is the number of residents and their criminal history that is of grave concern. As a result of the management of Argus Residence, my neighbourhood has become a volatile place to live. I look to you for intervention and direction in dealing with this dangerous situation.

“On April 27, we held a Neighbourhood Watch meeting. From this small residential area, 73 people came out. Most of the frustration and anger expressed at the meeting was directed at the Argus Residence. For many years, Argus was used as a residence for girls. This was an accepted part of the neighbourhood and not a problem. Recent changes—demolition of the old residence, building of a big new residence, changing from the former use to its present use—coincide with an alarming increase in crime. Break-ins of our homes, garages and cars seem to have become everyday occurrences. We endure vandalism and public pot-smoking and find used needles discarded, but the most serious occurrence was an armed attack on the elderly couple who were tending their son's corner store. Although the attackers were arrested and are no longer at Argus, we have no assurance that this will not happen again.

“In an interview I attended with the executive director of Argus, Ms Eva Vlasov, she said that if there was a problem in the neighbourhood, there was no reason it

should be blamed on Argus. In a recent memo to Argus residents, she says, “Together, we need to ensure that our neighbourhood is a good place to live.” Pure fantasy! While the director composes these charming memos, right outside her office window the residents are yelling vulgar comments at young women, swearing and throwing patio furniture. Neighbours of Argus can't use their yards because of this rowdy behaviour.

“After this disturbing interview, I sent a lengthy letter to the chair of the board of Argus outlining some of the problems we are encountering and insisting that the board make changes to help ensure our safety. I copied the letter to each of the directors. Not one of them acknowledged my letter. The only communication I received was a very brief letter from the chair instructing me to address any future correspondence to her at the Argus box number.

“The management of Argus has never dealt in good faith with the people of the neighbourhood. We were misinformed about the purpose for which the new residence would be used. They have never had any intention of complying with the existing city of Cambridge zoning bylaw which allows them to have a maximum of 10 residents. The home was built to accommodate 15 residents and has two executive offices. Although they are not zoned for offices, and in contravention of the existing bylaw, these offices have been in use since the building was completed.

1610

“I am troubled by the confidence with which they have chosen to ignore the city of Cambridge zoning bylaw. Clearly they expect to get an amendment so they can operate with 15 residents. A newspaper report said that this expensive new facility can't be maintained if they are only funded for 10 residents. Did the management of Argus Residence receive some assurance from the city of Cambridge that amending the bylaw would not be a problem?

“A new shelter, the Bridges, has been built within a few blocks of Argus. The city of Cambridge planning department said in a recent report to its council that our small neighbourhood is saturated and recommended that the zoning bylaw allowing Argus 15 beds not be amended. Although we had very little time to organize, there were 48 signatures of area residents opposing the amendment. We have made presentations at council meetings. Cambridge city council has chosen to disregard the recommendations of their planning department, the committee of adjustment and the presentations by the neighbourhood. They suggested, in effect, that Argus do a little public relations job on the neighbours. Since the credibility of the Argus management is zero, this will be difficult.

“Some of the people who attended the Neighbourhood Watch meeting are threatening to take the law into their own hands. What an appalling prospect. But neighbourhood residents feel that they have run out of options. The police are ineffectual and no one is prepared to do anything about this situation, not the Argus executive, the Argus board or Cambridge council.

“This is an ugly situation and unless you step in and makes some changes, it can only get worse. It’s bad news for everyone, including your ministry.

“I hope you can help us. I am deeply troubled by the situation that exists in Cambridge. I look forward to hearing from you with a proposal to address this very troubling situation as there appears to be no other recourse.”

As I mentioned, that letter is addressed to you. I will provide the clerk with a copy so he can make copies and distribute it, but you already have that. I assume in the nature of things that it would not have been replied to yet. It’s only been a month, and that’s fair. I really don’t expect you to answer, because it contains a large number of issues. However, you, as an MPP, have run into this before, where people come to you with a problem and everywhere they turn, all they get is another door shut in their face, saying, “It’s not our problem. It’s over there. It’s a federal rather than a provincial problem” or something like that.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Yes, indeed. As a municipal councillor representing downtown Ottawa, I faced that situation—not often but more than once. My approach was always to work with the community and the agencies that can help to resolve the problem, including municipal government.

However, this letter has been sent to me. This issue is within the purview of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. But the deputy minister has a lot of experience in that area and I’ll turn it over to him and he will help to clarify the answer.

Mr. Kevin Costante: Thanks, Minister. We have had a lot of discussion in the sectors that this ministry is responsible for, which would include Associations for Community Living, and I think you have the Cambridge Association for Community Living. I think the Community Living group has a very progressive and proactive approach to working with neighbours, and I hope you’re seeing that in your community. In this particular instance, the minister is correct, it’s either the Ministry of Children and Youth Services or, if it’s for older adults, it would be the ministry of corrections, which also operates group homes. So our direction and the training and work we do with group home operators in our sector is very much to encourage them to be respectful of their neighbours, to take their situation into account, to obey all of the zoning and make sure that they adhere to that.

This one is not in our area, so I can’t speak specifically to it, but I think in the developmental services area there is a much better reputation, if you will, in terms of working with local communities and not having problems such as you just talked about.

Mr. Martiniuk: Well, if I may follow that up, I understand that at long last the correction facilities for children over 16 or 18—or is it under 16?—was finally amalgamated with corrections.

Mr. Costante: It was moved. They used to be split.

Mr. Martiniuk: Yes.

Mr. Costante: There has been some change in ministries. It used to be that the Ministry of Community and Family Services operated phase one for up to 15-

year-olds, and corrections operated phase two for the 16- to 18-year-olds. Those were brought together. They’re both now operated by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, which is the responsibility of Minister Chambers.

Mr. Martiniuk: Okay. How much time?

The Acting Chair: You have five minutes left.

Mr. Martiniuk: I would like to deal now with another topic. Perhaps you might explain to me whether it’s a pilot project or whether it in fact is a fait accompli: the change in policy in regard to service providers providing employment planning to the approximately 10%—I believe it’s 10%—of ODSP recipients who are seeking employment. As I understand it, there has been a change in method of payment, changing from fee-for-service to fee-as-to-outcome rather than for service, and I might request an explanation of that.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Yes, there has been a change, and the deputy minister is going to speak on it.

Mr. Costante: Thank you, Minister. We did make a recent change. What we wanted to do, and I think it’s consistent with best practice for many government programs, is to focus on what the key outcome of these programs should be. The key outcome for an employment program should be getting people into jobs. So yes, we have changed the funding methodology so that we will pay people for successfully getting individuals who are disabled into employment, and we’ve focused the money that way.

Previously, funding used to be activity-based, so we would pay for resumé-writing or to do such-and-such upgrading. So this was really an intention, to get a greater focus on what people really want, and that’s to become employed. That’s kind of the generalities of what we’ve done.

Mr. Martiniuk: Well, it sounds like a laudable aim. However, I’d like to deal with two points in particular.

If you’re paid as to outcomes, what is to prevent you from cherry-picking your clients?

Mr. Costante: Essentially what we do—we have people in our ODSP offices who look after the needs of people who are looking for employment. They come in, we try to work with them as to what the best plan could be, and then we refer them out to service providers at some point. Some of them are non-profit agencies who do work with employers. I mean, for us, cherry-picking, I guess, is okay. People come in, they want a job, they are disabled, and as you know, under the Ontario disability support program, people do not have to look for work. This is a voluntary piece. Any time we can get anybody on ODSP into a job is a good thing. I believe—and Cliodhna can help me if I have this wrong—we also pay more if they have a larger family and their costs are more. So we do try to provide an incentive for them to deal with people who perhaps have larger barriers to getting into employment.

1620

Mr. Martiniuk: Larger barriers or larger families?

Ms. Cliodhna McMullin: The other thing I wanted to mention—

The Acting Chair: Could you identify yourself for Hansard, please?

Ms. McMullin: Sorry; Cliodhna McMullin, director of the Ontario disability support program. In addition, funding is available to pay for special disability-related and work-related expenses. So additional money is available for service providers who are placing people who have extra needs and require extra costs. There's extra funding available for expenses related to accommodation, and that funding is provided on an actual cost basis, so it's not—

Mr. Martiniuk: But that doesn't really answer the question. By cherry-picking, one would take the ones who were easiest to place and therefore make more money. The problem with the payment being on the basis of outcome is that payments are delayed more than they are with fee-for-service, is that correct?

