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Thursday 4 May 2006

Jeudi 4 mai 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 4 May 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 4 mai 2006

The House met at 1000.

Prayers.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

EASTERN ONTARIO ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT FUND ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE FONDS
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE
DE L'EST DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Sterling moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to establish the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corporation / Projet de loi 42, Loi créant la Société de gestion du Fonds de développement économique de l'Est de l'Ontario.

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

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): This initiative is an attempt to mirror in some ways the northern Ontario heritage fund, which was set up by the previous government to help municipalities and businesses in the north to attract economic development to their area because they had a special need. They had a special need because there was a lot of population migration out of their areas. In other words, there was a net outflow of population from many communities in the north.

Their median incomes compare very poorly to the average Ontarian's. The municipalities that are trying to maintain a level of service necessary for the population—good drinking water, adequate sewage, an attempt to attract industry to their area—just don't have the resources to do it. So the past government, in its wisdom—and the present government has continued the program of giving \$60 million to the north in various different kinds of grants, either to private concerns or to municipalities to improve their lot.

This bill covers everything east of the region of Durham, save and except for the city of Ottawa. The city of Ottawa is not included in this bill because, quite frankly, their median incomes are quite high in relation to Ontario. The city of Ottawa is growing rapidly, whereas the areas outside of Ottawa are not benefiting to the same degree.

This bill was introduced before as Bill 187. It was passed by the Legislature but was allowed to die on the order paper. Some people have talked in the past about bringing back what was there before. I want to assure members of the Legislature and members of the public that the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corp. is not anything like the previous Eastern Ontario Development Corp. The previous Eastern Ontario Development Corp. was primarily a lending corporation, a lender of last resort. This particular corporation is primarily a funding or a grant corporation. It also has much wider ability to make grants to municipalities. The former Eastern Ontario Development Corp. could only give municipalities money or help municipalities with the development of industrial parks. This particular bill and the northern Ontario heritage fund allow the corporation to grant funding to municipalities for all kinds of different projects.

I note most recently that the northern Ontario heritage fund has, for example, helped municipalities: Iroquois Falls airport, for a development business plan; they have helped the city of Kenora with upgrades to their water treatment plant; they have helped the city of Timmins with \$2.5 million to upgrade their drinking water system. A lot of what the northern Ontario heritage fund does is to allow these municipalities with limited assessment bases to upgrade their infrastructure or bring their infrastructure up to scratch. The former development corporations, either the Ontario Development Corp. or the Eastern Ontario Development Corp., did not have that ability. So there is a huge and significant difference between what I am proposing here and what was there in the past.

My bill has become even more urgent today than it was a year and a half or two years ago when I first introduced Bill 187. That's because the manufacturing sector in all of Ontario has faltered, but it has faltered to a greater degree in some of our smaller and rural communities. Take, for example, Smiths Falls. There are two major employers in Smiths Falls. Rideau Regional Centre has 840 employees, and the government is going to close that particular residence in 2009. It's going to be very devastating for Smiths Falls, and there is no plan by this government—or they haven't come up with any money—to assist that particular town to seek other economic alternatives. I suggest to the government that this is a very good tool to meet that kind of problem. Also, in the manufacturing sector, Hershey chocolates, Smiths Falls' second-largest employer or approximate equivalent, has recently lessened their workforce by 50

people. That's a big number—50 jobs—in a town of 9,000 people; it's a significant number. As well, there have been jobs lost in places like Chesterville—the Nestlé plant closed in Chesterville—and there have been losses by Domtar in Cornwall etc. in eastern Ontario.

1010

This general overall decline in manufacturing jobs has had a real impact on the areas that we're talking about here, and we need to come to the assistance of these municipalities who don't have the income levels and who don't have the assessment bases. They're not growing communities; they are, in general, static communities. They just need an extra boost, not only to attract but to be able to maintain their infrastructure to help go forward.

I was glad to support the resolution of Mr. Runciman, the member for Leeds–Grenville, last week to set up an eastern Ontario secretariat, because this area not only needs funding mechanisms; it also needs coordination of the efforts of this government to be able to provide significant help, not only with funding, as I've said, but also with organization etc.

The beauty of Bill 42, the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corp., and the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. is that both of these organizations would be deciding the priorities for their funding on the basis of local directors. The directors for this funding would come from eastern Ontario, and presumably they would know better than people sitting here in Toronto what priorities are foremost. My bill tries to delineate certain priorities with regard to the choices the corporation would make. They would help those most in need; they would look at the median income of particular areas and help them out.

Lastly, I think that's a fairly simplistic explanation of the bill, and I think that there is significant support from many, many townships. In fact, I have endorsements from over 25 different municipalities for that particular matter.

I think a simple explanation would help most. If you look at the income level, the average income of an individual in Smiths Falls is \$19,500. That's roughly equivalent to what it is in Sault Ste. Marie, which is about \$20,400. Both are far under the median for all of the province. Sault Ste. Marie needs help, but I would argue as well that communities in eastern Ontario like Smiths Falls, like Cornwall, which has a median income of \$18,300, need help as well.

When we look at some of the projects that have been granted to places like Sault Ste. Marie—I applaud the government and the northern heritage fund in giving \$15 million to Sault Ste. Marie on March 31 to build a tourist attraction in the waterfront redevelopment. I think that it is absolutely necessary for the Ontario government to come forward with special help for communities that are struggling, but we cannot confine this to northern Ontario. Eastern Ontario outside of the city of Ottawa has some of the lowest levels of income, the slowest development and, in some cases, negative population growth.

So I urge all members to support this particular bill. It would be a great help to many people who are crying out for it.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I want to say first of all that I and the New Democrats will support this bill, An Act to establish the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corporation, and support its introduction by the member from Lanark–Carleton.

He makes a distinction between what was and what he is proposing. I had an opportunity to review what the member from Peterborough had said in last year's debate on this. He articulated what it was, and I think the member from Lanark–Carleton did some justice in explaining the differences. Here's what the old Eastern Ontario Development Corp. did. Its first mandate was to provide incentive loans and term loans to prospective businesses in eastern Ontario. We don't dispute that. Its mandate was to provide loans specifically to small business to start their activity in eastern Ontario. We don't dispute that. The third was to provide venture capital for new ideas for those businesses that wanted to establish in eastern Ontario, give them a leg up. It was a good idea, and we don't dispute that. Another one that the member from Lanark–Carleton identified in the debate was that they also provided loans for pollution control equipment, and we don't dispute that. The EODC would provide to its municipal partners loans for pollution control equipment. This is something that's so important to eastern Ontario: It provided tourism industry loans for new resort facilities. And so on.

The question that was raised was, why would the Conservative government—and you were there—through the former minister, M. Saunderson, decide that it was no longer a very useful corporation to support? It is beyond me, because you, the member from Lanark–Carleton, speak about why it's so important.

Mr. Sterling: It's so different.

Mr. Marchese: It doesn't matter how different they were. I read out for the record what they did as a way of suggesting to you that what they were doing was very useful and important for eastern Ontario, and that, rather than eliminating its function, if anything, expand its role, which you so easily could have done as a Conservative government, but you decided to eliminate that corporation. I hope you're not proud of having eliminated that corporation and, for eight years thereafter, doing very little to support eastern Ontario.

Mr. Sterling: No, no.

Mr. Marchese: I don't know how you could nod your head and say that's not true. If eastern Ontario is in trouble today, surely they were in trouble five years ago. Surely they were in trouble seven or eight years ago. Eastern Ontario didn't suffer an economic development problem just recently, for God's sake. Clearly, the problems you're identifying have existed there for quite some time, and I'll speak to that in a moment. But the point is, it's not for lack of will, I suspect, because I presume that most of you would have liked to see this kind of

development going on in eastern Ontario. If it wasn't will, I ask myself, what might it have been? Was it the money?

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Well, if it wasn't the money, and you had the will, what other possible explanation might you offer in the next round of debates where you will be speaking to these questions that I ask? If you didn't suffer for lack of will and it wasn't an issue of money, then what could it have been?

My suggestion to you is that it was lack of money and you were trying to cut back rather than add to your cost. The northern Ontario heritage fund cost 60 million bucks. You spoke very positively about it. I do too, and we support it because it does good things. Northern Ontario needs as much help as eastern Ontario municipalities and communities. We want to make sure that jobs, to the extent possible, are protected and created in eastern Ontario. We want to make sure that people don't leave the rural communities and head for the cities in search of jobs, because as soon as you do that, you destroy those rural communities and those smaller communities outside of the city regions. So what you want to do, and I support this, is make sure that you keep those jobs there. Having a fund such as the northern heritage community fund is a good thing.

All I wanted to do by raising the issues that the member from Peterborough had talked about—it was a very useful tool. I argue here today that you should have kept that Eastern Ontario Development Corp., because what it did was important. What you're proposing by way of offering grants is a very useful thing, although when we get to committee, assuming this government will allow it to get to committee, we might have some suggestions about how we offer grants, with what conditions and controls, and not just simply willy-nilly giving away money to those who say, "Here's an idea." I'm assuming the member agrees with that, and we'll see whether he does when we send this to committee, assuming the Liberals support this.

1020

But my point is that you started this Eastern Ontario Development Corp. in 1973 and it continued to 1996. M. Saunderson decided it was no longer useful and then we had nothing at all to replace it.

We know that eastern Ontario continues to experience high unemployment—higher unemployment than much of the rest of the province. The closure of the Domtar mill wiped out 90 well-paying jobs in Cornwall. Those kinds of job losses are serious to these communities. We know that many people who live in the eastern communities that the member from Lanark–Carleton was talking about are seniors and they are getting older. That is generally true, but it is particularly so in many of these communities. We also know that income levels in much of eastern Ontario are lower than in many other parts of Ontario, so that speaks to the need for having an eastern Ontario economic development fund.

I know that many of the Liberal members supported this initiative the last time. Clearly, it was defeated by the

Liberal government; hopefully, it will not be defeated again. I have no doubt that the members of the Liberal Party who are here today are going to support this bill. The question is, will they have the courage, at least those who are here today to speak to it, to speak to the Premier, the ministers and others who are not here to debate the bill? Will they pass on the need to have such a bill passed and support it? Of that, we are not certain.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): Who cancelled the EODC, Rosario?

Mr. Marchese: I pointed that out two times already. I agree. I've already assigned appropriate blame to the Conservative Party members who were in government and who are here today.

Mr. Lalonde: I wasn't here.

Mr. Marchese: I agree. I have properly attacked the members of the Conservative Party for having cancelled the former Eastern Ontario Development Corp. We're told by some members of the Liberal Party here that they benefited from that corporation, and I agree with that. I think all the Liberals here today should attack the Conservative government for what—

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Attack no more—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marchese: Tony Ruprecht, the member from Davenport, is speaking about me attacking them and that I should stop doing that.

Mr. Ruprecht: You've done that.

Mr. Marchese: I've done that. Oh, I see. I presume that when you get up to speak, you will attack the Conservative members as well. I suspect that if the member from Davenport will stand up to speak today, he will not only attack the Conservatives once, but he will do it twice and three times. Rather than urging me to stop my attacks on them, I would think he would be supportive of my attacks on the former members.

Mr. Ruprecht: I know what's coming next.

Mr. Marchese: Exactly. No, but also—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marchese: —I was attacking the Liberal government and the members for not properly defending this bill. So yes, let's share the blame here and let's review the history, because reviewing history is always important.

That's what I love about the Conservative Party. I find them in opposition oftentimes progressive, and it is a scary thing because you wonder how that could be, having witnessed what they did to Ontario for eight and a half long years, to have them get in the opposition benches and almost forget—this collective amnesia that happens to the members who were here in that government: You wonder how it works. How does it happen? How could you, in opposition, simply say things that you attacked when you were in government a mere two and a half years ago? It puzzles me, I've got to tell you. It makes me feel very odd as a member here to know that when you get into opposition you start doing things that are very radically different. It's a very—

Mr. Ruprecht: Maybe you want to share your own record.

Mr. Marchese: You're quite right. My own record—and I'm on the record very clearly. I supported public auto insurance and I defended public auto insurance. I was a very vocal member of the NDP in that party saying, "We support public auto insurance." I take pride in admitting that I was a strong supporter of public auto—I don't hide from that. Some Conservative members might hide and other Liberal members might hide from their own record, but I don't hide from that.

I supported us keeping the party policy on Sunday shopping. I was very proud of supporting it as a member of that party. I know that cabinet and the former Premier changed their minds on that, but I don't have any problem saying I supported the idea of keeping Sunday—

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): You're saying you were basically an independent then?

Mr. Marchese: I am saying that you should have the courage, as Conservative members, to say, "Yes, I disagreed with my party." If you ever get there, Yakabuski, I hope you'll be able to remember—

Mr. Yakabuski: Yakabuski.

Mr. Marchese: Yakabuski. It's a beautiful Polish name—

Mr. Yakabuski: It's a lovely name.

Mr. Marchese:—and I don't mind repeating it.

Mr. Yakabuski: Say it again, brother.

Mr. Marchese: Yakabuski. I don't mind repeating it. If you ever have an opportunity to get back on that government bench, just remember what you said here. Because when you get there, someone might decide you're not going to go into cabinet, and you're going to have to decide, "Am I going to be quiet? Gee, this is what I said."

Mr. Yakabuski: "Quiet" doesn't work very well for me.

Mr. Marchese: I know it doesn't work, but when you're there, if you're not in cabinet and you want to get in, you're going to be silent as a puppy, I can guarantee it: silent as a little puppy—or as a big puppy, whatever the case might be. I can guarantee it; yes, indeedly. I've seen it for 16 years. That's the way it works. Anybody who wants to get into those front benches is silent as a puppy until they get in, with minor exceptions. Stockwell was one of them. God bless Stockwell. He was pretty sharp in that regard.

Mr. Ruprecht: What happened to you then?

Mr. Marchese: Tony Ruprecht, what happened to you is the question. It's not what happened to me; what happened to you?

I say to the Conservative members, I proudly support this bill. I think it's a good bill.

Mr. Yakabuski: Now you're talking, Rosie. You're back to the right message.

Mr. Marchese: Yakabuski, if it's a good bill today, it would have been a good bill under a Conservative government. It would have been such a beautiful thing to have seen the member from Lanark–Carleton introduce this bill while he was a minister or telling another minister or buddy, "Please introduce this thing because

we really need it." Where were they when you needed them? That's the question I want to ask. When you need them, they're not there. They're only good when they get in opposition, because when they're in government they are a complete waste to all of Ontario.

Today I want to see, however, having condemned the Tories as strongly as I can, whether those Liberals who are speaking are going to be able to convince those who are not here that this is a bill they should be supporting. I'm going to be waiting to see whether they can and will do that, because it isn't just good for the Tories, who have introduced this bill, but it will be good for eastern Ontario and it will be good for Liberals. I'm hoping they're going to have the courage to support this bill. Tony Ruprecht, I want to see you speak.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to stand this morning to speak to Bill 42, An Act to establish the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corp. As a member from eastern Ontario, as a member from the far east, from Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh, I will certainly be supporting this bill, as I did when I stood in my place and supported the member from Lanark–Carleton when he introduced, I believe, Bill 187, if that's the number of the bill. At that time I supported it and spoke strongly in favour of it, spoke strongly in support of the help that's required in eastern Ontario. I stand with a government that has provided many supports in the past, since I arrived here at Queen's Park.

1030

I would like to comment with regard to my good friend from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, who is sitting here in the House this morning and was having some dialogue with the member from Trinity–Spadina as the member from Trinity–Spadina was speaking. The member wondered if we would stand in our place and support this bill. The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has been a strong proponent and a strong supporter of business in his constituency. Just last Sunday, as I was heading up on the train, I stopped at a store just around the corner from the train station in Cornwall and picked up the Glengarry News. A banner across the front page alluded to the fact that there are some problems with a business in Alexandria. I read the news report, and the work this member is doing for his riding and for that company in Alexandria is commendable. I want to say this morning that, as his neighbour, I think it's important for me to make comment about that.

It is unfortunate that we've lost the Eastern Ontario Development Corp. As we heard, from 1973 to 1996 this was an organization that supported the economic development of eastern Ontario and certainly of my riding. It's unfortunate that it disappeared and wound down operations in 1996 because, as we've seen across Ontario, certainly in eastern Ontario with the loss of jobs related to one-industry town industries—for example, comments were already made about Chesterville: by two members this morning. Yes, it's very sad that we are

losing one industry in the town of Chesterville, Nestlé. It has been a long survivor in that rural municipality in my constituency and has provided great jobs. I've worked with the company, I've worked with the individuals from that industry and I've worked with the municipality to see what could be done. I think that if we had an Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corp., if we had something of that mechanism, not only with what we've provided in the past but with that type of organization, we could continue to give help to industries like Nestlé; to industries like St. Lawrence Corp. in Iroquois; which recently announced their closure and have closed, with Gildan in Long Sault. My hometown of Long Sault lost Gildan Activewear. Both members who stood and talked about this this morning talked about Domtar Fine Papers in the city of Cornwall.

I want to set the record straight. We had the debate here on the proposed eastern Ontario secretariat, a bill brought to this House by the member from Leeds-Grenville, I think just last week or the week before, and I spoke in favour of that bill. In debate on that day, it was mentioned that 81 jobs were lost at Domtar, and then today we heard it was 90 jobs. We have to multiply that by at least 10 in the past two years, which is very unfortunate.

I can say that we have a government that stepped forward with opportunities for Domtar, and Domtar didn't take those opportunities. Cogeneration: I met for at least a year on a bimonthly basis with officials from Domtar to try and get something established there because they wanted cogeneration opportunities. We put money on the table. We put opportunities in place for cogeneration. They did not. I remember sitting in this House on the day there were questions being asked by the opposition to the Premier. I remember the Minister of Economic Development and Trade saying—I won't say he was shouting, but he made it very clear that those opportunities were given to that industry and they did not accept those opportunities, which is very unfortunate, because, in my understanding, the dollar was a detriment to them, right, but energy was a problem. We put something in place to help them on that energy front that was not accepted, which is very unfortunate.

I'm going to tell you something else I would like to put on the record today. The member from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey, who represents that riding at the present time, has been to my riding. The Leader of the Opposition has been to my riding a few times in the past year. I want to make a comment about a speech he gave to a group in Cornwall on January 5 of this year. He said, "It's obvious that the local municipal leadership gets it, that something needs to be done ... the business community gets it; the only people who don't get it are the Liberal governments."