Ms. McMullin: Actually, the funding is provided based on a plan that's developed by the service provider, where they look at the total number of people they're planning to serve, the total number of people they expect to place in employment based on their last year's experience. Then funding is provided in advance and on a monthly basis, so that they do have the cash they need in order to carry out the service.

Mr. Martiniuk: Is that transitional funding?

Ms. McMullin: That's the way the funding is flowed for the outcomes. They forecast in advance how successful they expect to be. They also forecast what cash flow they need in order to carry out the service. So the funding is provided in advance so that they do have the cash they need to be able to provide the service, and then at the end of the year, as need be, there may be a reconciliation if the service provider is finding, for example, that they're placing more people than they expected or placing fewer people than they expected.

Mr. Martiniuk: Okay. Ma'am—

The Acting Chair: Can I intervene? You're just about out of time.

Mr. Martiniuk: Yes, I realize that. It was just getting interesting too. Are you saying there was no transitional funding?

Ms. McMullin: There has been transitional funding provided.

Mr. Martiniuk: There has been. That's simply because the payments would be delayed under the new plan. Is that not correct, that it provides working capital for the smaller businesses and non-profit organizations?

The Acting Chair: I'm sorry; after this response, we will move on to Mr. Bisson, please.

Ms. McMullin: Service providers have been provided with a transitional year. So they're being provided with funding for this coming year based on their last year's experience and what they expect to accomplish. The funding is being provided for the entire year, and they are allowed to provide the service. If they don't meet their targets, this year's funding is being treated as transitional funding and will not be recovered from them. It gives them an opportunity to move to the new funding formula.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much. Mr. Bisson.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–Baie James): Madame la ministre, bienvenue. On a commencé cet échange il y a déjà une semaine. Là, on se trouve de retour aujourd'hui finalement avec la traduction simultanée et tous nos collègues pourront comprendre les questions qu'on va demander.

J'ai déjà eu une chance, madame la ministre, de vous parler à une couple d'occasions faisant affaire avec une partie de ce que je veux vous demander aujourd'hui : toute la question de la diète spéciale.

Vous savez qu'il y a eu un changement dans le règlement qui fait qu'il y a eu un changement dans ce programme. Avec ça, on trouve qu'il y a beaucoup de personnes qui ont perdu leurs bénéfices. Je veux soulever une couple de dossiers avec vous, puis vous demander très simplement ce que vous êtes préparée à faire pour être capable d'aider.

Dans ce cas ici, M^{me} Melodie Walker, qui est une francophone, qui est venue au bureau de comté à Timmins, nous a donné son histoire. Il se trouve qu'elle a MS. Elle doit être capable de garder une diète où elle peut avoir au moins 3 000 calories par jour. Avec la diète spéciale qu'elle a eue, elle était capable de faire ça, mais avec la diète spéciale perdue, elle va avoir des problèmes avec la diète dont elle a besoin pour garder sa santé.

Sa situation est pas mal précaire. Ce qui arrive avec elle, c'est que sa maladie lui fait perdre beaucoup de poids et qu'elle n'est pas capable de s'injecter dans le bras, dans les cuisses ou dans d'autres parties de son corps parce qu'elle n'a pas le gras pour le faire comme il faut. Donc elle s'injecte dans l'abdomen.

Avec ça, ça commence à faire des complications. C'est rendu au point où elle a beaucoup de douleurs dans son abdomen. Elle se trouve très malade parce qu'elle n'est pas capable de s'injecter comme elle est supposée de le faire pour sa maladie. Numéro deux, elle ne peut plus manger comme il faut.

Ma question est simplement, qu'est-ce que vous êtes préparée à faire comme ministère pour que M^{me} Walker, comme d'autres personnes dans la province, puissent avoir ces diètes spéciales où c'est nécessaire?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Premièrement, je ne peux pas parler d'un cas particulier, et vous comprenez bien le pourquoi. Alors—

M. Bisson: Vous avez la permission, madame. J'ai la permission ici.

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Tout ce que je peux vous dire, c'est qu'il y a eu une revue de ce programme-là parce qu'il y avait des augmentations incroyables des demandes, et les coûts devenaient exorbitants.

Ce qu'on veut faire, ce n'est pas ne pas donner le montant supplémentaire dont les personnes ont besoin pour pouvoir s'alimenter proprement selon le diagnostic médical qu'ils ont et aussi une condition médicale qui demande une diète spéciale.

Chaque cas est revu, et la personne, selon la liste de diagnostics qui nous a été présentée par l'association

médicale de l'Ontario. Cela n'a pas été fait vraiment d'une façon cavalière mais ça a été fait d'une façon professionnelle. Maintenant cette liste-là va être revue cet été et à l'automne, et suite à des commentaires qu'on a eus de la communauté médicale, d'autres diagnostics, d'autres conditions, vont y être rajoutés.

Si cette dame-là a besoin d'une diète—et je vais parler en général—si quelqu'un a besoin d'une diète, et c'est reconnu par la profession médicale que cet individu-là ou cette condition-là a besoin d'une diète spéciale, c'est bien sûr que la personne va recevoir le montant qui est identifié dans cette catégorie-là.

Maintenant, je vais demander à madame la sous-ministre ajointe de compléter ma réponse.

M^{me} Lynn MacDonald: Merci, madame la ministre. Lynn MacDonald, sous-ministre ajointe en matière de politique.

Ce que j'aimerais ajouter est qu'il y a vraiment trois processus de revue, si vous voulez. Il y a le processus de révision des cas, disons, de l'année dernière qui ont été approuvés avec la formule ancienne. On fait la révision dans le bureau régional de ça et dans les bureaux des municipalités qui sont touchées par des cas.

Il y a, deuxièmement, le processus de revue que madame la ministre vient de mentionner, c'est-à-dire la révision de la liste pour assurer que nous ayons—

The Acting Chair: Ms. MacDonald, I'm sorry but Hansard can't hear you. Could you speak a little closer to the microphone?

M^{me} MacDonald: Le deuxième processus de révision que madame la ministre a mentionné est un processus de révision pour assurer que toutes les maladies soient listées correctement, qu'on n'ait pas oublié une condition médicale, ou que les conditions médicales qui sont peut-être nouvelles et pas reconnues auparavant y soient ajoutées.

Il y a un troisième processus de révision que madame n'a pas mentionné et j'aimerais ajouter quelques points saillants là-dessus. C'est-à-dire, c'est un processus de révision des montants. Vous savez—

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M. Bisson: Montants?

M^{me} MacDonald: Des montants.

M. Bisson: Pas les moutons mais les montants.

M^{me} MacDonald: Pas les moutons.

Il y a la personne qui a l'approbation de la profession médicale indiquant que, oui, il y a une condition qui requiert une diète spéciale, mais ensuite il y a un formulaire qui fait une combinaison de diètes spéciales demandées et un montant approuvé pour ces diètes. Les montants ont été approuvés il y a, je dirais, peut-être six ans. Alors on fait aussi un processus de révision pour nous assurer que les montants sont corrects et sont à jour et qu'on paie assez pour couvrir les frais actuels de la personne.

Alors, prenons un exemple : si j'ai une condition médicale qui demande que je ne peux pas prendre du lait dans ma diète, que je dois avoir des suppléments de Lactaid, disons—ça coûte plus que le lait normal—est-ce

que le montant qui a été prévu il y a six ans pour le Lactaid est aujourd'hui suffisant? Alors, ce troisième processus de révision est pour nous assurer ça.

M. Bisson: Je veux poser la question à la ministre : si ça marche si bien, pourquoi a-t-on tant de cas qui entrent dans nos bureaux de comté? Je regarde dans mes filières. Actifs présentement, j'ai 18 cas dans mon comté où le monde est venu chez nous pour nous dire, soit au bureau de Kap ou de Smooth Rock Falls ou ici à Timmins, que le système ne marche pas, qu'ils ont été coupés. Donc, si ça marche très bien, pourquoi est-ce que tout ce monde-là a été coupé?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Je voudrais ajouter que si la personne a une condition qui requiert une diète spéciale, la personne va recevoir l'argent. Auparavant, il n'y avait pas ces diagnostics-là. Alors, une personne pouvait aller voir un médecin ou une infirmière ou une diététicienne en disant qu'elle avait besoin d'une diète spéciale, et alors le formulaire était rempli et envoyé.

M. Bisson: Soyons clairs.

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Ceci a été révisé.

M. Bisson: Présentement, dans le vieux système, ça prenait quelque chose d'un médecin ou quelqu'un dans la médecine pour dire que la personne avait une condition, oui ou non?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Ça prenait la signature d'un médecin.

M. Bisson: Exactement. Puis dans ces cas-ci que j'ai, ceux qui ont été rejetés avec le nouveau règlement étaient du monde qui était déjà accepté par soit leur médecin de famille ou par le département d'urgence, ou dans d'autres cas par le système de santé mentale avec des médecins dans ce système-là. Donc, dans tous ceux que j'ai, c'est du monde qui n'a pas eu ça parce qu'ils ont fait l'application sur un morceau de papier, et c'était un médecin qui a dit, « T'as une condition, et cette condition demande une diète spéciale. » Donc, ceux qui ont été rejetés étaient du monde qui avait déjà été accepté par les médecins.

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Ce sont des gens qui avaient un formulaire qui avait été rempli, qui avait été retourné, mais ce n'était pas nécessairement une condition qui requerrait une diète spéciale. Alors, c'est à la demande de l'association médicale qu'on a dû revoir ceci, parce qu'il y avait trop de pression de mise sur les médecins pour pouvoir avoir ce supplément-là.

M. Bisson: Donc, vous dites que ce n'est pas le gouvernement qui voulait couper mais que ce sont les médecins qui ont demandé la réduction?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: C'est une combinaison des deux, mais on a eu une demande de l'association médicale, et puis je vais demander à M^{me} MacDonald de parler plus—

M. Bisson: Pas trop long, parce que je n'ai qu'un peu de temps.

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: D'accord. Alors succinctement, M^{me} MacDonald va expliquer comment ça s'est passé, mais c'était à la demande, et puis aussi la grande augmentation des coûts soudains.

M^{me} MacDonald: Oui, l'association s'est approchée de nous il y a un an environ, au mois de mai, je crois, pour nous dire que leurs médecins étaient mis sous pression par certaines personnes qui voulaient absolument une diète spéciale. À ce temps-là, le formulaire n'exigeait pas que le médecin ou l'infirmière ou le diététicien, le nutritionniste, constate une condition médicale. Le formulaire disait simplement, « Est-ce que la personne requiert une diète spéciale? »

Ce que les médecins nous ont dit, c'est qu'ils étaient sous pression de dire qu'une personne avait besoin d'une diète spéciale même si ce n'était pas le cas. Ils se sentaient harcelés presque. Alors, nous étions d'accord avec eux de réviser le formulaire pour que le formulaire exige leur jugement professionnel d'une condition médicale. C'est comme ça qu'on a ajusté le formulaire.

M. Bisson: J'ai un peu un problème à croire que c'étaient les médecins eux autres qui ont fait qu'on a eu cette déduction-là. C'est aussi parce que le gouvernement a vu que ça coûtait de l'argent, puis on essaye d'avoir quelque chose pour sauver de l'argent. Vous l'admettez?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: C'est pour qu'on puisse—il y avait une augmentation—

M. Bisson: Exactement.

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Mais c'est pour qu'on puisse s'assurer, pour les gens qui ont besoin d'une diète spéciale, qu'on leur offre le supplément nécessaire pour pouvoir combler ce déficit-là.

M. Bisson: On va revoir une couple de cas. Là, je suis en train de regarder à mes filières; j'en ai trois que je peux voir très vite là. C'est du monde qui ont MS. Leurs médecins ont écrit qu'ils ont besoin d'une diète spéciale. Ils ont été donnés une diète spéciale, et là ils ont été coupés, certaines personnes, de 250 \$ à 20 \$. Il y a de différents exemples. Il y avait du monde avec de différents montants.

L'autre, c'est les conditions psychiatriques. Comme on le sait, une diète est une grosse partie—c'est quelque chose que je viens juste d'apprendre moi-même. Mais ce qui arrive, c'est que pour une personne qui se fait traiter pour des conditions de santé mentale, parfois une partie du traitement est ce qu'on mange pour s'assurer que la personne est bien.

Dans quatre cas que je peux voir, c'est du monde soit avec la dépression, soit une personne qui est schizophrène, qui ont eu leur diète spéciale coupée, encore donnée par un médecin. Dans ce cas ici, dans deux des cas que je peux voir, c'est le médecin directement de TDH, l'hôpital psychiatrique de Timmins. Donc, ce n'est pas comme le monde a fait des formulaires pour demander de l'argent. Ce sont des médecins qui ont signé les papiers pour dire que ce monde-là a besoin d'une diète spéciale pour une raison ou une autre.

Je vous pose une question très simple. Si on vous donne ces cas, êtes-vous préparée à revoir la décision qui a été faite par votre ministère, pour s'assurer que ce monde-là qui ont besoin de ces diètes spéciales ont la chance d'avoir ce qu'ils avaient déjà?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: La façon de procéder est que s'il y a des diagnostics, une condition médicale pour

laquelle la personne devrait avoir une diète spéciale, lors de la revue cet été, ces diagnostics-là seront ajoutés. Ce n'est pas des cas particuliers. Les cas particuliers, si leur condition médicale requiert une diète, ces personnes-là vont recevoir les suppléments nécessaires.

M. Bisson: Je peux vous garantir qu'on va vous donner certains cas pour cette revue. Mais l'autre partie du problème c'est la question d'appel. Comme vous le savez comme députée provinciale, et n'importe qui qui travaille dans un bureau de comté sait le prochain, il y a beaucoup d'occasions où une personne va faire application pour des prestations sous ce programme de « disability » provincial. Dans beaucoup de situations on trouve que la réponse du ministère est « non ». La réponse est « non » pour décourager le monde. C'est un peu le sens que tu as de temps en temps. C'est près de huit à 10 mois pour être capable d'arriver devant le tribunal pour faire annuler la décision.

Je peux vous dire que pour nous autres, puis j'imagine que c'est la même affaire avec les autres députés, dans 100 % des cas où on s'en va aux tribunaux, on gagne. Ça me dit qu'il y a quelque chose de mal avec le système.

Deux points : un, sur la question de la diète spéciale, même si on va aux tribunaux, ça ne va pas nous aider parce que les tribunaux vont arriver après la décision que vous allez avoir au mois d'août. La deuxième partie c'est pourquoi on a besoin de perdre notre temps, nous les députés avec notre staff, et les cliniques légales aux alentours de la province qui représentent le monde sur l'assistance, sur des cas qui auraient dû être approuvés droit au début.

Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire pour être capable d'aider, et pas ralentir, le processus d'accepter quelqu'un qui doit avoir des prestations droit au début? Ce que je trouve, puis j'imagine que c'est de même avec beaucoup de députés, est qu'une personne applique, la personne est refusée, et elle s'en va voir le député ou elle va à la clinique légale. On s'en va en appel—ça prend trop longtemps; ça prend de huit à dix mois—puis on gagne une fois arrivé là.

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Donc ça me dit qu'il y a quelque chose de mal à la base opérationnelle. Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire pour arranger les problèmes à la base opérationnelle?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Premièrement, il n'y a pas d'appel si le diagnostic n'est pas prévu. C'est spécifique dans le règlement.

Ce que je vous dis est que s'il y a des diagnostics qui devraient être rajoutés à la liste, il y a un processus de revue, et je pense que ces médecins-là devraient écrire directement au médecin chef pour rajouter ou pour donner les arguments pourquoi on devrait avoir une diète, avec ces diagnostics-là, pour une telle condition médicale. Puis, lors de la revue cet été, s'il y a lieu, ce diagnostic-là ou cette condition médicale sera rajoutée à la liste.

The Acting Chair: There are just under four minutes left.

M. Bisson: La deuxième partie de la question : premièrement, tu peux amener n'importe quoi en appel.

Dans ces cas-là on s'en va en appel; déjà accepté trop tard.

Ma question était, pour quelle raison est-ce que le ministère refuse tant de cas dès le début? Comme je vous dis, on trouve qu'il y a un gros pourcentage de cas où le monde fait des applications pour des prestations à travers le programme de « disability » et ils sont refusés. Ils regardent l'application puis ils disent, « Écoute, c'est pas mal clair, là. » La personne a un avis médical disant qu'elle ne peut pas travailler. J'en ai eu une couple moi-même dernièrement. C'est du monde avec MS. Ce n'est pas comme s'ils peuvent travailler. Ils ont été refusés dès le début. Ça nous prend de huit à dix mois pour le rendre en appel, et on gagne.

Donc, qu'est-ce qu'on va faire pour accélérer le processus de revue dès le début pour ne pas avoir besoin d'aller en appel avec autant de cas?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: La revue pour—

Mr. Bisson: Tribunal. Le tribunal.

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Oui, il y a eu beaucoup de retards. C'est vrai; vous avez raison. Il y a beaucoup de travail qui est fait—on a rajouté du personnel—pour qu'on puisse rendre des décisions le plus tôt possible.