I'm going to tell you that it was very clear on that day that he was not listening to the comments by the mayor of the city of Cornwall, Mayor Phil Poirier. It was just after that, five days later, when the mayor of the city of Cornwall on Oldies 1220 The Jewel, on the morning

show, said he had never seen the province so open to helping out in his city.

I'm going to tell you that as a member I've never seen a government so open to helping out the rural municipalities in my constituency too. I look at the recent announcement of half a million dollars each to South Stormont and South Dundas, to those municipalities, to assist them with their water projects. There are other concerns there and we are addressing those concerns, but that was some support that my government felt was important for those two municipalities.

I look at some of the other supports that have been given to the community: \$5 million to the city of Cornwall, a one-time grant to help with water and sewer improvements; a \$5-million unconditional grant for reconstruction and widening of road lengths from provincial Highway 401 to the international bridge, an absolute necessity to get that done; \$1.2 million for the city's water purification plant.

I look at our hospitals. We have the shovel in the ground in the city of Cornwall for St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre. We will have the shovel in the ground next year for the Winchester hospital. In 2008 we will have the supports to our Cornwall Community Hospital and some smaller projects already pulled out of that to give supports to health care.

We have made strong commitments and strong support to those communities. I can say that an Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corp. will certainly go a long way in continuing to support—and the member from Lanark-Carleton commented that this would be grant opportunities. Any opportunities that we have in eastern Ontario for grants, I say, let's support it. That's why I stand in my place today and say I will support and will encourage my members from the government side to support his bill.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): At the outset, I want to make reference to the comments made by the NDP member for Trinity-Spadina, Mr. Marchese, who is an engaging individual and an entertaining and, I think, forceful speaker in this place. It has always intrigued me that, over the past almost three years, when he speaks to initiatives in this House he seems to focus on the past, to focus on the former government, which is, as I say, intriguing and in some respects puzzling.

If you look at his own riding and at the folks who are the government of the day, I'm not sure there is much in terms of political astuteness in continuing to carry those embers of whatever it might be. It seems to be the David Peterson phenomenon, if we read about David Peterson's brother's spiteful comments about Bob Rae. People speculated it was resentment because Mr. Rae led the party that dispatched the Liberals from government back in 1990. I don't know the reason, but it is certainly intriguing.

I want to support the bill put forward by the member for Lanark-Carleton. He is one of two deans of the Legislature, and certainly understands eastern Ontario

and the challenges faced by eastern Ontario as well as anyone in this Assembly.

There was a study done a number of years ago by the federal government that pointed out that pockets of eastern Ontario have the highest levels of poverty in the province. That's not readily apparent to most of us when we're driving on the 401 or the 416 and visiting friends in Cornwall or Ottawa or wherever it might be. But you get out onto some of those country roads and visit with people and you start to appreciate the level of poverty and the despair that many families in this part of the province are facing. That has been exacerbated over the past number of years by the loss of significant manufacturing jobs in the province.

1040

I think most people look at Ottawa for example or they look at Kingston and say, "Well, there can't be real problems in eastern Ontario," but we forget that those communities depend heavily on government jobs and on academia, that those kinds of jobs continue to make those communities prosper, and in some respects they are radically different from other parts of the region which indeed are suffering, and the suffering is growing month after month as we see good-paying jobs leave the region. We've had Chesterville mentioned, and I won't repeat that, but there have certainly been significant job losses in my own community: SCI moving to Mexico and Quebec; Hathaway shirts leaving Prescott; Black and Decker consolidating its operations in the United States. There is a whole list, Mr. Speaker, as long as my arm and yours, in terms of job losses, and they have an especially devastating impact on the smaller communities, where they tend to be either the only employer or by far the major employer in many of those communities.

An area where I believe this bill could assist as well is in terms of the tourism sector. If you look at the Rideau system, the Thousand Islands region, they're significant attractors of tourism dollars. We've seen a dramatic decline—I think you saw the press recently, Mr. Speaker: a 30% decline in US visitors to Ontario over the past couple of years. Part of it is the dollar and the attacks on New York and Washington; there's a whole combination of factors. But we are suffering as a result. This is the sort of thing—if you look at the operation of the heritage fund in northern Ontario, you can provide and incent visitors, you can use those dollars to build tourist attractions, and you can use them to promote specific areas or specific attractions within a region. We see that done fairly well within eastern Ontario.

Farmers' markets: This Liberal government is going to impose significant impediments on the operations of farmers' markets, requiring them to have public washrooms. That's one of the regulations coming down. The government, through this fund, could ensure that those farmers' markets continue to operate and attract people by paying for this. If you're going to impose these kinds of restrictions and regulations, the government should be prepared to come forward with the monies to accomplish that.

I appreciate the opportunity to support the member from Lanark–Carleton. He has done an outstanding job in this place for some 28 years, and I congratulate him on bringing forward this initiative.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to make a few comments on the resolution or bill today from the member for Lanark–Carleton. I tend to support it.

First of all, last Monday, I indeed was in the heart of eastern Ontario, in Gananoque. I attended the funeral for Corporal Randy Payne. I was there because his mother and father and his grandmother reside in my riding. I think, outside of funerals for both of my parents, it was probably the most sombre event I was ever at. Corporal Payne's son, Tristan, who is seven years old, delivered a poem in memory of his dad. For those old enough to remember, it was a flashback to that young child some 43 years ago, in late November 1963, who saluted his father's casket to say goodbye to him. It's an experience I will never, ever forget. Being in Gananoque that day to see all the townsfolk out there lining the city streets with their Canadian flags to salute that hero was a very emotional experience—something I will never forget.

But getting on to the discussion here this morning, I really think there is an opportunity to look at the re-establishment of the Eastern Ontario Development Corp., something that I believe was in place since the early 1980s and, for reasons I'm sure others have articulated, was abandoned during the 1990s.

When you look at some of the economic characteristics in eastern Ontario, there are great resources in eastern Ontario. Many of the communities are home to universities and community colleges. There are two border crossings in eastern Ontario. When you think of the gridlock—Mr. Speaker, you're very familiar with gridlock, coming from the Windsor area—that exists today at the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor as the flow of commerce and commercial activities goes between Ontario, Canada, and the United States, it seems to me there's an opportunity perhaps to make better use of those two border crossings in eastern Ontario that don't have the volume of traffic that certainly the Bluewater Bridge has in Sarnia and indeed the Ambassador Bridge has in Windsor. So how can we make that come about?

We can make that come about by the proposal that has been put forward from the member from Lanark–Carleton and others from eastern Ontario, who I believe will support this motion today, to look at perhaps providing some incentive, some mechanism to build up the economic base in eastern Ontario in many of those communities such as Belleville, Kingston, Prescott, Gananoque, Cornwall—real opportunities to take advantage of the fine labour force in those communities, an opportunity to take advantage, as I said previously, of the educational institutions that are in those communities and the ability to shift some of the economic growth.

There are great stories about companies that are doing phenomenally well that have established in eastern Ontario. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke

will know that GE has a facility in Arnprior that's involved in the manufacturing of nuclear fuel bundles that are used in the Candu system, both here and abroad. In Gananoque, Textron Fastening Systems is a company that does a tremendous amount of exporting. There is an opportunity in Kingston, Ontario, with research capacity related to Queen's University. We think of St. Lawrence College and, in my own hometown, Trent University and Sir Sandford Fleming College.

There is a real opportunity to build on the base that we have in eastern Ontario. It may be that by providing a corporation like the Eastern Ontario Development Corp. to look at incenting business opportunities and entrepreneurial activities in eastern Ontario. I think there's a real opportunity there and I commend the member. I supported his bill the first time he brought it forward on this motion, and I look forward to supporting it again.

1050

Mr. Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to support the member from Lanark–Carleton on his Bill 42 today. In the words of Yogi Berra, "It's like déjà vu all over again." This bill was passed at second reading during a previous session. The government, even though many of its members supported it—and we do really appreciate that—chose to let this die on the order paper. I think that was regrettable because there's no question that the prima facie case for passage of this bill has been made over and over again. I see the support here, and we do appreciate that. I do hope that these members will make a point of taking this issue to their government, to their cabinet ministers and to the Premier and say, "Look, this bill is important. It is worthwhile. It is necessary for eastern Ontario to show some fairness and equity. We demand, as members of the Liberal caucus, that you pass this." I see the member for Brant there. He understands his bill. It had strong support in this House. Because it was necessary, it was passed by this House even though it was a private member's bill. I was very supportive of that bill and would be again if I had to do it all over again because it was a great bill.

Let's talk about the case. It is so obvious that eastern Ontario lives under different economic circumstances from much of the rest of the province. That is the reason, for example, that the northern Ontario heritage fund was established. We can show evidence that the incomes in eastern Ontario, save the city of Ottawa and possibly Kingston, are even less. For example, in the city of Pembroke the average income is some 13% less than the average income in North Bay and some 12% less than the average income in Sault Ste. Marie, yet those places are subject to receiving monies through the northern Ontario heritage fund. The member from Lanark–Carleton spoke about \$15 million for waterfront revitalizations and things like that in the city of Sault Ste. Marie. Why not in the city of Pembroke, which recently had tremendously terrible news with the announcement that the Smurfit plant would close, throwing 139 people out of work? I was at a meeting last weekend with Cheryl Gallant, the federal member of Parliament, Mayor Ed Jacyno, myself and all the employees of Smurfit, and they're devastated.

But if we had a proper fund in place to recognize the impact of these things on eastern Ontario, they could be mitigated. The mayor has been a fighter for these issues, but Pembroke itself is a city that doesn't have room for growth because of its geographical limitations and is facing economic difficulties because of that, because it can't grow its assessment.

This bill is something that addresses some of those needs. If you look at what has come forward from members from eastern Ontario—myself with Bill 3, the gas tax bill, and recently the member from Leeds–Grenville with his act to establish an eastern Ontario secretariat—it seems there's a common thread here: We are always bringing in private members' bills to try to help and support those people in eastern Ontario who need it so badly, but we need help. We've got the right ideas here but we need help from you people on the government side. Recognize some of those things that the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus has been saying for years under the leadership of Bob Sweet, my warden here in Renfrew county. Recognize some of those issues that they've brought forward to you at different conferences, whether they be AMO, ROMA or whatever. We're struggling in eastern Ontario. We need a separate fund that recognizes the difficulties we're having, but we can't pass that law over here. We actually need you people to do that. I just want to, in the name of fairness and equiva—

Mr. Marchese: Equity.

Mr. Yakabuski: Equity; thank you very much, Rosario. In the name of equity, please stand in your place in your caucus next Tuesday morning and tell your people that these things must be passed. Eastern Ontario deserves no less than the rest of the province.

I am always amazed, quite frankly, when we talk about the incomes in eastern Ontario, through counties like Renfrew, Haliburton and the rest of eastern Ontario, at the resourcefulness and the resilience of the people who live there. Even under those kinds of circumstances, the lowest incomes in the province, you know what? They find a way to get by, because they're not quitters. We're proud to represent people like that, but we'd like to give them some hope that there's some fairness on the part of the province of Ontario when it comes to giving them a level playing field, to be able to say, "Yes, we're fighters, but give us a fair chance. Get us into the second round and we'll win by a knockout in the third."

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to join the debate today on Bill 42 and to support my colleague the member from Lanark–Carleton. He is to be congratulated for his hard work and dedication to the citizens of eastern Ontario. This is the second time this bill has been brought forward, and I was supportive of my colleague the member from Leeds–Grenville in the eastern Ontario secretariat bill he brought forward last week.

The purpose of this is to create a corporation which would invest in the communities in eastern Ontario in an effort to promote economic development in the region.

My colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke articulated very well the core values and the strength of the citizens there, and their hard work and determination to prosper, but they need a little bit of assistance. This fund, if established—and we want the Liberal government to pass this act—would create a fund like the northern Ontario heritage fund, and we'd be able to get dollars to invest in public sector and private sector projects.

While pockets of Ontario are experiencing some growth, eastern and northern Ontario are falling way below the provincial average. It begs the question of what opportunities are available for these communities to stimulate growth and attract the new businesses. They can't do it on their own. That's why this bill was put forward today: They need some help.

The members opposite are acutely aware of the need of this type of development initiative in eastern Ontario. In my riding of Haliburton county, the median income is \$17,000. That equates to a 30% difference from the rest of Ontario. That is not their only challenge: In Haliburton county, they have the highest percentage of seniors in the province, translating into a labour force participation rate of 50%. Kawartha Lakes is not far behind at 60%.

I ask this government, how are these communities expected to grow and prosper without our support? The legislation would provide the much-needed economic development support to increase their tax base, increase their revenue and, most importantly, improve their quality of life, and that is what we are elected to do in this Legislature. This type of bill being brought forward today is going to push that forward for the people in eastern Ontario specifically.

The municipalities in Haliburton county are completely behind it. They said that it would have the potential to provide much-needed, additional provincial government investment into eastern Ontario. "It provides a structure and opportunity to flow funds through to eastern Ontario municipalities." From Sylvia Sutherland, who works closely with the Peterborough county part of my riding: "It is long overdue, and I wish you every success." That was the municipalities all supporting this.

Small business is the economic engine that drives the Ontario economy. We want to encourage and promote this entrepreneurial spirit in areas where there is tremendous untapped potential.

Eastern Ontario communities are welcoming and embracing this initiative. They are not just facing their own community-based obstacles to development expansion; they are competing with highly organized and prosperous economic development associations throughout the province. These associations generate long-term strategic plans for their communities, and are designed to anticipate and compensate for declining sectors in their economic base.

As my colleagues have pointed out, manufacturing is declining throughout Ontario. What are these small communities going to do when one of their main sources of employment, like a factory, closes? I know that a lot of the forestry sector had trouble in the Haliburton area of

my riding: Trent Rubber in the Lindsay area and the city of Kawartha Lakes part of my riding have seen closures and lost jobs.

This bill is not just about business and economic development. We want to encourage small, medium and large businesses to thrive across this province, and, more importantly, we want to ensure that these communities remain vibrant and that people can continue to provide a quality of life for their families.

I urge all members in the Legislature today to support this bill and I encourage the government to move quickly on this legislation.

1100

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Sterling, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Sterling: I'd like to thank all members who spoke on this legislation for their support of the bill.

One element we didn't mention in regard to how difficult a time this part of eastern Ontario is having is related to the agricultural sector. We all know in this Legislature that the agricultural community, the farming community, has had a very, very difficult time over the last three or four years. This impacts on the ability of small-town Ontario to keep up its infrastructure, because if the agricultural community does not have money—and hasn't had money for the past two or three years, primarily because of the beef crisis, but also commodity prices in terms of corn—then the money isn't there to spend in town to keep the infrastructure up, or for the implement dealer to pay his taxes to keep his doors open, and that kind of thing. It has had a devastating impact on many parts of eastern Ontario as well.

Again, there was the mention of the demise of the former Eastern Ontario Development Corp. As a result, I did an analysis on the 37 different grants that the northern Ontario heritage fund has made since January 1 of this year. Under the old mandate, only three of those particular grants could have been made under the former Eastern Ontario Development Corp. So I hope that members of all parties understand that what I am proposing here is very, very different than what we had.

Eastern Ontario communities need an alternate method of keeping up their infrastructure, of creating economic development. This bill will help in an enormous way to not only give funding but to give hope to these communities.

TRILLIUM GIFT OF LIFE NETWORK
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE RÉSEAU
TRILLIUM POUR LE DON DE VIE

Mr. Lalonde moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to amend the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act, the Health Insurance Act and the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le

Réseau Trillium pour le don de vie, la Loi sur l'assurance-santé et le Code de la route.

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

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): I am very proud to rise in the House today to debate my private member's bill, the Trillium Gift of Life Network Statute Law Amendment Act, 2006.

First of all, I would like to thank the Trillium Gift of Life Network for working closely with my office on this bill. Jennifer Tracey and Dr. Frank Markel from Trillium have joined us in the gallery today. Welcome. I would like to thank them for their support of this bill and the tremendous work they do to raise awareness about organ donation.

Thanks to my staff, Pauline Auger and Jacqueline Locke.

As we know, organ donation is a very serious issue in the province of Ontario today. Every three days, a person dies waiting for an organ transplant. While the list for people awaiting an organ has almost doubled in the last 10 years, the number of organ donors has remained low. About 2,000 people are currently waiting for an organ or tissue donation in Ontario. Even though the majority of Ontarians support organ donation, the consent rate remains at only 45%.

I am very troubled by these statistics, and I know my colleagues in the House are troubled as well. This is why I am pleased that we in this Legislature have had the opportunity to help raise awareness about organ donation in this province.

Let me explain a little about Bill 79. The purpose of this bill is to create an enhanced province-wide registry that will be created and maintained by the Trillium Gift of Life Network. The registry will allow family members of potential donors to see that their loved ones had indicated their desire to be a donor.

Le projet de loi modifie la Loi sur le Réseau Trillium pour le don de vie, la Loi sur l'assurance-santé et le Code de la route, et exige qu'une formule de consentement soit remise avec chaque demande ou renouvellement de carte Santé et de permis de conduire d'une personne.

It is my hope that consent forms will eventually be available in all government services offices and MPPs' offices. Upon the death of a consenting donor, the consent is binding and there is full authority for the use of the body as specified, unless the person has expressly withdrawn consent in writing or has orally withdrawn consent in the presence of, and attested to by, two witnesses.

The key to this bill is the registry. Consent information will be entered into the registry and it will be accessible by Trillium Gift of Life Network staff. This is an important change. Ontario does not have registry for organ and tissue donations. Currently, the Ministry of Health maintains a health information database that includes information on organ and tissue donation. When people register for their photo health cards, they are able

to indicate their intent to be a donor. Individuals are also able to indicate their intent to donate by contacting the ministry directly.

However, this database was created in 1995, prior to the introduction of the Trillium Gift of Life Network and contains health information unrelated to organ donation. The Trillium Gift of Life Network does not have access to the Ministry of Health database. This means that filling out a donor card for your wallet or simply agreeing to be a donor when you renew your health card or driver's licence is not enough. Many questions remain unanswered: Who keeps track of this information? Who has access to it? How will your family know your wishes?