On travaille dans ce sens-là pour que, premièrement, il y ait une bonne décision puis que la décision soit rendue le plus rapidement possible.

M. Bisson: Qu'avez-vous fait spécifiquement? Avez-vous mis plus de staff? Avez-vous changé la politique intérieure? Qu'avez-vous fait spécifiquement?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: Il y a tout un processus qui a été mis en place—je vais demander à M^{me} MacDonald de l'expliquer—qui a été mis en place justement pour accélérer, parce qu'il y a trop de retards. Puis ça prenait huit, neuf, dix mois dans certains cas. Justement, dans le dernier budget il y a de l'argent qui a été mis de côté pour adresser ce problème-là.

M^{me} MacDonald: Comme la ministre a dit, on a ajouté 12 employés à la direction, qui est responsable des décisions pour l'éligibilité pour le programme. De plus, et je pense que c'est votre point, monsieur, on a reconnu qu'on avait au sein du ministère une difficulté de contrôle de qualité. C'est pourquoi un certain pourcentage des décisions a été changé par le tribunal, finalement.

Alors, on a révisé les manuels de formation. On a eu tout un processus de formation pour les employés qui y sont actuellement.

De plus, on a ajouté un nouveau poste. Comme madame la ministre a mentionné, on a un conseiller médical au sein du ministère, un conseiller chef de médecin.

Et on a ajouté un député pour, précisément, avoir beaucoup plus de priorité pour ces cas-là qui sont plus complexes. Ce sont parfois des cas très complexes où il y a beaucoup de témoins médicaux, où c'est difficile de discerner.

Parfois c'est beaucoup plus simple et on fait une erreur. Ce sont des êtres humains et ils font des erreurs.

Avec la formation, avec une amélioration des matériels, avec l'ajout de nouveaux employés et surtout

avec l'ajout d'une deuxième personne pour contrôler la qualité des décisions et pour faire la formation continue, on a l'espoir que ça va améliorer sous peu.

M. Bisson: Madame, votre français est très bien.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Ms. MacDonald and Mr. Bisson.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Minister, I was wondering if you have any closing comments for us.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Yes, I do.

First of all I wanted to thank everyone here for your sincerity, for your honesty. I think that a lot of the comments or questions will help us to improve the service, and that's what we want to do. So thank you very much.

It has been a great honour for me to speak to the estimates of my ministry. As you have heard, my ministry has accomplished a great deal in the past three years to help Ontario's families succeed.

C'est avec beaucoup de fierté que je me suis faite la porte-parole pour le ministère des Services sociaux et communautaires afin de partager avec vous les avancées récentes réalisées au profit des Ontariennes et des Ontariens, et les progrès majeurs qui ont été apportés à nos programmes depuis que notre gouvernement a été porté au pouvoir en 2003.

Our government believes in the potential of all Ontarians. We believe that Ontarians deserve the opportunity to make better lives for themselves.

Notre gouvernement exprime cette conviction en offrant un soutien aux familles qui ont besoin de notre aide et en élargissant les horizons d'opportunité d'intégration à tout le monde.

Strengthening Ontario's families is the single most important component of every program of my ministry. There are men, women and children who need our help. Families that have fallen on hard times, mothers and fathers who just need a little help to build a better life for their children, people who are homeless and those who are hard to house, women who need a safe refuge from violence for themselves and for their children, women who need to rebuild their lives: These are our clients. These are the real people whom we in Community and Social Services deal with every day.

My ministry is not just about policies; it is about helping people help themselves.

Nous apportons le soutien dont les familles ont besoin afin qu'elles puissent réintégrer le marché du travail pour que leurs enfants puissent connaître un avenir plus prometteur. Nous proposons des pistes à suivre pour acheminer vers une vie meilleure.

I am proud to say that the Ministry of Community and Social Services is making its contribution to the betterment of Ontarians' quality of life, and our efforts to support Ontario's families cut across all government ministries.

The government has added new vaccines to protect children and has expanded nutrition programs in schools so that children are healthier and ready to learn.

We have limited college and university tuition hikes, doubled student aid and increased student grants so that

more of Ontario's financially strapped students have access to higher education.

We have improved health care and reduced wait times on many procedures so that families have renewed confidence that they and their children will be well cared for.

We have improved accessibility for all Ontarians with the passage of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

Nous continuons à travailler en étroite collaboration avec les spécialistes du domaine afin d'améliorer l'accessibilité dans tous les secteurs de notre société.

Nous travaillons également à améliorer l'intégration et l'autonomie des personnes sourdes et aveugles en créant des fonds d'investissement majeurs.

We are well along in our transformation of developmental services. This year alone, we are investing nearly \$84 million in new funding to strengthen the supports that people with a developmental disability need to participate and live in our communities.

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Mon ministère a également remédié à plus d'une décennie de coupures budgétaires et de négligence dans les services sociaux.

We can't completely make up for the lost years, but we send a strong message that our government will help as much as we are able.

We increased Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program rates by 5%, and families on social assistance with children will receive an additional \$56 million in 2006-07 and another \$75 million in 2007-08 under the national child benefit supplement.

We have developed strong employment supports and job programs to help people on Ontario Works and the Ontario disability support program find and keep meaningful jobs. We also gave our clients continued access to health benefits after leaving the program, because we heard that the fear of not being able to pay for medicine was preventing people from working when they wanted to work.

Our JobsNow pilot project is continuing to show great results. Less than a year after it was launched, more than 2,200 long-term social assistance recipients are working.

Ce sont là des personnes et des familles qui peuvent désormais envisager l'avenir avec un regain de confiance.

That decade of neglect was evident too in our violence-against-women programs. Our ministry has embraced Premier McGuinty's \$68-million domestic violence action plan. Our violence-against-women programs are doing more than just helping women escape abuse; they are helping them rebuild their lives for themselves and their children. We continue to strengthen these services so that women can find help when they need it.

Nous avons fourni un financement accru pour les refuges, les services de counselling et les foyers d'étape intermédiaire.

Nous avons également accru nos services d'écoute téléphonique d'urgence, afin que les femmes franco-

phones puissent obtenir, dans leur propre langue, l'aide et les conseils dont elles ont besoin.

We are supporting 39 domestic violence community coordinating committees to harness community resources and provide community leadership to combat domestic violence.

For our most vulnerable citizens, those who are homeless or difficult to house, we are working with our municipal partners to provide much-needed shelter and support.

We have also re-established and maintained strong municipal partnerships that have been neglected, and we tailored our programs where we could to meet their needs. We increased the per diem rate twice for municipally operated homelessness services and provided additional funding for people who are at risk of losing their homes. This year, we are also increasing per diem rates by 9% for domiciliary hostels.

Nous avons fait aussi en sorte que les services de notre ministère fonctionnent mieux et avec une efficacité accrue.

We have closed loopholes and changed rules so that our programs are more accountable and are designed for the people who truly need them.

We brought forward progressive legislation in adoption disclosure that was passed by the Legislature, and we are making the Family Responsibility Office work better for Ontario families.

We have accomplished all of this with people in mind: getting the right services to the right people, people who need these services most.

Je me réjouis à l'idée de poursuivre le travail avec tous mes collègues afin de réellement contribuer à la vie des personnes qui ont besoin de notre aide, grâce à des programmes réfléchis et constructifs qui contribueront à promouvoir les droits des citoyens et citoyennes de notre province, à rendre nos collectivités plus fortes et à donner aux familles le soutien et la force dont elles ont besoin pour améliorer leur sort. Merci.

I would like, in closing, to thank the staff of the ministry for their support and for helping me to answer all your questions.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

There are approximately 10 minutes remaining on the government side. Mr. Wilkinson.

Mr. Wilkinson: Thank you, Chair. We appreciate your consideration to make sure that our minister had a chance to have her closing statement fully on the record.

Minister, I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions about adoption, if you'd be interested in helping us with that, and I'm sure you would be. We know that the ministry recently was able to get the Adoption Information Disclosure Act through the Legislature. This piece of legislation will, as I understand it, make it easier for thousands of adoptees and birth parents to learn about their medical and personal histories. But how is your ministry going to protect the privacy rights of women who were forced to give up their children for adoption so many years ago?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: That's a very good question. We are protecting people's right not to be contacted. We are saying that the right to know is not the same as the right to a relationship. People will have the right to register a no-contact notice to protect their privacy. There are significant penalties for those who do not respect the no-contact notice. In other jurisdictions these penalties have been effective and we are not aware of any individual breaching a no-contact notice anywhere in Canada.