This is where the registry comes in. Under Bill 79, Trillium will create and maintain the registry. They will then have access to donor information in order to quickly and easily determine the wishes of the potential donor and discuss the option of organ donation with the family.

D'autres juridictions utilisent des registres semblables avec beaucoup de succès. Aux États-Unis, 36 États ont des registres pour le don des organes.

This week I had the opportunity to speak with Mr. David Fleming, the executive director of Coalition on Donation in Virginia, an organization that promotes organ donation awareness in the United States. Mr. Fleming told me about the success they are having in the States thanks to the organ donor registry. When the family of a potential donor learns that their loved one has registered to be an organ donor, 99% of families agree to go ahead with the donation. This is a fantastic success rate, which shows the difference a registry can make.

L'éducation est ce qu'il y a de plus important à faire pour améliorer le don d'organes en Ontario. En conscientisant le public, nous pourrions, sans aucun doute, réduire les listes d'attente et augmenter les taux de don.

For this reason, I am very pleased to support two other private members' bills on the subject of organ donation that have been brought forward for second reading in the past few weeks. Both Bills 33 and 67 represent important steps in raising awareness and educating people about organ donation. I hope all members of this Legislature will support my bill today for the same reasons. We have an organ donation crisis in Ontario and we must do everything in our power to put an end to this crisis. The creation of an organ and tissue donor registry in Ontario is one more important step in ending this crisis.

I hope all members will support Bill 79. This is an issue that goes beyond party lines. It is about saving the life of the hundreds of Ontarians who are waiting for organ and tissue donation right now.

1110

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I am pleased to participate in this debate. I commend the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for bringing this bill forward. I participate in this debate gladly because one more time in this Legislature we're able, as members, and as

the public observes these debates—the importance of organ donation is once again highlighted.

I'm convinced that it really is all about education. Surveys show that a high 90%, 95%, 96% of people, when asked if they believe in and support organ donation, say yes. Unfortunately, when it comes to actually making the choice of registering as organ donors, that percentage point is significantly lower, 35% to 45%, and therein lies the problem, and the problem is in the availability of organs. I'm convinced that Ontarians, Canadians, when confronted with this issue and given appropriate information about their ability to give the gift of life, will in fact participate. The bill before us does a great deal, I believe, to moving us in that direction.

The member will know that I have some concerns with the specifics of the bill, and our purpose in this debate is to highlight some of the issues relating to the various pieces of legislation before us. I'm going to express, first of all, my support overall for the bill. I will vote for it, and I trust that my colleagues will as well and that this bill will be passed today.

I do have the following concerns. With regard to the consent provisions, Mr. Lalonde's bill proposes that registration forms, consent forms be made available. Specifically, section 8.0.2 states that these consent forms should accompany every application for or application to renew a health card. It has the same provision for drivers' licences. My concern with this is that I believe we need to go one step further because, even now, we have available the opportunity to register through the licence and provincial health cards.

That is precisely why I brought forward my private member's bill, Bill 67, which I appreciate the member's having expressed his support for as well, that there should be a mandatory requirement for the reference to organ donation to accompany every application for either a driver's licence or health card—application for or renewal. The reason I say “mandatory” is because it's far too easy to ignore this issue. If one isn't prepared to confront it, it's a lot easier to pass by and not complete that consent form. What Bill 67 does is require that for every application form, there are specific questions relating to organ donation, that people are confronted with the issue and that the application will actually be considered incomplete if you don't answer that question.

My bill also respects the right of every individual, and this is where I differ with Mr. Kormos, who has also presented a bill in this House which actually requires someone to state that they don't want to be an organ donor; in other words, there's a presumed consent. I don't believe that in Ontario, in our society, we're ready to take that leap. I really believe that in our multicultural society, people want the right to make that decision themselves. So if I'm going to be an organ donor, I don't want the government to presume that I will; I want to actually state clearly that that is my wish. That's why I don't support Mr. Kormos in the bill that he brought forward. I believe that my Bill 67 still allows that personal decision, the right of choice, but it does require that the answer is given.

I'm not proposing in that bill that you say yes or no; in fact, as Mr. Lalonde knows, on that application form it allows for a yes, a no or an undecided. The reason for the undecided is because, quite frankly, a lot of people will be. For many people, once they're confronted with this, it will be the first time that they are actually confronted with this issue of organ donation. I want to ensure that the trigger of that mandatory declaration is actually a trigger to get more education. I envision that along with that application form would in fact be some educational material about organ donation: what it means; how significant it is; what the implications are; and the lives that we can save by actually giving a positive declaration. Having said that, I know that for many people this is a very emotional issue, a very personal issue, and they will want some time. By allowing for that undecided, but yet triggering the discussion about it, I believe that we'll move many more people into that positive side of declaration. So therein I differ with Mr. Lalonde's bill, because I don't believe it goes far enough. I think we can do better.

I will now move on to the issue of the registry. I concur with and support a central registry. In fact, I was surprised that we didn't have one. Before I started my research on this, and I'm sure before Mr. Lalonde, Mr. Levac and Mr. Kormos started doing their research as well, we had some idea about what organ donation is and some assumptions about what may well be in place in this province. I assumed—and I should have known better, because I've been a member of this Legislature since 1995. I was here as a member of the government when, under the then Minister of Health, Elizabeth Witmer, the Trillium Gift of Life Network was brought to life in this province and became a reality because of the commitment that then-Premier Harris had to ensure that we move the issue of organ donation on to the front burner. But as busy legislators, we don't always get involved with all of the details of the programs that are developed. Somehow I assumed that there would be a central registry and that Trillium Gift of Life would be overseeing that; that when I sign my donor card it in fact goes into a registry; and, if I should die, that somehow there's a trigger of that, and this information would then be available to the hospital so that the health team could deal with my family on this issue. It's not quite that sophisticated yet in Ontario.

We have a very good system; Trillium Gift of Life is doing wonderful work. I have high regard for Dr. Markel and Jennifer Tracey, who have as their mandate to advance the work of Trillium Gift of Life, and we want to do whatever we can to help them. But this issue of the registry is so important because it completes the system; it actually allows the intent of the organ donor to be completed. The more work that we can do to make that an efficient system, I want to support. But I have a problem with the way this bill defines that registry. It's for that reason that I don't support the details of the registry, because I think there are other ways. I would like to leave that open rather than entrench in legislation

what that registry should be. I think it's appropriate that we leave that to a committee, to be developed by professionals within the field, and ensure that if we're going to move in this direction, we've got the absolute best system in the world. That's what I want.

1120

I also have a concern about the identification that would appear on the driver's licence or the health card. Mr. Lalonde provides that there should be an indication on those cards that "I'm an organ donor" or what level of organ donor I am. I don't have a problem personally with that, but I can tell you that in my research over the last couple of years on this issue, there have been people who have said, "Look, I don't want anything to appear on my health card or on my driver's licence that I'm an organ donor or that I'm not an organ donor. I don't want anyone, whether it's a health care professional or anyone else who has access to those cards, to be prejudiced towards me in how I'm dealt with, either at roadside or under any circumstances, because they know that I either am or am not a donor." So I don't support that aspect of it, because I think there is another way that the same issue can be dealt with.

I'll give you example, and that is the registry in British Columbia. I'm not suggesting that that's perfect either, but I think there is something for us to learn there. Under that registry, which is a central registry—here's how that works. There is no indication on any driver's licence or health card that you're a donor, but the minute you sign a consent form, your name and that form is registered with the central registry and it is kept there. In the event of a death, the central registry is contacted, the name then appears and, if the person is a donor, that is immediately referred to the hospital, along with a faxed copy of the actual consent form. There is an automatic trigger of that individual, if they are a donor, that lets the hospital know that that person is a donor, along with the signature on the fax form, which the health team can then use in discussions with the family to confirm the donation. It allows for full privacy, but it also ensures that the hospital and the surgical team are immediately notified.

Those are my critical comments on the bill. That in no way takes away from my support for the bill today or for its intentions. My point is simply that I think there are details that need to be worked out. In the end, we all have the same objective.

I believe that the more we do to help people in this province understand the importance of organ donation—the fact that every one of us has within us the ability to give life is such an important message that when it comes time for implementation of any of the legislation we have in place here, whether it be Mr. Lalonde's bill, mine or Mr. Levac's, there should be no discussion about how it is too time-consuming or doesn't have a priority in legislation in this place. We have lots of legislation, a lot of bills debated here, and yes, it's true that private members' bills seldom see the light of day. But I think we have here before us some private members' bills that deal with such a practical issue that can make such a profound

difference in people's lives that these bills deserve the support of this House and deserve the support of the government.

Quite frankly, I don't care if my bill goes forward under my name. I do believe it is a sound principle and that it should be done. If the Minister of Health prefers to take that principle on and incorporate it into a government bill, that's fine with me. In fact, I would applaud him and applaud the government if that took place. I'm simply saying, and I agree with Mr. Lalonde's comment, that this is not about partisan politics and it is not about playing a political game; this is about a serious issue that I believe all members of the House should support. I certainly do, and I look forward to lives being saved as result of the debates that have taken place on this important issue.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): Good morning. It's impressive to me that members in this House have taken on the responsibility of addressing this social issue, this medical issue. Certainly, the bills before us and the bill we're debating today show an attitude on the part of the legislators in this chamber that is forward-thinking. I can say right now that this is a bill I will support. I personally feel that we could go further than this bill, but every step we take toward the goal that we all want to see—saving human life, making organ donation far more an accepted part of our culture—I see as a positive step.

I would ask that the sponsor of this bill address the question, when he has an opportunity to speak again, about the section in legislation—I may have misunderstood him, but I don't see that a registry is required to be set up. It's structured so that information is gathered and may be set up. I'd like to understand why a registry is not required. Frankly, if we're going to go to this effort to make sure the information is gathered and made available, why don't we go the next step and require that it be systematically gathered, organized and made available to those who need to make use of it?

The other bill, put forward by Mr. Klees, takes us a step further. It says that in order to get a driver's licence, you have to note whether you are for or against making an organ donation. It strikes me as logical that you should have that step, that requirement that people take a few minutes when they get their licence to make a decision yes or no.

But of all of the bills before us, I have to say that I think the direction set by Mr. Kormos will be the most effective. The reality is that most people in this society support organ donation. When we look at the polling, it's up around 96%. The reality in my life and the lives of millions of people in this province is that they're extraordinarily busy and there's always something else pressing in: They've got to get the kids to the hockey game, they've got to get out and get groceries; they have variety of responsibilities that press on them on a daily basis. So when you come across a question that's not pressing and immediate, one that has to be dealt with right at that moment, then for the most part, it's set aside. I think that the bill assuming consent unless people deny

it makes a lot of sense in terms of the need we face in Ontario.

I understand that there are thousands of people on the waiting list. If we had a far more effective and inclusive system, we could address that unmet need that, as we all know in this House, is leading to untimely death. If we could address that need, we could save more lives in this province.

My colleague in the opposition talked about cultural acceptability and the different religions in this province. But when you go to the Ontario government's website, they have a fact sheet on cultural and religious perspectives on organ and tissue donation. When you go through it, there's no prohibition under Hinduism; Buddhism doesn't have an official position; Sikhism supports a positive stance on organ and tissue donation; Judaism is supportive; Islam strongly believes in the principle of saving human lives, with no prohibition on donation of organs; Episcopalians encourage donation; Greek Orthodox supports donation; Lutherans encourage donation; Presbyterians encourage and promote donation; Catholicism encourages donation. I would say that the reality with religious choice, with cultural inclination, is that there's not unanimity but there's certainly a very strong degree of support for the idea of organ donation. It's there in this culture. The question for us is, how do we move things forward with the support of the population?

I think we can go further than the bill that's before us today, but the bill that's before us does take another step forward, and on that basis I think should be supported by this House. I look forward to the debate on Mr. Levac's bill. We have this initiative from our legislators trying to deal with loss of human life. That's always a commendable exercise on the part of those in this society.

1130

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's a privilege to have a chance today to join this debate. I don't often take the opportunity, as a minister, to speak in private members' hour. In fact, in the two-and-a-half years or so that I've had the privilege of being the Minister of Health, there are only two occasions, I believe, where I've done so. Both of those occasions were on this very same issue. I want to applaud the tone that has been brought forward by members on all sides of the House today. I believe that the issue of doing a better job for our Ontarians on the issue of organ and tissue donation is one of those things that has the potential to be a unifying factor among parties.

The reason I come today in support of the work of my friend and colleague Jean-Marc Lalonde on Bill 79 is because I believe we have an opportunity in Ontario to make dramatic improvement in this area. We don't just have an opportunity, though; I'd say we have an obligation. The obligation is a solemn one, reflecting the reality that has already been well expressed in this debate, that too many of our Ontarians, people we love, who are our friends and neighbours, are very much in need of policy enhancement.

I want to compliment, on the point of policy enhancement, some that has already been done, acknowledging that we've worked hard as a government to give more life to the work of the Trillium Gift of Life Network. Representatives from the Trillium Gift of Life Network are here today in the galleries. But way more important than that, they're here today as a signal and a symbol of their engagement on this issue.

We've made some progress, as I said, even in the first quarter of this calendar year, the last quarter of the government's year. We saw a 19% increase in our capacity to give appropriate, real life and meaning to the gift of life through our routine notification request. In a certain sense it was one element, one rather substantial element, of low-hanging fruit that was available to us to do a better job, by simply creating the capacity for the Trillium Gift of Life to be provided with notice from our highest volume hospitals when an individual had passed on, where that individual's organs or tissues might lend benefit and life to other Ontarians. We've made a substantial improvement. The improvement is most substantial when it is measured on a percentage basis, and we have to be careful not to celebrate so much a success on percentage terms that continues to leave so many of our loved ones, so many of our Ontarians, without all the support they require.

I come today as a member of the government on an issue during private members' hour to send a very strong signal to encourage all members of the legislature to stand on this issue today, and to continue to be united in a desire to see us do a better job. There are four members of the Legislature who have distinguished themselves on this issue. I don't know what it is about having the last letter L or K to lead your name, but Levac, Lalonde, Klees and Kormos, the group of four, if I might call them that, are all making a contribution to a debate that lends us, gives us a sense of hope and opportunity that we don't always manage to achieve around this place.

For our part as a government, and I want to follow up in a certain sense on the tone that was offered by the member from Oak Ridges, we see this very much as non-partisan issue, as one where we can demonstrate to Ontarians that our best work on this file is yet to come. To that point, the government has an obligation to demonstrate its leadership. I had the privilege, I think just a week or so ago, on a day when many had gathered in Toronto, international experts coming to work with our Ontario health care community and the patient community to seek to stimulate the discussion even further, about what are those steps we can take to move Ontario from being a jurisdiction where we can celebrate our progress, but where we most certainly cannot celebrate that we have maximized our opportunity to extend life—this is the responsibility we have. Accordingly, the reason I am in support of each and every one of the bills that comes before this House on the issue of organ and tissue donation is that they are all important contributors to a discussion.

I want to send a message clearly today to legislators and to anyone from Ontario who is attuned to this debate

that some of the private members' bills challenge us in certain ways. Not everyone has the same level of comfort around notions like presumed consent. For my part, I'm on the record to say I support it. I support Mr. Lalonde's initiative, of course, because government has many opportunity points where we can influence the behaviour of Ontarians in a way that can help other Ontarians.

But our obligation is greater than that. I want to remind members of something I had the chance to announce in this House last Thursday, one week ago today, that our government will soon be moving forward with the appointment of what I refer to as an eminent persons panel. We're going to ask Ontarians who, when we show them to Ontarians, will be a group of people who reflect the diversity of our society. We will seek to reach out to people who are distinguished leaders. We believe it's essential that, on an issue like organ and tissue donation, we create the capacity for a community conversation that engages people in their town hall and at the Legion, down at the library and at the community centre, to have the kind of conversation to lay the groundwork for an organ and tissue donation system in Ontario that is a world leader, and that builds on the promise and the hope that is already so evident among all those who have come together on this issue.

The Trillium Gift of Life, the important hospitals that are doing transplant work, the patient groups, the patients themselves and their loved ones, all Ontarians who wish we would extend the very best of a health care system to offer more hope and more opportunity: This is with a promise that we have and the opportunity is there when we all work together.

I want to say to all those members who, like Jean-Marc Lalonde today, have moved forward pieces of legislation, that we should stand and support them all. I assure you that, on the part of our government, these bills will be an important part of the consideration we ask the people of Ontario to be engaged in.

I think that, by this time next year, we should establish for ourselves the goal of moving forward with a piece of legislation, not private members' legislation but a piece of government legislation, that has our common hopes, dreams and aspirations that we would do a better job for those Ontarians, too many of whom now languish on waiting lists that grow too long, that we will have stepped up to the plate and moved Ontario forward in a fashion that other jurisdictions will seek to emulate. This is the goal we should have for our public health care system. We have that capacity in our society.

On behalf of the government, during private members' hour, I stand in support of this legislation. I say to all members of this House and all Ontarians that I believe that in a one-year period of time we can unlock much of this promise, do a much better job for Ontarians and celebrate a community success that will have had important contributions from members on all sides, and I thank them for it.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I'm delighted to rise today in the House in support of Bill 79, An Act to

amend the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act, the Health Insurance Act and the Highway Traffic Act.

I too had the opportunity last week to attend the Trillium Gift of Life symposium and to hear Dr. Robert Bell and Dr. William Wall from the London Health Sciences Centre, and Dr. Gary Levy from the Toronto General Hospital speak about their experiences and the experience we are all having as Ontarians with respect to donors and transplants.

The Trillium Gift of Life Network officials who are here today in the gallery reminded me that last year we had a record year of donations of transplants in the province, and that is something to celebrate, but we have much work to do. As all members of the House who have spoken to this today have commented, one of the main issues we have deal with is a lack of awareness. We have to raise the awareness. We have to make sure that people know what their opportunities are and how to take care of those opportunities, how to act on those.

This morning, out of interest, I opened my wallet to check and see if I had in my wallet the card I had signed. In fact, I did not have one card; I have four cards. Over time I keep signing them and putting them in my wallet in the hope that whoever happens upon me, should I be felled in an accident, will know that I want to donate.

1140

One thing I was not aware of, that I found out at the conference, was that many people who sign cards do not talk to their family members about it; therefore, there's some conflict at the time of death about whether that donation can happen. It's really important that people not only sign their cards today but also talk to their family members, so they know that that's your intention and your wish, and that's what you want moving forward.

Part of this legislation will put in place a registry. It will also put in place acknowledgement of the donor card signature being the consent. That will ensure that, having signed that card, people will know that was my intention and will move forward with that, unless I take further action to take away my consent.

I have no problem with the fact that my consent will be indicated on my health card or my driver's licence. I think it's important that that knowledge be out there. Should I be in an accident, if someone is looking to find out who I am, they'll pull out my driver's licence and know, "This is who she is, and she has agreed to donate. Let's move forward."

I think a registry is vitally important. It's one thing to have people aware of the opportunities, and it's another thing to have them sign their cards and take action. But we also have to have that registry so that the confirmation and knowledge are there.

As a family member of someone who went through a bone marrow transplant, I am only too familiar with the need for a registry. On the bone marrow side, there is a registry. You can be tested through the Canadian blood service and be included on a worldwide registry. It is so vitally important to make sure that a match can be made with someone in need.

There is precedent for this in donors—transplants across other jurisdictions. There's a need for it, and I think that through this legislation and the other private members' bills we have debated, we are raising awareness. We are making sure that people know the opportunity is there, the demand is there, and we are saving lives.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity, and I certainly support this legislation and my colleague.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Obviously I stand before us to support my colleague's bill, Bill 79, but I want to bring to the attention of this place the overall debate, as the Minister of Health has done: Three days go by and you know that someone else has died waiting for an organ transplant. That's not acceptable. I said it before when I introduced my bill, Bill 33, the Education Act amendments that would allow us to teach organ donation in all schools in the province. I believe that bill gets in front of the debate to change the culture.

The member from Niagara Centre, the member from Oak Ridges and the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell are introducing bills that are asking us to debate what we know is the right thing to do. I have stood in this place often during private members' time and professed a strong belief that when we speak collectively on the same topic as legislators—I will remove the party acronym and the shackles we are sometimes attached to that tell us we must think as any party does—it offers us the opportunity to speak about issues that are important to us as human beings. This is one of them. This is absolutely raw to who we are as people. We have great scientists out there who have brought us from the 1960s, when the first heart transplant was done, to today, when people are surviving automatically with very few complications and moving on to us, as human beings, the gift of life.

I challenge all of us to remember that this isn't a debate about politics; this isn't a debate about whose bill is better. This is a debate about doing the right thing. I challenge all of us to engage in the debate to ensure that, as human beings, we're doing the right thing. That's a very lofty thing to say, but I think we sometimes forget to do that. Sometimes we forget to have that debate about the impact.

I have met with many organizations on this issue, and we are still scratching the surface of where we're going to be in the future. I commend all those researchers, those people who have used their brains and their passion to bring this forward, and not to discredit those, more importantly to the families on both sides of the issue: those who have gone through the painful process of losing a loved one to understanding the gift they present—and I know; I've spoken to the recipients who have someone else's organ—the utter joy and love they have in their hearts for those that have contributed. That's what we're talking about today, engaging in that conversation.

As I've done in the past and I'll continue to do, I'll reach into my pocket and hold up my wallet. Inside my wallet is my card. More importantly, that signifies to me

that I've had the discussion with my family and they know my wishes.

Sign your donor card. Talk to your families. Let's get this moving. I thank the member for bringing his bill forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Lalonde, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Lalonde: I would like to thank all the members that participated in the debate today: the member from Brant; the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the member from Toronto Centre–Rosedale; and the members from Nipissing, Oak Ridges and Toronto–Danforth.

I would also like to acknowledge a very special guest who has joined us today in the gallery: Marie-Josée Lalonde, who is not related to me but she's from Rockland, Ontario. Marie-Josée suffers from Alport's disease, which causes kidney damage. This means she needs a new kidney, and has been on the waiting list for a kidney transplant since 2002.

La condition de Marie-Josée est héréditaire. Sa mère, Lorraine, et son frère, Patrick, souffrent de la même maladie. Patrick a eu la chance de subir une transplantation de reins il y a 12 ans, et sa santé est très bonne aujourd'hui.

I would like to thank Marie-Josée for being here today and allowing me to share her family's story. This family's story is not unique. Hundreds of Ontarians are waiting for organ and tissue donation as we speak.

Last week I attended a conference entitled Organ Donation Crisis in Ontario: Finding Solutions, which was organized by the Trillium Gift of Life Network and the University Health Network. This conference included some of the most prominent doctors in the field of organ transplantation. I raised the issue of a registry during the conference, and doctors were very supportive of a registry for Ontario.

A province-wide registry exclusively for organ and tissue donation is one critical change we can make here in the Legislature which undoubtedly will help improve donation rates in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business usually takes us until noon. So what we will do at this point is pause till 12 o'clock and then deal with the ballot items.

The House suspended proceedings from 1148 to 1159.

EASTERN ONTARIO ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT FUND ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE FONDS
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUE
DE L'EST DE L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll deal first with ballot item number 33, standing in the name of Mr. Sterling.

Mr. Sterling has moved second reading of Bill 42, An Act to establish the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corporation. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I'd like the bill to be referred to the finance and economic affairs committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall the bill be referred to the finance and economic affairs committee? Agreed.

TRILLIUM GIFT OF LIFE NETWORK
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE RÉSEAU
TRILLIUM POUR LE DON DE VIE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 34, standing in the name of Mr. Lalonde.

Mr. Lalonde has moved second reading of Bill 79, An Act to amend the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act, the Health Insurance Act and the Highway Traffic Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Lalonde has moved second reading of Bill 79. All those in favour, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Arthurs, Wayne	Levac, Dave	Ruprecht, Tony
Balkissoon, Bas	Marchese, Rosario	Sandals, Liz
Barrett, Toby	Marsales, Judy	Sergio, Mario
Bradley, James J.	Mauro, Bill	Smith, Monique
Brownell, Jim	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Tabuns, Peter
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Wilkinson, John
Hoy, Pat	Oraziotti, David	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Zimmer, David
Kormos, Peter	Parsons, Ernie	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Patten, Richard	

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 37; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): Mr. Speaker, I request that this bill be sent to the standing committee on social policy.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall the bill be sent to the standing committee on social policy? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 p.m.

The House recessed from 1208 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TOBACCO GROWERS

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): Ontario's tobacco crop will shrink by 35% this year as local farming continues to crash. The negotiated target price for the 2006 crop is \$2.327 per pound, and at this price the 2006 crop will generate only \$129 million.

As tobacco board president Fred Neukamm states, "A drop of nearly \$60 million in the value of the tobacco crop is a disaster for our farmers and our communities. This deal only reinforces the need for a universal exit program for our farmers, and detailed negotiations on that package are needed immediately."

The last remaining farmers and their communities in Norfolk, Oxford, Elgin and Brant do need federal and provincial government help to make the transition to a post-tobacco economy. Previously, the federal and provincial governments put up \$120 million in tobacco relief, buying out quotas, encouraging new businesses and crops, but now more help is needed as the industry disappears.

"The crisis for growers is a perfect storm where all negative factors are in alignment," says Brant MPP Dave Levac in today's Brantford Expositor, and I concur with Dave. Tobacco taxes keep rising; Ontario will go smoke-free on May 31; and cigarette makers are importing more foreign, less expensive, tobacco.

The solution is a full exit plan, as in Australia and the United States. There is no turning back.

MOLSON CANADA

Mr. Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): Today it's my privilege as the member of provincial Parliament for Etobicoke North to recognize the good work of one of our leading corporate citizens, Molson brewery. Recently, I had the pleasure of participating in the kick-off of the Molson brewery volunteer program. This is an innovative campaign that invites all Molson employees to take a paid day off work to participate in team-based volunteer activity.

On April 21, Molson brewery participated in a community cleanup day in Etobicoke. Several other regional projects will be undertaken by Molson employees across Canada. In fact, the volunteer program broadens the company's commitment to communities all across the land.

With more than 3,100 employees across Canada, the Molson's program has contributed over 25,000 volunteer hours. This is the economic equivalent of more than \$1 million.

I and the Minister of Health Promotion, the Honourable Jim Watson, and indeed all members of this House, would like to congratulate the Molson's team, ably represented in the east gallery today by Judy McClelland, Heidi Pokorny, Kathryn Spraggett, Stacey Ritz, Ali

Cameron, Mary Boynton, Babita Khunkhun, Ashley Basfield and Carole Berry.

You are a credit, Molson, to Canadian business and a great corporate citizen in Etobicoke to partner with. Thank you for helping to better the communities we live in.

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I rise in the House today because of concerns over the number of unlicensed drivers on Ontario roads.

In May 2004, Mothers Against Drunk Driving announced the findings of a report on the number of suspended drivers who continue to drive in Ontario. The results were simply shocking. MADD Canada revealed that the number of suspended drivers had increased by 2.4 times in the past five years. MADD Canada estimates—this is important—that up to 75% of Ontario's suspended drivers continue to drive while the minister tinkers.

These outlaw drivers are likely to get into crashes. They lack the insurance to compensate their victims. Mothers Against Drunk Driving issued a report yesterday that compared Ontario's and Saskatchewan's statistics in terms of the number of suspended drivers who continue to drive. This report reveals that only 27% of first-time offenders in Saskatchewan did not follow through by attending the initial session. In Ontario, the non-participating rate was 55%. Andrew Murie, CEO of MADD Canada, has warned, "In Ontario, there's a nightmare scenario where more and more drivers who are losing their licence fail to get properly relicensed."

I urge the government, indeed I urge the minister and the Premier, to take some leadership: the government to act at once to end the nightmare of unlicensed drivers and get them off the roads.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): It's highway robbery. Motorists across Ontario, every time they pull up to a gas pump, are getting mugged and rolled, are getting ripped off and scammed by the price-gouging big oil companies of North America and beyond.

This government, the Dalton McGuinty Liberals, had all the answers, and they promised to control, stabilize and reduce gasoline prices once they got elected. They ran on that during the course of campaigning across Ontario, but when they get elected, what do they deliver? Nothing. Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals have abandoned drivers here in the province of Ontario, indeed have betrayed them. The Liberals crawl into bed with big oil and its billions and billions of dollars of new profits.

We know it's well within the jurisdiction of the province to regulate gasoline prices. The announcement just this week that Nova Scotia has acquiesced to the demands of the New Democratic Party there to regulate gasoline prices means that Ontario is the only province in

eastern Canada that does not regulate and control gasoline prices.

I say it's about time for the robber barons of the big oil industry to be taken to task and put on a leash. Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals would indeed keep one of their promises were they to set up a regulatory regime.

New Democrats are committed to protecting drivers across Ontario from the robber barons of big oil and their price gouging at the pumps. We're committed to recovery from pump shock rather than inflicting more.

SULTAN JESSA

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): I rise in the House today to recognize the contributions of Sultan Jessa, an outstanding journalist and decorated booster for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh.

Recently, Mr. Jessa retired from a 33-year career with the Cornwall Standard Freeholder. During those years, Cornwall and area citizens relied on him to tell the stories about their communities, both in the worst of times and the best. Sultan's reporting went beyond basic facts. His editorial work helped our community see the bigger picture.

It is people like Sultan who have given Cornwall and area its reputation for having hard-working, capable and caring citizens.

Settling in Cornwall after his family was forced to leave their native Tanzania, Mr. Jessa's story is one that exemplifies the challenging circumstances many of Ontario's newcomers face. When he arrived in 1973, Sultan experienced a number of frustrating and senseless roadblocks driven by racial prejudice.

Thankfully, we have come a long way since then, and I am proud to be part of a government that welcomes newcomers and recognizes the important contributions they make to our province.

Since settling in Cornwall, Mr. Jessa's achievements have been outstanding. He was named Cornwall's Citizen of the Year in 1979, just six years after his arrival. Most recently, in 2005 he received, with the pride of the community, the Order of Canada. All along the way, he has been continually recognized for his contributions to the community, from service clubs like Rotary International and Big Brothers, to multiculturalism and the arts.

I salute Sultan Jessa, who is watching today at his home, and I wish him the happiest of retirements.

FARMERS' MARKETS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): Rural Ontarians have once again found themselves in the crosshairs of the McGuinty government. It disappoints me to have to rise in this House today to provide yet another example of this Liberal government's encroachment upon rural values.

In March of this year, the Ministry of Health secretly distributed a draft report entitled Ontario Farmers' Markets Food Safety Guidelines with the intention of drastically altering the regulations governing Ontario's farmers' markets. This report was compiled without input from municipalities, market managers or the individual vendors who make our farmers' markets the unique fixture Ontarians have enjoyed for generations. One is left to ask, how many other provincial matters are being discussed behind closed doors without input from those most affected?

In fact, the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit board has determined that due to the potential negative impacts on the region, they object to the ministry's hasty timelines to ram these new and secretly drafted guidelines through. They have called upon the minister to accept a three-month extension on changes to the current guidelines so that proper consultations and stakeholder input can take place.

I encourage the Minister of Health to listen to this plea and recognize the importance of farmers' markets to the cultural and generational roots of rural and small-town Ontario.

1340

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): Recently the University of Western Ontario announced that they will be offering a university course in Goderich, which will be held at the Goderich museum starting this fall. I can tell you that this is good news for the town of Goderich and the surrounding communities. People in the area will now have an opportunity to take a university course without having to move out of the area or travel long distances each day. This will give students the chance to take a university course who might not have had that chance before. The first-year sociology course that is being offered will provide a head start for most university degrees. This is an exciting new opportunity. This is only the beginning, but it's a step in the right direction and it will strengthen our rural communities.

I want to add my congratulations to the extremely vibrant volunteers who so diligently worked on this program. Congratulations to them for their work and the successful outcome. We look forward to developing further relationships with our universities and colleges to provide post-secondary education in the riding of Huron–Bruce.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I am pleased to rise in my place today to report to the Legislature about a very successful event held in Ottawa last Friday, April 28, at the Ottawa Hospital.

I was honoured to participate in an announcement alongside my colleagues Minister Jim Watson and Minister Madeleine Meilleur. We had the pleasure of informing the people of Ottawa that wait times for medical

procedures in our city are decreasing due to the historic investments this government has made in health care.

The former government left Ottawa and indeed the entire province in terrible shape for health care. In order to address this situation, thanks to Premier McGuinty and Minister Smitherman, our government has made great investments in health care in Ottawa and the Champlain district. Even with higher demands for procedures, wait times for cancer treatment are down 4%; cataract surgery wait times are down 21%; hip replacement wait times are down 19%; and knee replacement wait times are down 17%. These are numbers to be proud of.

In order to expand on these triumphs, we announced on Friday that the McGuinty government is providing even more funding for the Champlain LHIN to help reduce wait times even further for various procedures. The Champlain LHIN received \$2,996,000 for cancer treatment; \$9,854,000 for cardiac treatment; \$6,319,000 for hip and knee replacements; and \$1,100,000 for cataract operations.

Since 2003, we have increased the number of MRIs by 43% and are now adding \$4,361,000 to increase MRI examinations in the city of Ottawa. Ottawa patients no longer have to go to the US or Quebec and pay \$900 for these procedures.

I thank you, Premier McGuinty, and thank you, George Smitherman, for the great progress we are making in health care in Ottawa.

PETERBOROUGH ECONOMY

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's my great pleasure to rise in the House today to announce that the Peterborough region has ranked first in the country for per capita retail sales. The Peterborough region was recently identified as the top community in per capita retail sales with a population of over 100,000 people. These results were released in the 2006 Financial Post Markets Canadian Demographics. Edmonton, Alberta, ties with the Peterborough region for total average sales estimates of \$15,100 per capita.

Growth in the region is evident, as retail sales surged by a total of 11% from 2005 to 26% above the national average in 2006. Over the past year, major retailers such as Home Hardware, Shoppers Drug Mart, Rona Cashway and Wal-Mart have recognized the economic opportunities in the region by opening new locations or expanding existing operations. Peterborough continues to grow, and future retailers such as Costco and Loblaws Great Canadian Superstore continue to announce new construction plans in our communities.

I am delighted to join with the Greater Peterborough Area Economic Development Corp. in declaring Peterborough as the number one business region in Ontario.

VISITORS

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to introduce some people in

the members' gallery. We have Denis and Jennifer Chamberland and Anne Marie and Elizabeth Chamberland. They're the family of Caroline Chamberland, our page.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to also introduce two proud relatives of our page, Elliott Leeftang. His mom, Helen Leeftang, and his aunt, Mary Brown, have come here from Port Elmsley near Perth. We'd like to welcome them here to the Legislature. I know how proud they are of Elliott.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I too want to engage in the introductions. With us in the west gallery, just speaking with the Minister of Labour, are Lois Boggs, Jackie and Nathan Shaw, and Henry Watson, working on presumptive legislation. We welcome them to the House.

We also have with us the president and the vice-president of the OPFFA, firefighters Brian George and Fred LeBlanc. We welcome them and others to the House.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (BOB SHAW), 2006

LOI BOB SHAW DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 111, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to occupational diseases and injuries of firefighters / Projet de loi 111, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail relativement aux maladies professionnelles et aux lésions des pompiers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm not going to reintroduce all of the members; I want to thank the member opposite for having introduced all of the people who are here today. He missed some of the family members who are also up in the gallery, some of the Hamilton firefighters as well as the experts in both the Toronto and Hamilton forces on compensation: Mr. Colin Grieve and Mr. Paul Atkinson. They're with us on this auspicious day of the introduction of this bill, which will basically see that firefighters get certain types of cancer or degenerative neurological diseases recognized as occupationally related and enshrined in the legislation of the WSIB. It's long overdue; other provinces have

done it. This is Ontario's opportunity to make sure that our firefighters, who put their lives on the line every day for the people of every community in this province, don't have to fight tooth and nail at the WSIB when one of their loved ones ends up dying of a disease that they contracted while fighting fires.

VISITORS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would be remiss not to recognize in our east gallery today two distinguished members of Peterborough's fire department: Matt Parkhurst and Greg Simmons.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That is not a point of order, but we welcome everyone to the Legislature.

FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DU POISSON ET DE LA FAUNE

Mr. Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 112, An Act to amend the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 112, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la protection du poisson et de la faune.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

1350

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): The bill amends the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997, to prohibit the hunting and trapping of albino mammals.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I have a question for the Premier. It has been almost 48 hours since a Conservative budget in Ottawa brought real tax relief for working families, for Canadians, for working seniors across Canada and in the province of Ontario. It has also been 48 hours that the McGuinty government has been silent about any plans to step into that tax room by once again breaking your election promise and raising taxes on working families and seniors in the province of Ontario. Please, Premier, confirm to the House that you have no such plans.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): We have no such plans.