We recognize there may be some exceptions where an individual should be allowed to maintain his or her anonymity in order to protect personal safety. If there are safety concerns, the act will allow adoptees, birth parents and other individuals to apply to the Child and Family Services Review Board to prevent disclosure of identifying information to the other party. This includes a consensus where the release of the information may result in sexual harm or serious physical or emotional harm. The Child and Family Services Review Board will determine the forum for how applications are reviewed.

Mr. Wilkinson: Minister, I know the adoption legislation we're talking about required an 18-month transition so that your ministry can slowly create a new administrative body that will be able to process requests from the adoption community to have this information released to them. Do we have a name for this new agency? Could you be a bit more specific in your vision about what services they're going to provide?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: First of all, we wanted to have it right, so that's why we wanted to take the time. We need to take the time to implement a system that will make it easier for adult adoptees and birth relatives to find the information they are looking for. Upon full implementation of the legislation, the Office of the Registrar General is expected to provide identifying information to birth parents and adoptees to give them the information they need, the information all of us take for granted, and the right to know their personal identity and history.

The custodian of adoption information will be developed in consultation with our stakeholders. Face-to-face meetings with stakeholders begin in March and the consultations are expected to continue through the spring and summer. We are expecting to have completed these consultations in the fall.

Mr. Wilkinson: Thank you, Minister. I know Mr. Arthurs has a question.

Mr. Arthurs: Yesterday Minister Sorbara had the opportunity to introduce Bill 117 to provide some energy cost relief to low-income families, and part of that reflects on your ministry and those on social assistance. Not only electricity rates, but gas, propane and oil rates are going up, not just in Ontario, not only in Canada, but across North America, if not internationally. Those who are vulnerable to the costs of energy are the most significantly impacted. Can you let us know what your ministry is doing in this context to help those you service to ensure they're able to pay the necessary energy costs to ensure they have energy when they need it?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: In 2004, we created the emergency energy fund to help vulnerable households if they

find themselves facing an energy-related emergency. This included, of course, financial assistance. The fund covers various forms of energy such as electricity, gas or oil. Our municipal partners are the delivery agent of the emergency energy fund. We are also working with the Ontario Native Welfare Administrators Association to deliver assistance to First Nations.

In 2005, we renewed and annualized the emergency energy fund to assist low-income Ontarians on an ongoing basis. In 2006, this government announced emergency energy funds and doubled the amount from \$2.1 million to \$4.2 million. Municipalities will receive an increase from \$2 million to \$3.7 million. The ONWAA will receive an increase from \$100,000 to \$500,000. Social assistance recipients receive amounts for basic needs and shelter. Usually the shelter amount includes the energy costs, but social assistance recipients may receive additional help from that fund.

Mr. Arthurs: Those who find themselves in the greatest need will want to have the opportunity to access that emergency fund in times of crisis, I assume.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Yes, indeed. I'm told there was still money in this emergency fund at the end of last year.

The Acting Chair: Are there any further comments on the government side? Seeing none, we'll proceed to the vote. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: Shall vote 701 carry? Carried.

Shall vote 702 carry? Carried.

Shall the estimates of the Ministry of Community and Social Services carry? Carried.

Shall I report the estimates of the Ministry of Community and Social Services to the House? Agreed.

We'll take a five-minute recess to facilitate the transition here.

The committee recessed from 1700 to 1706.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

MINISTÈRE DES FINANCES

The Acting Chair: We'll begin by welcoming the Minister of Finance and officials from the Ministry of Finance. The minister has up to 30 minutes to give his remarks, and we call on the Honourable Gregory Sorbara. Minister?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm a little bit rusty. I don't have to push anything here, right?

The Acting Chair: You weren't away that long.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: It all depends on where you're coming from.

The Acting Chair: Yes, I suppose.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I'll just begin by introducing people that I think committee members know: Deputy Minister Colin Andersen to my right and, to his right, Len Roozen, assistant deputy minister, the guy who sort of oversees all of our expenditures.

The Acting Chair: Minister, you may have to just speak up a little bit.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Okay. I'm kind of nursing a cold here, but I'll try and do that and watch my watch at the same time.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Firstly, our thanks to the members of the standing committee for this opportunity to address you today. Obviously I'm going to provide you with details of the Ministry of Finance operating and capital expenditures, but before I do that, I think I would just like to put on the record and acknowledge the incredibly great work that my predecessor, Dwight Duncan, did during his time as Minister of Finance.

This is a crazy business that we're in, this business of politics, and on the night of October 11 last year Dwight Duncan got a call from the Premier to say, "Would you get over here by about 10 o'clock because you're being sworn in as the Minister of Finance?" I can tell you without dwelling too much on the subject that Dwight never skipped a beat. In fact, from my perspective, resuming a position that I had until October 11, I now have very big shoes to fill. Among the accomplishments during his time in finance was of course the preparation, oversight and presentation of one of the province's most important budgets yet.

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As members know, the estimates for the Ministry of Finance provide the details of our operating and capital expenditures for 2006-07. They constitute our formal request to the Legislature for spending authority to implement key programs and services.

Today, I would like to tell you about the McGuinty government's 2006 fiscal plan. Its objective is very simple: a stronger, more vibrant economy for the people of Ontario. I also want to talk for a bit and to update you on the Ontario economy, to report to you on some of our achievements over the past and to say a word or two about the various measures that we're taking to manage our resources.

Aujourd'hui je voudrais vous parler du programme fiscal de 2006 du gouvernement McGuinty, un programme qui renforce notre avantage économique. J'aimerais aussi vous donner un compte rendu sur l'économie de l'Ontario, vous parler de nos accomplissements de l'année passée et des mesures que nous prenons pour bien gérer les ressources du gouvernement.

The McGuinty government's 2006 budget is the third in our long-term plan to strengthen Ontario's economic advantage and to do so by strengthening our people. I believe that planning is our strong suit.

The highlight of this year's budget, as you know, was transportation infrastructure. We invested in public transit, roads and bridges, doing all that while staying on track to eliminate the deficit. We were able to do this as a result of additional revenues in 2005 from an economy that outperformed expectations. I believe that that is a tribute to the working men and women of this province.

Can I begin with a word about infrastructure?

Infrastructure: our schools, places where our kids learn, the hospitals where we treat those who have become ill, public transit systems that we ride, the roads we drive on, the plants that clean our drinking water and the power stations that keep our lights on.

Quick, reliable and safe transportation is vital to our economic success. It is also essential to our quality of life. By the way, we don't need to go beyond yesterday and the unfortunate work stoppage in the city of Toronto to understand and cast away any doubt about the wisdom of the transit investments that we made in last month's budget. Can I just provide some statistics on what happens when you don't have good transportations systems?

Transport Canada has reported that traffic slowdowns and gridlock in nine major Canadian cities costs the economy as much as \$3.7 billion a year. In the greater Toronto area, traffic congestion costs about \$2 billion a year. All around the world, decision-makers know the tremendous importance of infrastructure and the problems that result when goods and people cannot move efficiently. That is why we announced Move Ontario, a new \$1.2-billion investment in public transit, municipal roads and bridges.

As you heard when the budget was presented, the centrepiece of Move Ontario is a landmark \$838-million investment to enable the expansion and modernization of public transit in the greater Toronto area. That transit system will serve some four million people, and by the time it's completed perhaps five million people, in the greater Toronto area and millions of visitors who will come to the greater Toronto area every year.

C'est pourquoi nous avons annoncé Transports-Action Ontario, un nouvel investissement de 1,2 \$ milliard dans les transports publics, dans les routes municipales et dans les ponts. La pièce centrale de ce programme est un investissement de 838 \$ millions pour l'expansion de transports en commun dans la région du grand Toronto.

This investment will help to build a new subway into York region, the fastest-growing part of the greater Toronto area, and new projects to fight gridlock and speed travel across Brampton and Mississauga. The city of Toronto and York region will be able to use some \$670 million to extend the subway to the Vaughan Corporate Centre at Highway 7. For the first time in our history, subway service will be able to extend beyond regional boundaries—in this case, from the 416 area to the 905 area—building opportunity for everyone in the GTA. Mississauga will be able to develop its Transitway, a dedicated bus line along Highway 403 and Eglinton Avenue. Brampton will be able to build its AcceleRide project, providing express bus service through dedicated bus lanes within the city.

Importantly, Mr Chairman, we have also introduced legislation to establish the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, which would promote seamless movement of people and goods, and oversee an integrated fare card for use across all the GTA transit systems. These investments, I believe, are just the beginning of a new era in public transit in the GTA.