Mr. Hudak: We're making progress. I thank the Premier. We asked the Premier that question many times yesterday, and I'm pleased to see that we're finally making progress and that the Premier gets it: Working

families and seniors in the province of Ontario can barely make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

Let's go for one more. Let me remind the Premier what the last three years have brought in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario: higher taxes, despite campaign promises to the contrary; higher hydro rates, despite campaign promises to the contrary; higher home heating costs, higher gasoline prices and higher insurance rates. Working families cannot make ends meet in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

I'll ask you, Premier, now that you've confirmed you're no longer going to increase taxes, will you go back to your original campaign promise and actually lower taxes for working families and seniors in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It's always remarkable the amount of energy that the member opposite brings to his questions. I really appreciate the enthusiasm.

I think it's important to recognize the difference in terms of the situation that the federal Conservative government inherited and that our Liberal government inherited here in Ontario. The federal Conservative government under Prime Minister Harper were the beneficiaries of good fiscal management, and they found themselves in the wonderful position of having a surplus and enjoying the luxury of being able to cut taxes. What we inherited was something significantly and markedly different than that: We inherited a huge deficit, and we have been working our way out of that ever since. But I am proud to say that, as we do that, we've made substantial investments that have resulted in better public services, whether in our schools or in our hospitals, and the continuing growth of this economy. So we're proud of the decisions that we have made, notwithstanding the difficult financial circumstances that we inherited.

Mr. Hudak: I think the Premier well knows that his record tax increases have brought in some \$15 billion in additional revenue to the treasury of Ontario. It has been a gluttonous attack on the pocketbooks of working families and small businesses under the Dalton McGuinty government.

Let me tell you, it's not only in Ottawa, but I think you know that a New Democrat government in Saskatchewan and a New Democrat government in Manitoba are cutting taxes for working families and seniors; a Progressive Conservative government in Alberta is reducing taxes; and in Quebec and British Columbia, Liberal governments are reducing taxes for working families, for seniors, and aiding small businesses.

You are the head of a government that is increasingly out of touch with the realities of the pocketbooks of working families and seniors in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. When will you open your eyes? When will you realize what's happening at the end of the month for these working families? Will you join the rest of the provinces and the federal government and finally get to the task of reducing the tax burden on Ontario taxpayers?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think it's important for the member opposite and his party, as well as Ontarians, to

hear this: We're not going back into deficit. We've been there before; we were saddled with that. We will proceed in a thoughtful, responsible way. We have a long-term plan that is going to ensure we eliminate not just our fiscal deficit but the education deficit, the health care deficit and the infrastructure deficit.

I understand the member's obsession with tax cuts, but there is a time and a place for those. Right now we've got to work our way out of the mess they left us. As we do that, I'm proud of some of the improvements we have brought about for Ontario families, whether it's free immunization for children, which saves a family \$600 per child, or the new insulin pumps just announced in our budget. This September, 60,000 young people from low-income families are going to get grants—not loans but grants. We have enhanced student assistance generally. Auto insurance rates are down 13% in the province of Ontario. I think that's a step forward. That's evidence of the positive direction we are moving in.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): A question to the Premier: In today's *Globe and Mail*, you are quoted as suggesting you've got a lot of work to do to ensure that the provinces are speaking with one voice regarding fiscal arrangements. In yesterday's paper, you were quoted as expressing concern that the Bank of Canada's initiatives directed at Alberta are harmful to Ontario. In response, Premier Klein is quoted saying, "I wish he would talk to me. I haven't heard from Premier McGuinty on this issue or any other issue."

Premier, if you want to have provinces speaking with one voice, why would you not at least call Premier Klein with your concerns before going public? Why wouldn't you do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm delighted to speak to this issue. The fact of the matter is, I did not direct any comments at my friend and colleague Premier Ralph Klein, but a reporter chose to interpret something in a way that elicited a response from the ever-colourful Ralph Klein, and I can appreciate that.

The point I was making is, I think, a good one; that is, that we ask the Bank of Canada to be mindful of our economic circumstances here in Ontario, and rather than design a monetary policy that is predominantly focused on the overheating economy in Alberta, they recognize that we find ourselves in different circumstances here, and while we have steady growth, it's not as rapid and not as much in need of cooling off as are other parts of the country. I thought that was a good point to make.

Mr. Runciman: Premier, yesterday's side-swipe of Alberta wasn't the first time you've blindsided a provincial counterpart. At last month's meeting of the Council of the Federation, you caught your colleagues off guard with a press release outlining your view on equalization and going against the one-communicé tradition. In

reaction to that blindside, Prince Edward Island Premier Binns said, "We just haven't seen this before. It's disappointing." That sentiment was echoed by other Premiers.

Premier, how can you expect to achieve provincial consensus on the fiscal imbalance when you apparently prefer to play politics rather than work in a co-operative way with your provincial colleagues?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I'm just not going to apologize for standing up for Ontario.

Applause.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order. Government bench, it's one of two things: I either stop the clock or the Premier won't have time to respond.

Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Just so the members opposite understand, the proposal that was on the table, which was presented in Montreal by a panel that had been commissioned by the Council of the Federation, would have required that Ontario taxpayers contribute \$1.8 billion more toward equalization. I said that is unacceptable. I said that, given the fact we are contributing close to \$5 billion on an annual basis, I thought we were doing our fair share.

1400

Mr. Runciman: The Premier could have at least not blindsided his provincial colleagues. He continues to play this political game. All parties in this Legislature have indicated our support of the effort to redress the fiscal imbalance. Our concern is your apparent inability to build bridges to accomplish that goal. You've blindsided and offended many of your provincial counterparts on more than one occasion. You and your members, on almost a daily basis, have attacked the new federal government from the day they came into office.

Ontario has a great history of leading the way in nation building, a reputation that you are damaging, if not destroying, for purely—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, Minister of Education. Member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Runciman: Ontario has a great history of leading the way in nation building, a reputation that you are damaging, if not destroying, for purely political purposes, trying to portray yourself as Mr. Ontario. Premier—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Leeds–Grenville, if you'd put the question.

Mr. Runciman: —when will you put politics aside and make a sincere and honest effort to work with federal and provincial governments to find a national fiscal arrangement that works for all Canadians and stop—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The question has been put. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Obviously, I don't share the perspective brought by the member opposite as represented in his question. We think, on this side of the House, that we can both stand up for our province and be proud and patriotic Canadians at the same time. In fact,

we believe that a strong Ontario is only going to serve to benefit all Canadians, no matter where they live across this great country of ours.

The member opposite is right in the sense that we have been commissioned by history to play a continuing leadership role in the evolution of this magnificent country, and we will never, ever walk away from that responsibility. But at the same time, we will not walk away from our responsibility as representatives of the people of Ontario to ensure that we get a fair shake. That's all we're asking for, and in that regard I'm very much looking forward to my meeting this afternoon with Prime Minister Harper and to communicating and conveying to him our concerns when it comes to how we're going to resolve the fiscal imbalance. We'll do that in the way we've always done it here in Ontario: in a way that is both determined and respectful.

Mr. Runciman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would respectfully request that when government members scream down opposition members asking legitimate questions, you stop the clock.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Leeds–Grenville, I did stop the clock. I gave you the opportunity to conclude your question. I think I could use the co-operation—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I think I could use the co-operation of everybody in here, and then we'd get on with question period in the way we should.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a question for the Premier. Motorists from across Ontario are suffering from pump shock. They're angry about big oil's price gouging, like a recent rip-off in Timmins where the price of gas went from \$1.10 to \$1.42 a litre overnight for no reason. People can't understand why the same gas in the ground goes up 30 cents a litre overnight.

Not long ago, you and your colleagues used to advocate for gas price regulation to stop gas price gouging and rip-offs and to ease people's pain at the pumps. You used to advocate it. When will you do it, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I think if the leader of the NDP were to check the record, he would know that I have never been a proponent of regulating gas prices, and I'll tell you why. There are some jurisdictions today in Canada which do in fact regulate their gas prices. The price in Prince Edward Island today, which is a regulated jurisdiction, is \$1.20 a litre; in New Brunswick, where it's regulated, it's \$1.14 a litre; and in Newfoundland, it's \$1.22 a litre. Today gas prices in Ontario range from 92 cents to \$1.07. Prices in Ontario have been on average 20% lower than the regulated prices in the Maritime provinces. That's why we are not going to proceed with regulating gas prices in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Hampton: The people in those provinces will tell you that gas prices were far higher before they implemented gas price regulation.

Earlier in the week you said that Ontario didn't have the constitutional authority to stop gas price gouging, but now we see that Nova Scotia has found the constitutional authority, and so have Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Quebec. Premier, can you tell us why only the McGuinty government, in all of eastern Canada, argues that it doesn't have the constitutional authority to implement gas price regulation?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, if the leader of the NDP checks the record, he will see that I never claimed that we didn't have constitutional authority to regulate gas prices.

I think what's important is that what the leader of the NDP is advocating would effectively result—not effectively; in real terms—in an increase in gas prices in Ontario. Perhaps it is not surprising, given that when they were in government the NDP raised the gas tax by 30%. We're not going to raise the gas tax by 30% or any other amount, and we're not going to regulate gas prices in the province of Ontario. But I can say, by way of one positive initiative that will help out our motorists, that automobile insurance in Ontario has come down over 13% on our watch.

Mr. Hampton: I invite you to go out and find those people who have had a reduction in their auto insurance premiums.

Before the election, when you were on this side of the Legislature, you used to harangue the former government about adopting your plan for gas price regulation. You were supported by your Minister of Tourism, who brought in a private member's bill, and your Minister of Northern Development, who had his private member's bill, and your Minister of Citizenship, who had his private member's bill, all advocating gas price regulation. But now, suddenly, you're a defender of big oil, and you're rolling over for big oil and abandoning consumers.

Premier, after advocating so fiercely, you and your colleagues, for gas price regulation when you were in opposition and failing to do anything now, why should consumers trust anything you say about gas price regulation or anything else?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, if the leader of the NDP doesn't trust my perspective that I bring on regulated gas prices, then he can check the record there for himself. The fact is that prices have been higher in those jurisdictions where they've had regulated gas pricing than we've had here in Ontario, where it's not regulated. Also, the NDP did in fact raise gas taxes by 30%.

In addition to bringing down automobile insurance by some 13%, there's also our ethanol program that we are bringing online, which will mandate the use of 5% ethanol by 2007 and 10% by 2010. Why is that important, beyond the environmental cleanliness associated with it? Because it also acts as a hedge when it comes to international oil and gas prices, which are beyond our

control. We've also doubled the sales tax rebate in this budget for hybrid cars to \$2,000 as a way to encourage people to conserve on gasoline and reduce their gasoline costs.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): Meanwhile, the price of gas goes from \$1.10 to \$1.42 a litre in Timmins, and the Premier thinks that's okay.

To the Premier: During the last election campaign, Liberal candidates went to tenants across the province and promised real rent control to protect them. They said that when a tenant vacates an apartment, the landlord would not be able to raise the rent sky-high for the next tenant. Liberals said that tenants wouldn't be deprived of legal protection just because their apartment unit was built after 1991. Premier, why did you break your promise this time to tenants?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): We're very proud of the bill introduced yesterday by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in particular, of those aspects of it that will bring greater protection and fairness for tenants. Let me list some of those:

—It eliminates an unfair eviction process that had been in place, so that henceforth every tenant will have the opportunity for a hearing or mediation;

—We're going to ensure that tenants receive the benefit of energy savings. We think that's pretty important;

—We are going to require that rents be reduced when utility costs go down. That has not been the case in the past;

—We're going to insist that there be no more paying for capital projects forever. Once those costs have been recouped by the landlord, then the rent goes back down;

—We're also saying that there will be no rent increases if a building isn't being maintained and there's a work order outstanding.

1410

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Answer?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We think those are positive initiatives that introduce more fairness for Ontario's tenants.

Mr. Hampton: The question was about the real rent control that you promised. I want to just quote a couple of people. There's this quote: "The people of St. Paul's can rest assured that [I] will not rest ... until we restore real, unqualified rent control with no ifs, ands or buts." Who said that? Michael Bryant, the now Attorney General.

Then there's this quote: "We will get rid of vacancy decontrol; it will be gone." Who said that? Oh, Mr. Caplan, also in your cabinet.

Or this quote: "I want to be clear about our plan for rent control.... We will get rid of vacancy decontrol that allows unlimited rent increases on a unit when a tenant leaves." Who said that? Dalton McGuinty.

Premier, why did you break your promises to tenants? Why don't we see real rent control?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think that David Miller, mayor of our largest city, mayor of that city which has the greatest number of tenants, is worthy of some consideration in terms of the comments that he made with respect to this legislation. He said:

"The (current) legislation is very anti-tenant, and there are significant improvements in the (proposed) legislation that will increase tenants' rights and make the system much, much fairer for them.

"Toronto is a very expensive place to live for tenants, and tens of thousands of people are just struggling to get by, and this legislation is critical to ensuring they can live in dignity."

I agree with the mayor of that city which has the greatest population of tenants in it.

I think it's important to understand what has been happening to rents as well. Last year, the average rent increase in Ontario was 0.7%. The vacancy rate today stands at 3.7%. Vacancy rates are highest—

The Deputy Speaker: Answer?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: —at the low end of the market. In Toronto, in the lowest 20% of the market, the vacancy rate sat at 5.5% last year. The market is moving in the right direction, and we're bringing in additional protections for Ontario tenants.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I want to ask about your promise of real rent control. David Miller may say what he wishes. As far as I can tell, David Miller is not a tenant.

Here's what tenants say. A quote from Dan McIntyre, coordinator with the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations: "Tenants will be very exploited by this act."

Here's another tenant, Mary Papert, a tenant in Waterloo: "We definitely wanted to go back to rent control."

Here is Marva Burnett, a tenant in Scarborough who works with ACORN Canada: "[T]his is still the landlord protection act.... Thanks for nothing."

Premier, once again you've broken your promise of implementing real rent control. Given that, why should tenants trust anything Dalton McGuinty says about rent control now?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I'm sorry to disappoint the leader of the NDP, but we're bringing in real rent controls for Ontario tenants. We are requiring rent reductions when utility costs go down. Tenants have been asking us to do that for a long time. We said there will be no more rent increases to cover the costs of regular maintenance. Tenants have been asking us for that, as well, for a long time. They have told us they don't want to pay for capital projects forever. I think that's a very fair and legitimate request. That, too, is something that we responded to in this legislation.

Again, we have brought in answers to those concerns that have been raised time and time again by Ontario tenants. We have a good market in place, which is ensuring that there's a high vacancy rate and, at the same time,

we're bringing in fairness with far greater protections for Ontario tenants.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Premier. The general public has started to realize that you are once again pulling the wool over their eyes with your decision to pass a piece of legislation that will reduce the frequency of municipal elections from three years to four years.

Premier, your government did this without telling anyone, let alone discussing the change in public. Instead, the McGuinty Liberals inserted it in their budget bill and decided that they would allow only one day of debate on the budget bill, which was today.

Premier, let me read a quote by you on May 12, 2003, where you were emphatic: "Ramming through bills without proper debate weakens our system of democracy." Well, Premier, I suggest that this is exactly what you are doing, and I ask why you are ramming through this piece of legislation without proper debate, since you already agreed that that was not an appropriate way of doing it.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): This particular initiative is in keeping with our determination as a government to demonstrate real respect for Ontario municipalities. The member opposite will know that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario has been asking for this change now for some time.

We first announced this in February. We introduced legislation in March. It will be debated throughout April. There is a committee in May. There will be a three-month process after years of local debate on this issue.

The member opposite may somehow draw a distinction between the people who serve the public in this place and the people who serve others in Ontario municipalities through municipal councils. I am not prepared to draw that distinction. I think that is the kind of thing, again, that demonstrates respect for our municipal politicians, unlike, obviously, what the members opposite are prepared to do.

Mr. Hardeman: The last time a change in this area took place was in 1982, and I had the privilege of being in a council chamber where the discussion was taking place. There was intense debate. Incidentally, Premier, it was a very public debate—note, I said "public"—that focused on accountability. There was a great deal of concern raised publicly that, by extending the election term, municipal councillors would become less accountable to the public they serve. There are many who believe that fewer and less frequent local elections will serve only the interests of politicians seeking to delay their accountability to the voters; our democracy will be the weaker for it.

So I ask you again: Will you do what is right, right here and right now in this Legislature, to honour the democratic process and allow public consultation?

Premier, will you allow the people of Ontario to have a say on this very important change?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think I've just demonstrated that this is hardly something that can be categorized as being rushed through. It's hardly something that can be categorized as something that was not sought by municipalities in Ontario.

By the way, this kind of legislation with respect to four-year terms is now in Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and New Brunswick. But I would contrast it with the Tory record when it comes to the Fewer Municipal Politicians Act that was introduced in December 1999. It was time-allocated. There were no committee hearings. It was introduced on December 6 and passed on December 20—14 days from start to finish, including weekends.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: So if the member opposite is going to deign to offer lessons with respect to courtesy and ensuring there is appropriate time for debate, he might want to review his own government's record.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I really would like to hear the Premier's answer. Heckling from his side of the House doesn't help. So we'll get on with a new question.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Premier. Today, I introduced a bill in memory of Hamilton's Bob Shaw, a firefighter who died of cancer of the esophagus in March 2004. In fact, the short title of the bill is Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act (Bob Shaw), 2006.

Bob's physicians indicate that he contracted his cancer while on the job, yet his family has been made to suffer the indignity and insult of being denied compensation by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.

Premier, the Shaw family is not alone; there are many other families who have suffered this indignity. Will you do what is right now, and support my bill that ensures firefighters receive compensation for occupational diseases?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I thank the member for the question and for her interest in this issue. I, too, welcome the families here today. I think every one of us in this House expresses our condolences to those families who have lost loved ones. I think everyone in this House, as well, recognizes the important role our firefighters play in this province. Governments of all stripes have been there to support our firefighters, and will continue to be there to support our firefighters.