But our vision for transportation infrastructure extends across the province. Through our \$30-billion, five-year ReNew Ontario plan, the government will provide a total of \$3.4 billion to improve the provincial highway network in southern Ontario and \$1.8 billion for highways in northern Ontario. Move Ontario has provided an additional \$400 million in immediate, one-time funding, with special emphasis on rural and northern municipalities, for roads and bridge repair and upgrading. Ultimately, this will mean not just safer roads and more reliable movement of goods and people across Ontario, but also the timely delivery of goods across our borders, because exports are the lifeblood of our economy.

Just a word on borders: Not all of you know, perhaps, that more than 70% of the value of Canada-US road trade is carried on Ontario highways. In 2004, 45 million vehicles, including nine million trucks, used Ontario's 14 border crossings with the United States. Our responsibility is to make sure our borders with the US are safe and secure but still allow the swift flow of goods. To this end, we've already made highway improvements near our border crossings to help with traffic flow and safety concerns. We'll be moving forward with the federal government on our \$300-million investment in the Windsor gateway and the \$323-million investment in the Niagara and Sarnia crossings.

Effective borders are important to people and businesses, and so is electricity. This government has taken on one of the most ambitious building programs in North America for new electricity generation. Over the course of three years, the government has initiated dozens of projects to provide, together with conservation efforts, about 11,000 megawatts of supply over the next five years. That's enough power, by the way, to supply some five million homes. On the transmission side, Hydro One is investing more than \$3 billion over the next five years to sustain, expand and reinforce its transmission and distribution systems across the province.

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The government is also committed to making green, renewable energy a key part of Ontario's future supply mix. We have set a 5% generation target of Ontario electricity capacity, or 1,350 megawatts, from renewable sources by 2007 and 10% by 2010. We are also committed to creating a culture of conservation. Our goal is to achieve a 10% reduction in the government's electricity use by 2007, and we are encouraging consumers to reduce their use of electricity with the installation of some 800,000 smart meters by 2007, and in all homes and businesses by 2010. Be it through new generation or conservation, this government will keep the lights on.

Que ce soit grâce à de nouveaux investissements en génération ou par des mesures de conservation, le gouvernement McGuinty s'assurera que l'électricité demeure allumée en Ontario.

One of the things we're most proud of is that in 2005-06 Ontario's electricity users have paid off about \$1.1 billion of the stranded debt of the old Ontario Hydro.

What sets Ontario apart from other jurisdictions across the globe? I think the answer to that is simple: It's the

high quality of our business environment, the diversity of our economy and our highly skilled and diverse workforce. We are home to Canada's largest manufacturing sector, we are home to the continent's leading auto sector, we are home to the country's leading information and communications technology sector, and we're the hub of Canada's financial services sector, which underpins economic activity right across the country. We believe that government policy plays a vital role in the continuous enhancement of Ontario's competitive advantages and, of course, in helping to ensure that the economy can weather the challenges it may face.

As all of you know, a competitive tax system is essential to attract business investment and encourage economic growth. Although corporate income tax rates in Ontario remain competitive with surrounding jurisdictions, Ontario's capital tax is widely recognized as a barrier to attracting investment and fostering new economic growth, because it taxes investments rather than business profits. In the 2004 budget we announced plans to gradually phase out the province's capital tax. In the 2006 budget the government is proposing to accelerate the capital tax rate cut so that the capital tax will be cut by 5% in 2007, a full two years earlier than planned, and we intend to eliminate it altogether in 2010 if our fiscal situation allows.

To help the financial services sector flourish, we will continue with regulatory reforms that foster fair and effective financial markets. In this regard, I want to reiterate that the McGuinty government continues its strong advocacy for a common securities regulator in Canada.

Now, if I could, just a word about innovation and education, and the role these policies play in the long-term economic success of Ontario. Intelligent governments understand how science, technology, innovation and education policies can efficiently contribute to sustainable economic growth and job creation. To ensure that Ontario is coping with challenges arising from developments in new science-based industries, notably biotechnology, our government is placing considerable emphasis on research and innovation. I think that's why it is the Premier himself who leads the Ministry of Research and Innovation. Under his watchful eye, we plan to invest nearly \$1.7 billion in research and commercialization over the next five years, to 2009-10.

A word about our manufacturing sector: It's the mainstay of our economy. Manufacturing accounts for 17% of Ontario's employment and 21% of its gross domestic product. We've become the continent's best when it comes to the automotive sector. Our automotive investment strategy has leveraged almost \$6 billion in new investment. You probably remember, four of the world's leading automakers—GM, Toyota, Ford and Daimler-Chrysler—have committed to making new investments in Ontario in cutting-edge auto manufacturing technology, confirming that Ontario continues to be the best place in the world to manufacture automobiles.

Since those announcements, both Linamar and Honda announced investments, in the case of Linamar, of \$1.1

billion, and in the case of Honda, \$154 million. Both these investments come with the assistance of the Ontario government. More importantly, these investments will create 3,000 well-paying and highly skilled jobs at Linamar and another 340 jobs at Honda.

In the resource sector, we all know that our forest industry has faced substantial challenges, so we're working with them to help lever investments to improve our competitiveness. On the other hand, Ontario's mining industry is booming. Today, Ontario's first diamond mine is under development. Toronto has emerged as one of the world's premier centres for mining finance.

Finally, I believe that one of the many success stories of Ontario's diverse economy is the growing entertainment and creative cluster, a very important employer and contributor to GDP. This year's budget included proposals to enhance a number of media tax credits and to provide capital support for six major Ontario cultural attractions. This cluster, we believe, has great potential to grow and create jobs and to continue to attract tourists, business and investors.

Need I mention, as well, the substantial progress we are making on deficit reduction? We have reduced the \$5.5-billion deficit we inherited from our predecessors in 2003-04 by 75%, down to \$1.4 billion for the fiscal year 2005-06. We're on track to eliminate the deficit in 2008-09, or a year earlier, should we not have to call upon the \$1.5-billion reserve provided for in that year.

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Now let's look at Ontario's economic growth. In 2005, it was well above average private sector projections at the time of the 2005 budget. I think that speaks to the fundamental strength of the Ontario economy and how hard-working the people of Ontario are, but to be frank, exterior forces continue to challenge Ontario's growth prospects.

While short-term interest rates moved moderately higher and oil prices reached record levels, it's important to note that consumer spending, the housing market and real business investment held up very well in 2005, notwithstanding those pressures. That's good news. At the same time, Ontario exporters faced significant challenges because of the sharp rise in the Canadian dollar, but they managed to record modest gains, increasing exports for the second straight year, and I believe that's a show of strength. Despite the high dollar, manufacturing output has increased and firms have raised productivity.

Overall—this is very good news—employment continues to rise, reducing the annual average unemployment rate to 6.6%, the lowest in four years. It's worth noting that the Ontario economy added 81,200 net new jobs in 2005, and that's an increase of 1.3% over 2004. Almost 254,000 net new jobs have been created in Ontario since October 2003. These new jobs include 68,000 in the education sector, 36,000 in construction jobs, 51,000 in finance, insurance and real estate, 45,000 in wholesale and retail trade jobs, and 24,000 professional, scientific and technical service jobs. Over 90% of these jobs are full time.

I want to put Ontario's growth prospects in context. Over the 2006-08 period, Ontario is expected to remain one of the fastest-growing regions when compared to major industrial countries. Private sector forecasters expect real GDP growth in Ontario to average about 2.7% a year during that period, faster than any other G7 industrialized nation, except Canada itself as a whole and the US.

I want to highlight some of the recent achievements of the Ministry of Finance, and before I do so, I just want to mention the changes that have been made to merge the ministry-published, results-based plans and estimates briefing books that those of us who have been around here for some time are familiar with, the merging of those two documents into one document that is now known as the results-based plan briefing book. The changes in the briefing books are consistent with this government's commitment to transparency and accountability, including changing the nature of how we manage, the way in which we budget and the way in which information is reported to the public. The integration of these documents simply provides for better public reporting.

The Acting Speaker: Minister, there are about five and a half minutes left.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I have about 25 minutes to go, though. I'm just kidding you.

I want to wrap up with some of the achievements of the ministry over the past year. Obviously, the most important is producing and supporting the implementation of two budgets in one fiscal year because of the timing. We published the long-term report. We made improvements to our tax administration system. We released the public accounts. We supported various federal-provincial meetings and worked on numerous interministerial groups.