We recognize that dedication. I think yesterday the member heard a question asked in this House regarding this very issue. We know it is an issue that has been looked at for a number of years by governments of all

stripes. This government is prepared to look seriously at this issue. That's why yesterday I announced that my parliamentary assistant, the member from Thornhill, Mario Racco, will undertake a comprehensive review and consultation and report back to me on this issue on July 15 of this year.

1420

Ms. Horwath: Minister, the families that are here today are here because they've witnessed the injustice of a system that refuses to compensate workers who lay their lives on the line every single day in this province. Telling them you're simply going to do more planning and more studying is just not enough. As it is now, roughly 300 Ontario firefighters have had their compensation claims for job-related illnesses such as cancer, leukemia and heart disease flatly denied by the WSIB. Five other provinces—and you know this—already recognize irrefutable links between firefighting and occupational diseases. In fact, they used Ontario's evidence to get that legislation in place in other provinces. Minister, the science is there and you know it is. Ontario needs to catch up with other provinces that are already doing this. Stalling time is over. Will you show some respect for the fallen firefighters and their families by just, today, acting on this issue?

Hon. Mr. Peters: If we were going to turn this into a political issue, I would ask why that report that was done in the 1990s wasn't acted on by the NDP government at that point. This isn't about rehashing the past. This is about looking ahead, and that's what we are doing. That's why yesterday we announced that my parliamentary assistant will undertake the comprehensive review. It's going to work with the WSIB. We recognize as well that the WSIB—you sit there and shake your head. As I'm saying, we take this seriously. The families are here today.

We want to move forward on this issue. The WSIB has already reviewed a number of cases. They've re-considered and allowed nine cancer claims for firefighters. That's good news. Close to 80% of firefighter claims for some types of cancers are allowed. This is a much higher rate than with other occupations. This isn't a political debate. This is a debate about the lives of family members. We take it seriously. I'm looking forward to receiving the report from my parliamentary assistant, in consultation with firefighters, families, and the WSIB, on July 15.

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. As you know, commuting around Toronto, especially on city streets, can be not only costly but can also be quite time-consuming. Many people are driving just by themselves, and with the high price of gas it's just too expensive to operate a car every day. I've heard from frustrated constituents who are looking at alternatives to driving their cars. The Ministry of Transportation and previous

governments have set bureaucratic roadblocks in front of people trying to use smaller, more fuel-efficient motor scooters as an alternative to their cars. These mopeds are a real solution. They are environmentally friendlier and more cost-effective. Minister, what is the issue here?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First of all, I would like to thank the honourable member for his question. The issue here is that we used to have an M class. We have a graduated licensing system for cars and we also have a graduated licensing system for motorcycles. Anybody who wanted to ride mopeds could ride them by using the G licence, but anybody who wanted to use the scooters needed the M licence for the motorcycles. In order to ride the scooter, they had to get the licence for the motorcycle, for which they have to go on the highway. What we have done is made it very convenient to use fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly vehicles. We have changed the M licence to an M and L licence for people who want to use scooters and mopeds, so that they can get it on the same vehicle that they want to ride on, which will make it more convenient and will also be good for the people who want to use fuel-efficient vehicles.

Mr. Balkissoon: Minister, I know our government has done a considerable amount to help reduce gridlock, clean up our air and get people moving on public transit. We introduced car-pooling lanes on Highways 404 and 403 to get people car-pooling to reduce congestion and harmful car emissions. What has the Ontario government done to support people who want to drive moped scooters?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: We have made it easier for them. We have created a special class of licence so people who want to just drive or ride scooters and mopeds can have a special class of licence. They don't have to go on the highway anymore. We have made it more convenient and easier for them to get it. That will affect fuel-efficiency and will also make it easier for them to do that.

STUDENT IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): To the Minister of Education: Some 1,800 students were suspended in Waterloo region because of a lack of records relating to immunization. Many of those students come from immigrant families who have difficulty understanding the notes that were perhaps sent home. It caused considerable confusion and frustration to many families. My question to you is this: Were you aware that these 1,800 students were going to be suspended? Were you aware of the policy of the board? Do you endorse how this was handled? And if not, what steps have you taken to ensure it doesn't happen in other boards across the province?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues): I think it's fair to say that no one would have realized the number this year, although this particular area has been higher on average in terms of the numbers of students that haven't had the documentation available to show that they in fact

have been immunized. It's important to note that this is a serious public health issue of which the member opposite is well aware from his days in government as well. Public boards of health today, thanks to some substantial assistance in terms of support, are able to do much more outreach into communities to see that they have good immunization records for students. Because we have had outbreaks in the past, especially recently and in this area, it really is important that the public health unit be available to do its job. I think in the supplementary we should talk about the method and how helpful this was to the students.

Mr. Klees: That is the point of my question, Minister. No one disagrees with the importance of immunization and no one disagrees that the records should be on file with the board. What we are asking you is whether you agree with how this matter was handled. There are many other boards across the province with a high percentage of immigrant families who quite frankly will not understand the forms that come home. Is there not something that you as the minister can do to show leadership on this issue to ensure we have a system in place in this province so that this is handled in the appropriate way? That's my question to you.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: We did in fact do some investigating to determine how much time the families were given to respond, and they have had literally several months. I do think that it is notable that we are dealing with perhaps a very different and varied population so that it calls for some thinking to be had in ensuring that families really understand the importance of letters that are sent home and finding ways to engage the families and parents as to their importance. I do believe that our ministry has a very good opportunity to do this. This member will know that we have launched our parent engagement strategy, which gives us, on a province-wide basis, the ability to get information to all parent councils, to all parents, and engage them with items that are very important, like this health issue. This will be an issue for discussion through our parent engagement strategy, and I appreciate the member opposite's interest in it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is for the Premier. Eighty-nine-year-old Frances Carter moved into Versa-Care Windsor Place about a year ago with her husband, Elmer. She says that at \$5.34 per day, the meals are terrible. She also says that personal items have been stolen from her and her husband's room and went on to state, "We went right to the top man. He didn't do nothing."

According to the Windsor Star, the number of legitimate complaints filed against Versa-Care Windsor Place is more than seven times the provincial average.

Premier, you promised a revolution in long-term care. When are seniors like Frances Carter and her husband, Elmer, going to be the beneficiaries of that revolution?

1430

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I appreciate the question raised by the member. Let me just say that I'm sure that all of us in this chamber feel a special responsibility when it comes to ensuring that our most vulnerable and our seniors—our parents and grandparents—receive standards that are in keeping with the highest.

This particular home has had challenges. It was placed under probation while they addressed risk areas. This is my understanding of the progress they've made to date: They have enhanced staff education; they have implemented changes to their quality management; they have improved policies to deal with wound care; there has been more staff training; and they have worked long and hard to address many complaints of residents and family. Enforcement inspections will continue at this home, and the ministry expects a further report just next week on compliance.

Mr. Prue: My question again is to the Premier. In 2004-05, Versa-Care Windsor failed to meet 29 provincial standards. You have said that some few small things are taking place, but provincial sanctions against the for-profit long-term-care facility were removed under your watch in only three months; three months later, all of those sanctions were removed.

The Windsor Star said today that the Ministry of Health spokesman, John Letherby, admitted, "The fact that Windsor is experiencing a shortage of long-term beds was a factor in removing the sanction."

Premier, seniors like Frances and Elmer Carter built this province, and they deserve to live with more dignity than this care facility is providing. Why are you letting the shortage of beds compromise patient care in Windsor?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I'll return to the specifics momentarily, but it's important to understand that, overall, there has been a revitalization of long-term-care homes under way after too many years of neglect. We have increased investments by 35% since we took office; that's an additional \$740 million. This year alone, there's another increase of 5.8%; that's a \$155-million increase. We have now in position over 2,300 new staff, including 472 nurses. We're regulating 24/7 nursing. There's a minimum of two baths per week, diet plans have been reviewed and approved by dietitians, and there are more frequent and tougher inspections.

To return to the specifics of this particular institution, again, it has been under close scrutiny, enforcement inspections will continue, and we expect a further report next week on compliance.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Yesterday, you announced that you had appointed the Honourable Jane Stewart, a former federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and a prominent and respected long-time

resident of the Brantford area, as a special representative to the Caledonia discussions. I also understand that the federal government appointed Barbara McDougall as its special representative. I appreciate your leadership and that of our Premier in the desire to bring a peaceful conclusion to this very serious and sensitive situation. Minister, can you tell me specifically what Ms. Stewart's role will be in Caledonia?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I very much appreciate the question, so that we can certainly make clear that two weeks ago, when negotiating an end to this dispute, it was agreed upon by all parties that this would be done in two phases. The second phase was agreed upon, that, by Friday of this week, both the federal and provincial governments would nominate and make public long-term negotiators who have higher profiles so that we could expedite the process that was actually already begun two years ago. We're very pleased with the federal appointment of ex-minister Barbara McDougall, an excellent choice by Minister Jim Prentice, and I'm very pleased with our choice, Jane Stewart. Not only does Jane have tremendous experience in this file, but she knows that area and has great relations with many of the Six Nations people in that part of the world.

Interjections.

Mr. Levac: Unlike those across the way, we take this extremely seriously, as I do.

I'm very pleased that someone of Ms. Stewart's expertise and knowledge, in particular of the Six Nations and of the issues in general—and the aboriginal friends she does have—will be representing the province. We have to resolve the situation, a very sensitive one, and ensure that all communities are returned to normal conditions as soon as possible.

Minister, not long ago, you announced that former Premier David Peterson was also a special representative working on resolving the issues in Caledonia. Does the appointment of Ms. Stewart or Ms. McDougall mean that Mr. Peterson's work has been completed in Caledonia, and if not, could you explain to us in more detail how the two-phased negotiations are taking place?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I appreciate the question, so that we can make it clear that David Peterson, former Premier of Ontario, is still on the job working on the immediate issues, which are basically two: the removal of the barricades on the roads and basically settling the occupation issue on the Douglas Creek Estates development. The former Premier is working on that; he continues to have meetings with all sides in this dispute. There is a lot of goodwill. I was in touch with all the different parties last night, and they're very happy with the progress, and that work is continuing. On behalf of the government of Ontario, I'd like to thank David Peterson for his work.

AMATEUR SPORT

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is for the Premier. On Tuesday, Ontarians

received much-needed and welcome tax relief from the federal government when the finance minister, the Honourable Jim Flaherty, announced there would be a \$500 physical fitness tax credit to cover registration fees for children's sports. Unfortunately, people are telling us that under your failed energy policy and your high taxing regime, it is being eaten up by the additional costs due to electricity rates at arenas across this province.

Your tax-and-spend policy, your health tax, your skyrocketing property rates have succeeded in driving businesses out of this province. Will you not be satisfied until you've driven our children off the ice as well? What are you going to do to help kids in Hockeyville—Barry's Bay—and across this province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Health Promotion would like to speak to this.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): That sounds more like Hockeyville, coming from the honourable member. The fact of the matter remains that this government is committed to our young athletes. In fact, it was the McGuinty government that brought in the community use of schools program after your party gouged those young people and they could no longer afford to rent gymnasiums and classrooms in the schools. Your party also cut amateur sport funding by 42% under your reign of terror; our government has instituted the Quest for Gold program, where, just a few weeks ago, almost \$3 million went directly to athletes, including some in the honourable member's riding, if I'm not mistaken.

Finally, the communities in action fund, something we're very proud of, is providing funding for amateur sport and recreation groups. Five million dollars is available this year, and application forms will be available by May 26. I encourage the honourable member to encourage people in Pembroke to apply for that funding, because we're back in the business of supporting our young people.

Mr. Yakabuski: That's cold comfort to people whose children are forced to leave hockey in this province because of the raging electricity rates under your failed energy policy. At the Mateway centre in Renfrew, electricity rates are 20% more than they budgeted for last year. In Pembroke, they're looking at \$12,000 increases in three different facilities this year. In Barry's Bay, they're expecting a 30% increase this year.

People cannot afford to keep their kids in hockey when the association has to charge so much for ice time because of the electricity costs under your failed policy. We need some real relief for families in this province. You people want to keep digging into their pockets, unlike the federal finance minister, who incidentally, I'm proud to say, will be speaking at an event in my riding tomorrow night.

When can this government show some real help for real Ontarians and working families?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I know that the honourable member is a little embarrassed by their own track record in

government. They did nothing for amateur sport and they did nothing for recreation. We brought in, for instance, the Ontario trails strategy, with \$3.5 million to help those communities across the province get young people and seniors alike out hiking in this great province. We've created, as a government, 230,000 jobs that we can be very proud of. We don't have to take a back seat to the Conservatives on economic policy. With respect to amateur sport, I noticed that the honourable member didn't respond to the fact that his riding has benefited from the communities in action fund. The young people in his riding have benefited from the community use of schools program, a \$20-million investment to help take down one of those economic barriers that young people faced under the Conservative regime. It's something we are very proud of.

1440

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): New question?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. The member for Nickel Belt and I, like a lot of other parents, are hockey parents. We talk to a lot of hockey parents here in Toronto and elsewhere in the province, and we know that paying for hockey, whether it's for your daughter or your son, is an expensive undertaking. We also know that, thanks to the McGuinty government, that's going to become a lot more expensive for a lot of parents, whether their children are playing hockey, ringette or simply trying to learn how to skate. My question for you is, do you support McGuinty government policies that are making skating, figure skating, ringette and hockey for kids more and more expensive for working families?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I reject the premise of the argument, first and foremost. This government does not apologize for investing \$20 million to ensure that young people have access to gymnasiums, classrooms, playgrounds and so on. I also respect the fact that we put together, under my predecessor, the Honourable Jim Bradley, the communities in action fund. I know the honourable member's riding has benefited from CIAF funding, which gives seed funding to allow young people to engage in physical activity and sport and recreation, because they don't have the necessary resources to invest.

The fact is, we have a very proud track record of supporting these young athletes, whom we're very proud of. The Quest for Gold program, for instance—I have been around the province. I was in Kingston the other day meeting with parents and young people who have benefited directly from this money. It's not the old line, "The cheque's in the mail," or, "I'm a politician; I'm here to help you." The money is in the hands of these young people, and it's allowing them to represent our province—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: Minister, we're talking about hundreds of thousands of kids who play boys' hockey, hun-

dreds of thousands of girls who play girls' hockey, kids who are taking figure skating, trying to learn how to skate and play ringette. In total, we're talking about millions of kids and families across this province, and many of them are looking at \$100-per-player or \$100-per-skater increases in order for their kids to play Canada's national game. I'm simply saying to you that you talk about what you may have done over here or over there, but we're talking about millions of kids and parents who are worried about whether or not their kids will be able to play next year. How do you justify policies that may cut off literally hundreds of thousands of modest- and low-income kids from being able to skate, take figure skating, play hockey or play ringette?

Hon. Mr. Watson: Let me talk about the community use of schools, which is lowering the cost for young people to go and train and play various sports. Ilene Watt, the executive director of Basketball Ontario, said, "On behalf of Basketball Ontario, I cannot thank you and your staff enough for moving forward with the CUS program. It has made an incredible difference. The seven years of cutbacks in funding to the school system by the previous government actually eroded the number of children playing ... by an estimated 10,000 as gym fees continued to rise."

When the community use of schools program was bought in, the NDP, as a result of a budget vote, voted against that program, so it's a little rich to hear the honourable member up on his hind legs talking about support for young people in sport when his track record is abysmal and he voted against the program that brings costs down for young people in Ontario.

SMOKING CESSATION

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. Minister, recently you came to my riding of Markham to present one of my constituents, Dr. Howard Wu, with a Heather Crowe Award in recognition of his efforts to promote a smoke-free Ontario at the local level.

As you know, this government created the award to honour the leadership and commitment of tobacco control activist Heather Crowe, who fought to improve the health of Ontarians by eliminating second-hand smoke in the workplace and in enclosed public spaces. Dr. Wu exemplifies how an individual can make a profound difference and bring about change in a community, in particular among the Chinese Canadian community, by helping smokers quit.

This being the first week of May, how is our government ensuring that the province is prepared for the Smoke-Free Ontario Act coming into force on May 31?

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to thank the honourable member from Markham for inviting me to his riding and to congratulate Dr. Wu on receiving the Heather Crowe Award. He is a great leader within the Chinese Canadian community. To date, over 140 individuals—community volunteers and leaders

across Ontario—have received Heather Crowe Awards. I thank honourable members from both sides of the House for their participation in this program.

I was very pleased, when Minister Duncan released the McGuinty government's budget, that an additional \$10 million has been allocated to the Smoke-Free Ontario program. This includes money for enforcement and smoking prevention campaigns, particularly among young people. Our government is providing \$8.4 million to public health units to bring enforcement officers into communities—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Answer?

Hon. Mr. Watson:—which represents 100% of enforcement. This is another example of the McGuinty government uploading the costs, and we're very proud to ensure that these dollars are going into enforcement for the protection of young people and old alike.

Mr. Wong: It is good to learn that a comprehensive approach is being undertaken. A recent report by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse showed that in Ontario the total cost of tobacco-related illness and lost productivity was \$6.1 billion in 2002.

Minister, as you know, there are very large and vibrant ethnic communities in my riding for whom English is a second language. We in Markham are fortunate to have a local physician and smoking-cessation activist as committed as Dr. Wu to raise awareness and to educate the public on the ills of tobacco. But this may not be the case for all ridings. Minister, how is our government ensuring that the new Smoke-Free Ontario legislation is understood by all Ontarians?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I think that, regardless of political affiliation, all of us in this Legislature will be very proud on May 31, when the Smoke-Free Ontario legislation comes into effect. I certainly was when I stood in my place in June and voted for the legislation, because we realized that 16,000 of our fellow citizens will die prematurely as a result of smoking-related diseases. That's 44 people a day.

We have now provided, through our website, smoking cessation tips and other information on smoking in 22 different languages, and we have more languages to come. We've encouraged people to go on to our website, which is Healthyontario.com. I'm also very pleased to note that we have provided \$2 million for an aboriginal anti-smoking strategy, because there are higher rates of smoking among certain new Canadians and our First Nations people. So it's something that we are very aggressively working on as we head to May 31.

TOURISM

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): Would the Minister of Tourism inform the House what, if anything, he has done to advocate for Ontario's hospitality industry, which will be impacted negatively by Bill 53?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I'm always advocating on behalf of Ontario's

tourism industry, whether it's on Bill 53 or whether it's on a topic that I know is near and dear to the heart of the member: the passport issue that exists at the present time.

As he would know, and I know he's on our side on this issue of the passport, we have a situation now where we have Canadians and Americans, business people on both sides, chambers of commerce, Republicans and Democrats, Liberals, Conservatives and New Democrats on this side, and all of us recognize the importance of that issue. Just as I would advocate on behalf of the tourism industry as it relates to Bill 53, I'm also advocating on part of that issue. I'm pleased that there are many allies in all of the caucuses that are on our side on this particular issue. I know that there are people on both sides of the border who will continue to press the issue very hard, to the benefit, I think, of the people of this province.

1450

Mr. Arnott: The question was about Bill 53, the city of Toronto bill, containing within it a provision which will allow Toronto council to levy yet another tax on drinks, which are already taxed three times, according to the Ontario Restaurant, Hotel and Motel Association. They say this will reduce their sales, lower operating margins and jeopardize thousands of jobs in Toronto's restaurants and bars. This comes at a time when Ontario's tourism business people are struggling, during a time when US visits to Ontario have plummeted to a 33-year low.

I will ask the minister once more: Will he go on the record today and represent Ontario's tourism interests, as I know he would want to do, and express support for an amendment to Bill 53 to get rid of this pending new tax?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: As the member would know, we'll be interested in all the representations that are made to the committee on this piece of legislation and the other piece of legislation. I note, because I've heard many of the questions that have come from his fellow caucus members about the federal budget, that in fact there was an increase in some alcohol taxes in the federal budget. I would have thought that in the supplementary question to me from the excellent member opposite, the critic in the field of tourism, he would have asked me what I think of increasing the alcohol taxes in the federal budget and what effect that would have on tourism. I can say to him that it may well have a detrimental effect on tourism in this province. I'll call upon him to speak to all of his friends in the federal Conservative caucus on this particular matter, including Mr. Flaherty, the finance minister.

VISITORS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to introduce the grade 5 students from Glencairn Public School in Kitchener.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): That's not a point of order, but they're welcome.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to

introduce a couple of members from the Sikh community here. We have Mr. Bains from India, Mr. Grewal, who's the editor of the Punj Pani newspaper in Punjabi, and other community members.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition today on behalf of a Port Perry nursing home, Joy Husak, Heather Cooper, Karen Sansom, John Dodds, Liz Hobson and the family and community council members. It reads as follows:

"Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents who are residents of long-term-care homes need, with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

"Whereas, even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, go to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

"Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

I'm pleased to present that to Philippe and sign it in support of my riding.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I rise to present a petition on a similar matter: a call for increased funding for long-term-care facilities of approximately \$300 million to increase the amount of care time that residents of these facilities receive by about 20 minutes per day. For many, this would make a substantial difference in their lives.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition signed by a number of people that was passed on to me by the Consumer Federation of Canada and reads as follows:

"To the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

“Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

“Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

“Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one’s good credit rating; and

“Whereas we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

“(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated ... form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and credit card numbers.

“(2) Should a credit bureau discover that there has been a breach of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the victimized consumer.

“(3) Credit bureaus should only report inquiries resulting out of actual applications for credit and for no other reason.

“(4) Credit bureaus should investigate any complaints within 30 days and correct or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed or inaccurate.”

Since I agree, I’m delighted to sign this petition.

HIGHWAY 26

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the redevelopment of Highway 26 was approved by MPP Jim Wilson and the previous PC government in 2000; and

“Whereas a number of horrific fatalities and accidents have occurred on the old stretch of Highway 26; and

“Whereas the redevelopment of Highway 26 is critical to economic development and job creation in Simcoe–Grey;

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

“That the Liberal government stop the delay of the Highway 26 redevelopment and act immediately to ensure that the project is finished on schedule, to improve safety for area residents and provide economic development opportunities and job creation in Simcoe–Grey.”

I want to thank Marilyn Ruttan and Kim Taylor from Re/Max of Wasaga Beach for sending me the petition.

COLORECTAL CANCER

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that’s been sent to me by the Colorectal Cancer Association of Canada, and it reads as follows:

Whereas a “2002 report by the National Cancer Commission on Colorectal Cancer Screening and recommendations of Cancer Care Ontario” make it clear that “it is incumbent that the Ontario government

introduce a population-based screening program for colorectal cancer immediately;

“That the Ontario government has not implemented a colorectal cancer screening program, and owes an extra duty to provide the standard of care that is recommended in the treatment of colorectal cancer;

“That the Ontario government has elected not to fund the medications which form the standard of care for the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer; namely Oxaliplatin and Avastin;

“That the Ontario government should rightfully fund these medications;

“That forcing patients to pay for these drugs constitutes a two-tiered health care system which is unacceptable for the standard treatment of Canada’s second-biggest cancer killer....”

Whereas the petitioners ask the assembly of Ontario to do two things:

“(a) introduce and implement a population-based colorectal cancer screening program;

“(b) fund the necessary medications for the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer....”

I agree with the petitioners and I affix my signature to this.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition that’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to improving public transit and eliminating gridlock;

“Whereas the McGuinty government understands that public transit over the course of the past 10 years has been in a constant state of decline and has therefore committed \$1.2 billion for public transit and local road and bridge repair; and

“Whereas proper mini-buses for the handicapped are still not being used in all areas;

“We, the undersigned, therefore continue to support and encourage the McGuinty government’s commitment to public transit, ensuring that, throughout the province, everyone is guaranteed fast, reliable and adequate transportation.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it, and give it to page Isaac, who’s here with me today.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I have a petition presented to me by staff at Hilltop Manor in Merrickville, and it reads:

“We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents’ councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per

resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007).”

I strongly support this and have affixed my signature.

1500

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, sent to me from the good folks at the long-term-care facility in the great town of Tillsonburg.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents who are residents of long-term-care homes need, with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

“Whereas, even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

“Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining;

“We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents’ councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007).”

I have affixed my signature, as I agree with the petition.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario farmers are facing difficulties in earning their living and supporting their families;

“Whereas urban residents, such as those in Toronto, count on a reliable food supply from Ontario farmers; and

“Whereas farming is an integral part of the Ontario economy;

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

“To ensure that Ontario farmers are supported so that all residents can count on a reliable, well-priced, safe food supply for all Ontario residents.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and give it to page Caroline, who is here with me today.

DRIVER PENALTIES

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I have a petition presented to me by the Bikers Rights

Organization and Brian Burnette from Lindsay, in my riding.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there currently exists an inequity in penalties under the Highway Traffic Act whereby a driver causing death or grievous harm to another due to an unsafe turn or other act may only see a maximum \$500 fine, and such is an inadequate penalty;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass into law the Highway Traffic Act amendment, as proposed by the Bikers Rights Organization, which calls for stiffer penalties for drivers involved in fatal accidents where their error caused fatality.”

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

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to improving public transit and eliminating gridlock;

“Whereas the McGuinty government understands that public transit over the course of the past 10 years has been in a constant state of decline and has therefore committed \$1.2 billion for public transit and local road and bridge repair; and

“Whereas proper mini-buses for the handicapped are still not being used in all areas;

“We, the undersigned, therefore continue to support and encourage the McGuinty government’s commitment to public transit, ensuring that, throughout the province, everyone is guaranteed fast, reliable and adequate transportation.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and give it to page Philippe, who is here with me today.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. John O’Toole (Durham): I’m pleased to present another petition on behalf of my constituents. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to

receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

I'm pleased to sign this in support of my constituents, and present it to Billy.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I am so glad that my colleague Peter Fonseca has joined me for this petition, because I know this is very close to his heart as well. It's addressed to the Legislature of Ontario and reads as follows:

“Whereas Portuguese Canadians number 171,545 in the Toronto census metropolitan area, many of whom encounter serious barriers (language, culture and location) to accessing community and long-term-care services; and

“There are no long-term-care homes dedicated to the needs of Portuguese Canadian seniors; and

“Camões House for the Aged and Portuguese Community Centre of Toronto is proposing a partnership with a local long-term-care provider to purchase up to 160 existing beds in the Toronto area (for a nominal fee) to develop a Portuguese Canadian long-term-care home in Toronto. This partnership is tentative and is dependent on the approval of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;

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

“We encourage the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, his staff, and members of the Legislature to support the Camões proposal and to make the appropriate administrative and policy changes required to develop a Portuguese Canadian long-term-care home in Toronto.”

Since I am in 100% agreement, I am delighted to sign this petition.

HIGHWAY 35

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I have a petition.

“Highway 35 Four-Laning

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's signed by many citizens from my riding.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a very important petition here and it's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I wasn't quite ready for this, Mr. Speaker, but I appreciate your giving me the time. The petition reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ontario government already fully funds 93% of faith-based schools in Ontario, but the remaining 7% receive no funding, solely because they are not Catholic;

“Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled in 1999 and again in 2005 that this arrangement is discriminatory and violates basic international human rights law that Ontario formally agreed to uphold;

“Whereas all three parties represented in the Legislature support Catholic separate school funding, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada, so that the only fair and viable solution to the discrimination is to extend funding to the small religious minorities that are currently excluded;

“Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the constitutional power to provide funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools;

“Whereas Ontario is the only western democracy that fully funds faith-based schools of one religion to the total exclusion of all other religions, while all other provinces except the Atlantic provinces fund faith-based schools and have thriving public school systems;

“Whereas the cultural survival of the affected minority groups is at stake;

“Whereas faith-based schools produce responsible and productive citizens; and

“Whereas the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools in December 2004 submitted to the Minister of Education a detailed proposal for the funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in a manner that is fair and accountable and protects and enhances the public interest;

“We call on the Ontario Legislature to pass legislation to provide equitable funding in respect of all faith-based schools in Ontario without religious discrimination and without any reduction in funding for public education, with accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded.”

I gladly affix my signature to this petition.

1510

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I rise pursuant to

standing order 55. I want to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, May 8, in the afternoon, we'll be debating second reading of Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act; and in the evening, second reading of Bill 11, the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act.

On Tuesday, May 9, in the afternoon, debate will continue with second reading of Bill 109, the Residential Tenancies Act; and that evening, second reading of Bill 102, the Transparent Drug System for Patients Act.

On Wednesday, May 10, in the afternoon, third reading of Bill 81, the Budget Measures Act; and in the evening, second reading once again of Bill 104, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act.

On Thursday, May 11, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 109, the Residential Tenancies Act.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREATER TORONTO TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA RÉGIE DES TRANSPORTS DU GRAND TORONTO

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 1, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 104, An Act to establish the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority and to repeal the GO Transit Act, 2001 / Projet de loi 104, Loi visant à créer la Régie des transports du grand Toronto et à abroger la Loi de 2001 sur le Réseau GO.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): For those of us in Mississauga, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority is part of a process that is the answer to many of our problems. For me especially, this is something that's very close to home. It is part of the new process that's going to get Mississauga its first new GO train station in 25 years, and that's in Lisgar, right in the riding that I represent.

An act like the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act is something that shows that the framework of laws is not monuments. Laws are meant to be changed; laws are meant to evolve with the times. One of the things that needs to change and evolve with the times is the notion of the silos in which public transit exists in what is currently the greater Toronto area. The GTTA, or the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, is going to be a comprehensive effort to break down a lot of those silos and enable the people who really need it to use transit to get from where they are to where they want to be seamlessly, with one fare, without worrying that when you get on Oakville transit, you have to transfer to Mississauga transit, you've got to take Mississauga

transit until you can transfer to the TTC, you have to take the TTC until you can get to the subway, and you have to take the subway to where you're going. It's absurd.

Those of us who have had the privilege of travelling to many of the world's great cities have seen many areas that did it right. In years past, people came to Toronto to look at how a transit system was done right. Toronto has lost its way for a while. The greater Toronto area is now going to find its way again through the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.

Under the proposed model of the GTTA, its board—and the GTTA would in fact be responsible for purchasing public transit vehicles. That board brings together the province, the municipalities and the local transit authorities. Its representation is shared, it depends on consensus to make it work and it will get that consensus, because if there's one thing that everybody does agree on, it's that public transit is absolutely essential for a region that's among the fastest-growing in North America. I believe that only Houston is growing faster than the greater Toronto area. We're choking on our traffic. We have to get from where we are to where we need to be.

I remember that at one point the member from Willowdale had to make a trip out to my area of the woods in northwest Mississauga. He said, "You know, all those things I've heard you talk about in the Legislature, how difficult it is to get around: Now I understand what you were referring to, and you absolutely have my support on that." I say thank you to that. Those are some of the problems that the GTTA is there to address.

Just to show you one absurdity, let's suppose you start in Hamilton and you want to get to Markham. How would you do it? For all practical purposes, about the only way to do it is to go into Toronto, transfer in Toronto and then go north to Markham. It's the same in Mississauga. You have to go into Toronto, hub-and-spoke style, and then transfer to go north. Now, this is one thing if what you're doing is flying freight from one place to a hub and then outward to the various spokes, but people are not freight. What people want is to get seamlessly, in a cost-effective, timely manner, from where they are to where they need to be, by the most direct method. So if somebody wants to start in Hamilton or Stoney Creek or Ancaster and get to Markham, we want them to be able to take the shortest possible route, whether that be a busway parallel to Highway 7 or a GO train.

At the moment, we don't have GO train service across the top of Toronto, linking the areas where growth is taking place most rapidly. In my city of Mississauga, we are now at about 680,000 people, and within the foreseeable future we're going to be a little over 800,000 people. Brampton is growing to more than 500,000 people, and all the municipalities in York region are also growing very rapidly. We do commerce with each other. We don't necessarily do our commerce by going through Toronto. We need to get from where we are in the areas around the GTA to other areas around the GTA without

connecting in Toronto. That's some of the reality that didn't exist a decade and a half ago, but it exists now. That's why we need the structure the GTTA proposes, to punch through those regional silos, to enable us to do the right thing, for the right reasons, in the right way, to enable us to do it quickly, and to enable us to connect people and allow them to get from where they live to where they work.

Mississauga, for example, imports 2,000 more commuters per day than it exports. People now commute from Toronto, which we're beginning to think of as a suburb of Mississauga, into Mississauga to go to work. The same is true of the other growing and vibrant municipalities around Toronto, whether that be Brampton, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham or Aurora. They are all bringing in people for different reasons. People need to get from where they are to where they work, and in order to do so, rather than drive, we need more people to get on public transit and be able to connect seamlessly using public transit.

What are some of the good examples in recent years? I remember taking the Washington Metro last year. I was very surprised, with the growth in the city of Washington, DC, how far the Metro went. The Metro takes you right out into Maryland. You can get on the Metro in Maryland and travel right into Metro Washington. They've built it and built it and built it.

I look at the city where I was born and raised: Montreal. Toronto built the first subway line in the 1950s, built the Bloor line in the 1960s, then inexplicably stopped until the Spadina line was built in the 1970s, and then stopped. Rather than the fits-and-starts development, Montreal just kept building the Metro. Every year they would dig and build and dig and build, and now the Metro in Montreal goes just about everywhere.

That's what we need our public transit to do here in the greater Toronto area. Our public transit has got to be able to take people who shouldn't drive a car, don't need to drive a car, don't want to drive a car, and get them from where they live to where they work. There are many areas in which people work where it's very expensive to live, and part of the reason some of the jobs are not filled is because some of the people who could fill those jobs say, "I'm interested in that work, I could come here to work, I could fill this job, but there's no transit to get me from where I live, and either I don't want to have a car or I can't afford to have a car, so I can't come here to work."

Some of our firms in Mississauga are saying that that's one of the reasons we're having trouble attracting good-quality people to work here, because they cannot punch through those regional silos. It takes hours and hours if what you're going to do is connect from one bus to another and pay again when you cross the boundary from one transit system to another.

Among the other things the GTTA will do is coordinate fares. Our new Lisgar station will be the first example in which people will be able to pay one fare, get on the GO train and continue with that same fare when they

connect to the subway in Toronto. That's something we need to do here. We've got to look at our buses, our streetcars, our subways and our GO Transit as one seamless system in which you can get off one mode of transport at a connection point, transfer, and get on the other one. Whether it be that you swipe your card as you go in and swipe it again as you go out, which is what happens in Hong Kong, which is definitely a system to emulate—it's just a beautiful system there—there's no reason we can't adopt the best practices the world over and put them to work here in the greater Toronto area. That's what this act is going to enable Ontario to do.

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The government is making the largest investment in public transit in more than a decade, with \$1.3 billion this year alone. That means municipalities are able to purchase new buses, hire new drivers and add new routes. The provincial gas tax program has increased ridership already by 3.4% all across Ontario. What does 3.4% mean? Jeez, it sounds like a small number. What it does is eliminate 18 million car trips every year. That's 18 million people throughout the year who are not on the road going, inch by inch, ahead of you.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): What's that in CO₂ emissions?

Mr. Delaney: It's probably staggering in terms of the CO₂ and the nitrogen oxide emissions that are not going to take place.

We're going to have a lot of growth in the GTA. We expect to add nearly four million people here over the next 10 to 12 years. We have got to meet that challenge of population growth by enabling the people who look at the quality of life here in the greater Toronto area and say, "That's for me. Canada is the best country in the world. Ontario is the best place in the best country in the world, and the greater Toronto area is the best place to live, to work, to build a business and to raise a family." That's what this bill does. That's why I support it.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): This is an interesting bill that we're discussing today. The Greater Toronto Transportation Authority has been talked about for some time, particularly by this government. In fact, I think it's been announced several times as well. I think it was announced in two throne speeches over the last two years. This government is very big on making announcements. The announcements they make don't always come to fruition, but they certainly announce a lot.

I remember when the police officers were announced. I think it was announced seven different times that 1,000 new police officers were going to be hired in the province of Ontario. Then, over the crime spree that we had and the shooting spree, the gun problems in Toronto—and across Ontario, for that matter—over the last couple of months in 2005, there were, in fact, 40 new police officers hired. I think that's still a long way from 1,000. I don't think they've reached that 1,000 point yet. Here we are, with the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority,

and it's the fourth announcement—this could be the fifth announcement, I suppose, that this program is going to roll out.