In the area of tax policy, budget and revenue operations, we published the Transparency in Taxation report. We completed the planning phase of the modernizing Ontario's systems for taxation administration. That's very complicated and I hope you have a bunch of questions about that, but it really is the modernization of how we collect taxes. We created—this is important for consumers—the tax advisory service branch, designed to enhance taxpayer education services and improve legislative rulings, interpretations and staff training.

In the economic, fiscal and financial areas, we improved the timeline for the province's financial reporting by tabling the budget before the beginning of the year. We produced that long-term report *Toward 2025*. We worked with the Ministry of Natural Resources to provide strategic economic advice in bringing forward some \$900 million in support for Ontario's forest industry; and we introduced the Ontario municipal partnership fund, which replaced the old and unworkable community reinvestment fund.

In the area of service delivery and consumer issues, we introduced legislation to revise the Mortgage Brokers Act, and we released a consultation paper, entitled

Modernizing the Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act, to gather stakeholder input on bringing forward a new and more effective act in that area.

In financial management, we achieved total savings of some \$109 million through better money management; we saved the Ontario Electricity Financial Corp. over \$9 million annually by issuing a real return bond that replaced a bond at 3.25% over the Ontario CPI; and we saved GO Transit some \$11.5 million by way of procurement advice and currency hedging.

Finally, in the area of administration, the ministry has been able to identify a number of opportunities to consolidate revenue processing from other ministries within the Ministry of Finance. We've increased the use of electronic revenue processing, and we've helped develop and deliver the ministry's third results-based plan within budget and within FTE limits.

Just to wrap up, I want to reiterate that our government is strengthening Ontario's economic advantage and building opportunity through investment in infrastructure, post-secondary education, research and innovation, and key economic sectors while maintaining a competitive business environment.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished so far. I think every analyst says that Ontario's finances are now in much better shape. I believe that every analyst says that Ontario's investments in health care, education, post-secondary education and infrastructure are the kinds of investments that this economy needs to continue to grow and flourish. That is not to say that there are not incredible challenges ahead, but from my perspective, coming back to this job, I say, so far, so good.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister. We'll move on to Mr. Hudak.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Thanks very much, Chair. I apologize; I got in here just after the minister's remarks began. Process-wise, what's the—

The Acting Chair: You have till 6 o'clock, but you have a half hour in total.

Mr. Hudak: Okay, so we'd come to the remainder.

The Acting Chair: Yes.

Mr. Hudak: Minister, first, welcome back. It's good to see you here at the estimates committee. As I indicated to you in the House last night, I salute you for your courage and tenacity in taking on some personal issues in the last number of months. Our public profile—if you don't have that in politics, you don't have much. I commend you for your efforts and your fortitude in fighting back, and for being back in a chair that suits you very well.

There are a number of issues that really had your fingerprints on them, issues that you began and announced in previous budgets. Then, in the interim, Minister Duncan either advanced them more, didn't advance them, or they didn't move as quickly as some of us expected. I'm going to use up some time in this initial session just to ask you about that and to gather their status.

One of them is the mortgage brokers act. It was Minister Duncan that introduced that act earlier this year,

but a lot of the preliminary work was done by you when you were the minister, and your staff continued on. The mortgage brokers act has not been called for second reading debate. I think it's a good piece of legislation. I'm looking forward to a committee opportunity to look at it in detail; I think it's important that we move forward. But I'm curious as to its status and if we will be seeing that legislation moving forward this session.

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Hon. Mr. Sorbara: First of all, thanks for your kind words.

You mentioned that Minister Duncan had carriage of it. It's interesting that a good deal of the work on that was done by the now Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Mike Colle, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, who really did a super consultation process. I think the short answer is that the government is committed to moving forward with that legislation. We think that we have struck the right balance. Consumer protection and a high quality of regulation that is efficient is the underpinning of that legislation.

Now, I need to confess that I have not had a word with the government House leader to find out the timing of when the bill will come back before the Legislature. I am going to do that. There are a number of pieces of legislation that we want to move forward as quickly as possible: Yesterday, we had second reading of the bill to provide assistance to lower-income families dealing with higher electricity rates, and we hope that bill will move fairly quickly. But I simply don't have a timetable yet as to when the House will deal with—I guess it's second reading of the bill, is it not?

Mr. Hudak: Yes. It was called for second reading back in the February session or something like that: It was a number of months ago that it was brought forward. The minister at the time Mr. Duncan had indicated that he was looking forward to moving with some speed on the mortgage brokers act, and then it disappeared into the abyss a little bit.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Yes, but I wouldn't want you to misinterpret that as a loss of enthusiasm to proceed with the bill.

Mr. Hudak: Thanks for that, and I do hope that you'll have a chance to have the House leader push it forward.

Another request on that before I move on: There are a couple of areas that we in the opposition—and I'm sure my colleague Mr. Prue would be interested as well: How are you going to approach some of the issues like exemptions to the act through the regulatory process? There's some concern around the simple referral process. So I wonder if we could have your undertaking that the draft regulations will be brought forward during the second reading process before it's sent back to the House, so that we could have a good look at how the ministry is going to address those somewhat sensitive issues?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Well, I know that exemptions to the act are one of the substantive issues that gave rise to a lot of comment on the issue even before a bill was

drafted, but just to give you the assurance that we'll get those regulations to the House and to committee in a timely fashion. I wouldn't want to commit to any particular time period, because having just been back a few days, I confess I have not sat down with officials or even with my own staff on this bill and in fact on all the legislation that we're responsible for or that is coming up, except for that electricity act that we dealt with yesterday. Maybe I could repeat myself, that we have not lost enthusiasm for the bill. We think we know what the issues are and we think, frankly, that this is a bill that could have all-party support and move forward relatively quickly once it's called.

Mr. Hudak: In the grand scheme, the big picture, it's far from being a contentious bill. Both Mr. Prue and I have made positive comments about it from the opposition perspective in the general sense.

Within the industry and the associated industries like real estate and such, there will be some concern about how exemptions will work, given that it's a simple referral process. I think it would help flow the bill through the Legislature if there was a public release of draft regulations at least that we could take a look at from an opposition perspective.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I appreciate that request. Let me simply say that I'll get back to you on that once I've had an opportunity to review the larger legislative agenda and get a sense of when the Legislature may be debating that bill again.

Mr. Hudak: Thanks, Minister. The other measure you had brought forward in the 2005-06 budget was to modernize the credit union legislation. I made some very positive comments about that, and again, it's welcome. We've been well-served in Niagara by the Niagara Credit Union for some time, which I was a member of at one point in time. They're now Meridian. The consultations took place. Again, a lot of the work was done under your time, and then Minister Duncan released a consultation document.

There was an expectation that a bill would have been forward to the House as far back as the winter session, and definitely the spring session. I think your 2005-06 budget made the commitment that the legislation would be brought forward in the 2005-06 fiscal year. We're now a few months into the 2006-07 fiscal year. What's the status of the credit union legislation?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I'm a little bit disappointed, to tell you the truth, in our timetable here. It's not for want of proceeding. I remember, in my first year in this job—I think it was our first major pre-budget consultation—I had a number of chats with people who were anxious that we proceed. My sense was that we could proceed relatively quickly. Sometimes other work just intervenes and takes up the time available. But I think it was in the first budget that we mentioned we would proceed. So we are late on this. I think a significant consultation has been done.

I can't tell you today when we might be in a position to introduce a bill into the House to deal with reforms or

perhaps a thoroughly revised act, but I'll note your point, Mr. Hudak. I have not had an opportunity to look at the consultation document, but it's one of the things that is on the agenda for me to study during the summer. Certainly nothing will be presented in the Legislature before we rise for the summer. That's not in the cards.

Mr. Hudak: Will efforts be made for the fall session?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I don't want to make commitments I can't keep, but obviously I'll be making inquiries about when we can reasonably anticipate getting a bill before the Legislature.

Mr. Hudak: You deserve commendation on this. It's something that's had your personal fingerprints on it. You used very positive language when you described the need for modernizing in your budget of 2005-06.

Maybe through you, Minister, to the deputy or your staff: I believe the public consultations formally concluded a number of months ago. What has taken place since the conclusion of the public consultations?

Mr. Colin Andersen: We received over 30 submissions on the paper, so we've been going through those. There have been some meetings with the industry as well, with the credit unions and insurance brokers and some others. So we've been going through that. Obviously, with the transition back to Minister Sorbara, we have to now go through all of a fairly lengthy list of things with him to catch him up on where things are at. So that's where we're at.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you for that. Are the consultations now complete?

Mr. Andersen: There are some follow-through issues with regard to issues. There were concerns that might have been raised, clarifications on some of the ones that are fairly well known and in the public domain. So the formal part of the consultation, I would say, is over. There is legislation and regulations that will go along with it as well, so we're in the process of trying to work our way through that and then also take all of that through the minister.

Mr. Hudak: Aside from some catching up with the minister, which is understandable, what else needs to be done on a practical basis in terms of preparing a bill for the minister's approval?

Mr. Andersen: Aside from the drafting, the legislation and also the regulations that would go along with it, that's basically the stage where we're at. Like I said, the formal consultations are over with, so now it's really just discussing them with the minister.

Mr. Hudak: One of the main items in the consultation paper—I'm flipping to the right page—dealt with modernizing the rules around capital and the new accord, the Basel II accord.

Mr. Andersen: The international standards approach?

Mr. Hudak: Exactly, which would bring the credit unions to a more modern set of rules around capital. In the consultation paper, it seems you speak quite positively about that. Is that still on track for Basel II as the implementation goal of provincial legislation?

Mr. Andersen: Yes. There is certainly general support for modernizing the capital rules. With regard to the

actual implementation and time frame, I'd have to get back to you with regard to when exactly it would all kick in, but some of the leverage tests and all of those—my recollection is that they are generally well regarded, bringing the credit unions into line with standards that are used around the world. It was seen as a good direction to go in.

Mr. Hudak: And a relatively non-contentious item, I imagine, during the consultations.

Mr. Andersen: Overall, I believe. I mean, there may have been some issues with regard to some individual credit unions that may have a little more difficulty getting there, but I think overall this sector in general agreed that it was the right way to go.

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Mr. Hudak: Aside from briefing the minister on the consultations, are there contentious items that are holding the process back that you're trying to remedy, or have you come to conclusions as to the advice you're going to bring to the minister?

Mr. Andersen: No, I wouldn't say there are contentious issues that are holding it back. Again, we have a new minister with whom we need to discuss where we're at, and confirming the direction.

Mr. Hudak: Minister, I'm sure you remember that one of the items I think all of us here around the table are hearing about is the insurance brokers' concern about the credit unions' ability to sell insurance. Credit unions will say that in other provinces they already have that ability to sell insurance, to different degrees of direct relationship, depending on the province.

Mr. Andersen: Yes.

Mr. Hudak: Do you have a view that you'd like to express on the credit unions' ability to sell insurance?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: The issue of financial institutions selling insurance has been one before the Canadian banking sector for a very long time.

Let me preface comments on insurance with a broader statement on my hope and expectation and vision for the credit union movement or the credit union sector in financial institutions. We're seeing dramatic changes in the way in which financial services are delivered. So many of us do banking online, so few of us go into banks anymore—it's the bank machine, it's a computer at night, it's paying bills with little zippy things, paying for stuff with speed passes at gas stations and stuff like that. So the world of financial services is changing dramatically. My vision is that credit unions find a strong and vital role in this sector.

Tim, you mentioned capital requirements. As I recall—and I'm a little bit rusty—capital requirements was one of the impediments to the growth and vibrancy of the sector, but there is clear evidence that properly regulated, this could add to the quality of consumer services for financial institutions.

Just to give you a quick example which is right close to home, three or four years ago a new credit union opened in beautiful downtown Woodbridge, in the heart of the fast-growing part of the province, in Vaughan,

called the Italian Canadian Savings and Credit Union. There were I think three charter banks in the vicinity at street level. I know about it because they asked me if I wanted to invest and I said, "So long as I get account number 1, because I want to be your first customer." That credit union has grown remarkably, probably faster than any particular branch of any bank or financial institution in the general market area. It filled a niche. It's doing that within current regulations.

As our large financial institutions change and move markets and think about their international mandates, I just think there's a strong and vital role for credit unions. I would not want to say to you that in Ontario that would include the sale of insurance products that are currently sold by insurance brokers around the province.

Mr. Hudak: How about the ownership provisions, Minister, around the credit unions' ability to own insurance brokers?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Again, banks now own insurance companies that sell similar product. See, I don't think the issue for a stronger credit union movement and greater consumer choice in financial services is all wound up with how credit unions can get into the insurance business. It's not a matter of allowing credit unions to do indirectly what they can't do directly.

Mr. Hudak: Chair, how am I doing on time for the rest of this session?

The Acting Chair: You have seven minutes.

Mr. Hudak: Thanks, Minister. The other area that you had brought forward in the 2005-06 budget—and again, we didn't see movement to date—and if I remember the proper term, it basically gave professionals that are regulated health professionals an ability to have spouses or children—they would be non-voting shareholders, right?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: The incorporation of those practices? Yes.

Mr. Hudak: Exactly.

And you had indicated that that would be okay for doctors and dentists and that via regulation you could expand that definition beyond those. As you know, the other health professionals have said, "Well, why not us as well?"—physiotherapists, chiropractors etc. Why did you draw the line at doctors and dentists?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: A tough decision. You have to draw the line somewhere. There's no—what's the best way to put this?—sort of set of absolute rules that suggest that, well, as far as doctors and dentists are concerned, they should be able to incorporate in that fashion and others shouldn't have the capacity to use that kind of corporate structure. And there are revenue implications as well. Certainly, if you were around the table when we were discussing those issues, the very questions that you asked, Mr. Hudak, are the questions that we asked ourselves around the table. I think we simply came to a landing to provide that corporate structure for doctors and dentists, and then to be able to do an assessment of what the financial implications are, what the corporate implications are, how the world would change, whether

there would be sufficient revenue implications. We do that in a world where there are, with every passing budget, federal and provincial, different approaches to corporate taxation.

The main theme behind corporate tax, particularly for small business, is that the corporate structure ought to be neutral when it comes to earning income. So, for example, if you do the work of a consultant, it should make no difference whether you do that work as Tim Hudak Inc. or Tim Hudak, consultant. But the fact is that our current taxation system does have certain preferences, and certain burdens on corporations as well.

We didn't want to simply say, "Open that opportunity to all health professionals," because we wanted to get some expertise and some information and some experience with the two professions we chose to include in that budget.

Mr. Hudak: I had a private member's bill, Bill 76, you may remember, that extended this to veterinarians as well, who were not included in the first—

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: No. I haven't read that bill yet, but I will tonight.

Mr. Hudak: Good. Bill 76. It's right after 75, the mortgage brokers act—no. The Homestead Act is 75, which is another good piece of legislation we can talk about.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: You are very good at private members' bills.

Mr. Hudak: Bill 76 would extend to veterinarians. It doesn't necessarily mean that it would happen. It would be up to the finance minister of today or of the future to determine whether to extend that benefit, just as the finance minister could make a decision today to extend it to another health professional. Why not include veterinarians as part of that list of options?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Because as a matter of government policy right now, we've determined to extend the option to doctors and dentists and gain a little bit of experience and be able to do some analysis of the impact and the effect of that. The answer is more or less tied up in the question that you asked initially. To extend to veterinarians raises the question, why not, my goodness, physiotherapists or midwives or other allied health pro-

fessionals? There's no answer other than our determination to put into place that provision for those two professions and to gain some experience and some insight and information as to what the impact will be, as I said, in both financial terms, fiscal terms, and in terms of whether or not this represents an effective way of carrying on a business.

Mr. Hudak: Are there still two minutes to conclude, Chair?

The Acting Chair: I would wind up right now.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you for undertaking the reading of Bill 76, which is only a page.

The point I'd make is, the minister does have the option for the other regulated health professionals. I hear what you're saying; you'll look at doctors and dentists and see how it impacts on the budget and the professions. But at the very least, you could put veterinarians in the same category as chiropractors and physiotherapists as a future option. So I'll ask you to take a look at Bill 76.

It's probably an unfair question to ask today and maybe the minister could endeavour to bring this back to the table. I think you had estimated that the doctors' and dentists' ability exemption would be \$10 million in fiscal year 2005-06 and \$40 million annually thereafter, beginning this fiscal year. Could you bring back to the committee for our next meeting the calculations that form the basis of that \$10-million and \$40-million range?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: We could do that. I'll just put forward this proviso as we wrap up. This, of course, is based on the current provisions regulating corporate income tax, personal income tax, dividend tax credits and the entire system. So they are fraught with difficulties, particularly in the out years, given that corporations pay both federal and provincial corporate tax. We are in the midst of moving toward a single corporate tax collector for Ontario and we're in the midst of negotiating that agreement. But within that context, we certainly will try to provide you with as much information as possible as to how we arrived at those numbers.

Mr. Hudak: Great. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister. The committee stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1800.

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