What is rolling out is perhaps just a little disappointing, because this particular piece of legislation doesn't have a lot of clout to get anything done. They're going to be consulting, they're going to be asking questions, they're going to be suggesting different places that they can go, they are going to be making comment, but it doesn't sound like they're going to be doing very much at all.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I wanted to make a few comments on the remarks made by the member from Mississauga West. Although I agree with a lot of the theory that the member was talking about in terms of getting people out of their cars and onto public transit systems because of environmental concerns and the simple fact that that's the future for any progressive, forward-moving society such as ours, one of the things that the member fails to acknowledge is the criticisms that have come forward with regard to this bill, particularly around how we're going to adequately finance and provide the necessary resources for this particular authority to be more than just, as our critic called it, an empty vessel. That's certainly one of our concerns.

In fact, people may be aware that the Toronto Board of Trade had some quite stinging comments to make about the GTTA, and I thought I would share them with you this afternoon. Glen Grunwald from the Toronto Board of Trade stated, "We're concerned by the lack of strong financial tools that will provide sustainable revenue. The authority will need sufficient funds to tackle major projects and create partnerships. The last thing we want ... is a great car that doesn't have enough gas in the tank." It's quite interesting when the Toronto Board of Trade is coming out with some concerns. Those are some of the same concerns that we've identified, not only the lack of financial tools but the lack of real clout that this organization is going to have.

The last thing we want is another group of people sitting around talking about things; we want to see some real action. Although the member in his remarks did speak about the common card that's going to be able to be used across systems, they make it sound like it's going to happen sometime soon. It's not even scheduled to happen for some 10 years down the road. We need more and quicker action in this regard.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I'm pleased to have a few moments to remark on the fine speech from the member for Mississauga West. He has mentioned concerns in Mississauga and how they're able to now move from that area into Hamilton, all the way over eastward into Scarborough and northward as well.

One key thing to think about here is that people who ride the subway, who ride the GO trains, don't see boundaries; they don't see the fact that they're exiting Toronto and now entering Mississauga, or exiting Scarborough and going into Markham now. They just want to be able to go from point A to point B. If they're

living in south Scarborough, let's say, in Scarborough Southwest, my riding, and want to get through Scarborough perhaps into parts of my colleague Mr. Balkissoon's riding, which is Scarborough—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): Rouge River.

Mr. Berardinetti: —Rouge River—thank you—and into areas of Markham, a destination up there, they should be able to do so without having to get off one bus and onto another bus or pay for a separate ticket. Right now, we've got all these different ticket fares and ticketing systems. It's time to put this together.

I applaud the government for finally bringing this thing forward and debating it, as we are today, and hopefully bringing it into existence as soon as possible. The people who use transit have to have a change in mindset—I know that the member from Mississauga West spoke of this—so that you can get around to different parts of the GTA. Commuters don't necessarily see Steeles as a boundary anymore, or other parts that are divided up; they just want to get from point A to point B, and to do so as easily as possible. This bill does that. I support it and I applaud the member from Mississauga West for his comments earlier.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm looking forward to the opportunity to speak to this bill during debate, following the lead from our critic, Mr. O'Toole.

In one sense, this bill is in fact a recognition of the previous government's initiatives in the area of transportation and transit. Whether it be the concept of the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, whether it be the concept of the smart card and the seamless transit card, these were all initiatives that the previous government began to develop. In that sense, there is a complement here to the previous government's initiatives, and we welcome that.

I will have some comments to make about where I feel there are significant weaknesses in this legislation. Specifically with regard to the structure of the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, my concern is that we may well end up where the GTSB was, which we all know was a very dysfunctional organization, and the reason for that was because of its structure. There was a great deal of parochialism. Representatives from various municipalities, rather than seeing the big picture, began lobbying, if you will, for their own self-interest. For that reason, I believe that we have a faulty structure here, and I look forward to providing my comments further during debate.

1530

The Acting Speaker: It's time for oral response. The Chair recognizes the member for Mississauga West.

Mr. Delaney: I want to thank my colleagues from Halton, Hamilton East, Scarborough Southwest and Oak Ridges for their comments.

The member for Halton says that announcements we make don't usually come to fruition. I certainly expect to see him parking his car at Lisgar beginning next summer and see what fruition is in fact all about.

The member for Hamilton East agrees with us, in that structures like the GTTA are the solution to the GTA's legendary gridlock. Although she asserts that the fare card system would take 10 years to develop, in fact, the fare card will begin in 2007 in my station of Lisgar in Mississauga West and will be implemented system-wide by 2010.

I thank my colleague from Scarborough Southwest. He points out that people just want to get from point A to point B. To those of us on the periphery of Toronto, there is indeed life beyond King and Bay and we'd just like to be able to get there. He talks about Steeles as a boundary. In fact, we all know that Steeles is just another choked road with traffic on it.

My always elegant and sartorial colleague from Oak Ridges talked about certain parts of the bill, and if he wants to claim credit for parts of it, he's welcome to. To us, good ideas don't come wrapped in ideology. We just want to get the job done so that people can move around.

That's the essence of this bill on the GTTA. It's about getting the job done. It's about helping people get from where they are to where they need to be. That's the real value to the nearly 12.5 million people who will live in the area that it serves. That means that the amount of time people will spend stuck in traffic won't end up increasing by four times, which it would in the absence of the GTTA.

I thank my colleagues for their comments and I look forward to their support.

The Acting Speaker: Time for further debate.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I know the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford would be anxious to comment on being included in this GTTA bill.

I think for the viewer and those listening today, it is also worth noting at the beginning, following the member for Oak Ridges, who served for some time in the role of Minister of Transportation for the province of Ontario, that many of the comments I will make today will respond to the work that he did in his time there, which would include many of the ongoing announcements being made by Minister Takhar to this day. But it will take some time to get to the point.

The essence here this afternoon is Bill 104. I think the very title of the bill leads me to be quite suspect of its real intentions, in both real policy and real politics. They did make, as we all know, a promise during the election. They made a number of promises, and that's a debate that's been carried on here since the election occurred—getting them to keep at least one or two of these promises, not the least of which is to not raise your taxes. They've broken pretty well everything in that case.

On Bill 104, the title gives it all away. It says, "An Act to establish the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority and to repeal the GO Transit Act." It does use the word "transportation," but if you look in this entire little shell of a bill, you'll find in the 26 pages, which would be 13 pages in English, that this is all about transit; it's not about transportation. Transportation is the major issue

here, how it affects our quality of life and the quality of our economy.

In fact, our leader, John Tory, has commissioned me to do a lot of work, along with the other members of our caucus, many of whom are still here. We've initiated our initial document, called the gridlock task force. The work on that task force report will serve as a very important reference point going forward, not just in the role as opposition critic for transportation but also regarding what the plan for the future is, which brings me back to Bill 104. The plan for the future in Bill 104 is anything but a plan. I will get to the detail of the bill; I'm sort of setting it up here because there are, quite frankly, four or five key principles that I think are important to put on the record initially.

(1) This is proof of the lack of a plan. The GTTA was an election promise and was reannounced a number of times during their speeches almost from the beginning, and three years later they finally have Bill 104, what I refer to as the shell bill.

(2) An integrated transit card, in the bill referred to as a so-called smart card, is not planned or will not be implemented until at least, as a minimum, 2010. Certainly, it's my hope and the hope of our leader, John Tory, that we will have a plan that will bring it in right away. Their plan is for 2010. Like a lot of things, it's post-dated. In fact, the \$600-plus million in the budget is post-election spending. It's almost starting to sound like Ottawa's plan when Paul Martin was running the ship.

(3) This item is very important; people need to reflect on this: The GTTA role is advisory, not operational. I'll talk to the governance model, which is in one of the sections, that proves that it is dysfunctional. It is designed to be dysfunctional. Ultimately, without being critical, it has no real authority.

(4) I can refer to their budget, I can refer to everything in this bill—it's going to be signed by either Dalton McGuinty or Minister Takhar, if he's still in that role, which is another question for another day, actually.

(5) Business and municipal leaders in the GTA such as Hazel McCallion and Glen Grunwald, president of the Toronto Board of Trade, have expressed concerns over the effectiveness of the GTTA in the form proposed in this bill.

These are the five principles that are being echoed. This may not be the most important debate for Ontario citizens; they're probably very concerned about Bill 102, which is really going to impact their access to medications, which our critic, Elizabeth Witmer, has spoken to and is very much engaged in. But quite honestly, the media is paying some attention to this part of this bill; I just hope the viewers are. What it means to the citizen, like myself and/or my constituents in the riding of Durham or indeed all Ontarians in the GTA who are affected by this, is—this week I have been taking GO Transit. So I renewed. I buy my weekly 10-trip ticket, and it's in the order of around \$70 for 10 trips, which is a business week, five days in and out. Then I have to take the TTC. The TTC is roughly \$5, a little over \$5 to come

up to Queen's Park and to go back. So when you look at it, it's roughly \$5 a day for five days. So it's \$100 a week. Let's just round things off quite comfortably. It's \$100 a week, and if you work 50 weeks of the year, that's \$5,000.

Stop and think. They were harshly critical of the move made by Prime Minister Harper and Jim Flaherty—he and I used to take the GO Transit together because his riding was in the Whitby–Ajax area. How this actually came to my attention, this whole idea of the transit tax credit—which is not something in this bill, and it's disappointing. I've asked the minister to address it. Perhaps there will be public hearings and perhaps he'll do the right thing. But you really can't trust many of the promises sometimes.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps your spouse works in Toronto as well. In my case, many young families move to Durham; it's a great place to live. If there are two of them, they're each spending \$5,000. That's \$10,000 a year. Let stop here. The numbers are getting so big. You've got to first of all recognize—does this do anything to make transit affordable for hard-working people? At \$10,000—that means they have to make \$20,000 in their gross income to get the \$10,000 to spend, and that's just getting to work. This bill does nothing for the absolute consumer at the end of the day, the rider. I don't see anything in this which is a disincentive to the transit tax credit idea to move people from their cars into public transit, which would affect the economy and environment. In fact, it would affect the gridlock debate that's been raging for some time.

1540

I'm going to refer to the media, so these are third-party commentaries that I'll be referring to. In that sense, I'm going to use the most objective kind of reporting I can get my hands on—well, at least it's certainly not supportive of the Conservative perspective. I think the best one, at the very start, right after Minister Takhar introduced this, was by Ian Urquhart in the Toronto Star, April 26, and for the record, this bill was introduced on April 24, so he took the time to read it and analyze it. Basically, it's a pretty significant article. It's on, "Many Questions Surround New Transit Agency." It's a fairly neutral headline, but he goes on to say a couple of things here. "GTTA"—the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority; it's not a transit bill, but it is; that's the treachery of the title, technically—"will bring ... together with municipalities to develop a seamless and integrated transportation plan for road, rail and transit," he declared." Well, seamless and integrated? Our leader has spoken on this quite passionately in our discussions on the gridlock issue. As many members here would agree, the need to integrate transit, the need to have it seamless so that it's more convenient—and the missing part of the Liberal plan, of course, is "affordable." They'd probably like to raise the fees to pay for this new bureaucracy they've created, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, which actually has no power. It's sort of like the LHINs in health care. It's another bureau-

cracy costing millions of dollars that will do nothing to help children with autism or children who are diabetic or make drugs more affordable. It will cost more. The argument is it's going to cost a lot.

I'm going to cite a number of things that Ian Urquhart said in this article: "The bill directs the GTTA 'to provide leadership in the coordination, planning' ... of transportation routes in the region." Look at the soft words. See the introduction of these. I'll just repeat them, because it's important. "Leadership." What precisely is that? If you look at the governance model, which I'll speak to, the leadership is actually Dalton and Takhar, because all of the approvals go through orders in council, even their budget.

Clearly, most of the commentaries—I'll go on here, because it's in sync with what I'm saying: "The authority"—and this is a quote—"will need sufficient funds to tackle major projects and create partnerships." I would agree with that. "The last thing we want to end up with is a great car that doesn't have enough gas in the tank." They've got the vehicle, so to speak, but there's no gas in the tank. In fact, it's contributing to gridlock. In fact, this thing here is nothing but a shell that's going to be obfuscating the real debate about integrating seamless transit to make it affordable, to address congestion, gridlock, the economy and the environment.

He goes on to say, "But Takhar also hinted that the GTTA might eventually"—two soft words—"get access to federal gasoline tax revenue." Well, there they are. They flipped it over to the feds now to say that if it's going to do anything, Stephen Harper's responsible. These aren't written by our policy research people, nor myself.

I'm going to go on, because here's another article. I've used the most neutral commentaries I could find. The Toronto Star again, and this article is May 1, so it's fairly current. Its title is starting to tell the true story: "Not Quite the Ticket." If you go through this, you'll find they've really hit the nail. They've figured out that it is, as I said, an empty shell. You open it up, the 26 pages of blah, blah, blah. I hate to use that kind of trite expression, but it says, "In the 2003 election, Premier Dalton McGuinty promised to deliver such an agency, one with 'the clout and resources to tackle gridlock.'" There's nothing whatsoever in this bill. This, again, is an article from the Star—I've got to remind myself sometimes.

"Sadly, this new authority has no clout and few resources." This isn't our briefing note; this is the public media commenting on something.

It says, "It also has no money to put toward needed transit projects and no power to collect taxes."

There you are. Don't take my word for it. Members, backbenchers especially, should pay attention. This is going to do absolutely nothing for anyone and it's a tragedy, because I would support it if it had the proper governance and resources to start with.

Here's another one. This is again from the Toronto Star. I'm trying to stay neutral. It's hard sometimes. I think the Star is starting to see the real Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Really, quite frankly, they're supposed

to endorse these public policies from McGuinty. They certainly endorsed him during the election; that's for sure. And perhaps they should. That's a debate for another day.

This article is quite good, actually, because it relates not just to the GTA generally, which goes from Halton—my good friend Ted Chudleigh from Halton and I are sort of the bookends of the GTA. We see the growth areas and the pressures on the growth areas that are just inadequate under this government. They seem to think it's all in Toronto. They think David Miller is the Deputy Premier. That's the way I'm feeling here: sort of isolated, even though we are part of the GTA. I don't want to be too cruel, because the chief government whip is sitting on this side of the House, and that may be perhaps because of the convincing arguments I'm making today. I doubt it.

This one said, "Could Link Three Regions." This is something I'm putting on the table as a suggestion that I think deserves serious consideration. Certainly I'm reading it because I think it's an important comment. Who is it by? This article is by David Ryan, who's the mayor of Pickering, which is part of Durham region. He's the mayor, and his good friend Wayne Arthurs—Wayne probably wishes he still had that job, technically. He's underutilized and underappreciated here; there's no question of that. But Dave Ryan had some very good ideas. I see the minister has joined us. I'm flattered by that because perhaps there will be some connectivity here, and I'll be the first to support it. Good policy is good politics, Minister, and this isn't either. As this one currently stands, we need to do some serious work. I'm prepared to work with you on it, quite frankly, as is John Tory. This is our new democracy. Democratic renewal is going to start right here, right now today, on this bill.

Interjections.

Mr. O'Toole: I think we're getting some support for that in the House.

Now, what's Dave saying here? "Interestingly, your newspaper has also detailed the undetermined future of the Scarborough RT"—rapid transit—"line. I think we have a golden opportunity here, which may also be our best and last chance to get it right." Very good, insightful observations by a relatively new mayor. "Would it make sense for the GTTA to devise a strategy that would see the enhancement of the Scarborough RT line and its extension into Pickering and the region of Durham, as well as Markham and the region of York?"

Now, think of this. This is quite visionary, actually. In fact, he'd make a good candidate as the new chair of Durham region. Who knows?

It goes on to say, "For example, the Scarborough RT line should be extended to the University of Toronto at Scarborough"—I'm very familiar with that campus; it's a growing and healthy campus; I spent time there—"and then proceed eastward to the future community of Seaton in Pickering..." That's part of Smart Growth and Places to Grow. I understand that and I support that.

"It could then progress eastward along Highway 407"—that's the intention: to integrate public transit in

the corridor of the 407. Minister, I endorse that here publicly. You can quote me on it. The public transit corridor should be an integral part of the 407—"into Whitby, Oshawa and Clarington to service hundreds of thousands of additional new residents, as well as the University of Ontario Institute of Technology ... Ontario's fastest-growing university."

What logic. You've got the universities, the technology, the human infrastructure and the physical infrastructure—that is, transit—to get people to and from in the future that we're envisioning. Certainly John Tory espouses that kind of integrated thinking to have an intelligent, forward-looking plan for the future of Ontario and the growth that we're all going to experience as part of being members of the GTA.

He goes on to say, "If we are to be successful, we need to put aside the old disengaged way of thinking in silos and implement a solution that addresses the health and sustainability of the entire GTA and not just what we want for our own individual communities." Speaking as a mayor, I think he's made a very profound observation which I believe deserves further attention.

1550

This is another recent article, again from the Toronto Star. These aren't my crib notes here. "This is a tax break for commuters." Minister Flaherty is well aware of the GTA and its issues. I think he's the lead minister federally to work with the mayor of Toronto, David Miller, as well as—well, David Miller, Dalton, same thing; they're actually just going for the Toronto votes, which is fine. I understand that. He says that if the finance minister "follows through today on a \$400-million-a-year election promise for transit users, commuters will find themselves with their first tax break for taking buses, streetcars or subways." That drives it right down to my initial remark. The transit system isn't about MTO or the TTC or GO Transit; it's about people getting to and from where they need to be, conveniently, on time and affordably. As I said this morning and today in my earlier comments, I pull out my TTC and my GO ticket and it's \$100 a week and going up. With the price of gas, insurance, liability, terrorism and other issues—you name it—it's going to cost more.

In the minister's capital budget, which I have a copy of here, it's about \$1 billion a year, and that's basically what it has been for some time. That's building more. If you build it, they will come. Building more roads may not be the only solution. I think we have to be innovative here, and part of that is having some consensus on public transit. It's important to recognize that that infrastructure is more sustainable in many ways—environmentally, economically and operationally, I would say—than repaving the highways every year.

On the record here now is this transit tax. In fact, I had a bill—and I'm just going to digress for a moment. I still think there's room. There may be a breath of fresh air back into the creature of a municipally or provincially originated transit tax credit. Bill 137 passed here in the House. All parties voted for it; a few people abstained. It

went to committee, and there were some public hearings. Respectfully, I thank the government and the minister for allowing it to go to committee, because they could have used their manipulative tools to avoid that, but they didn't. We heard clearly from the Canadian Urban Transit Association and others that there were some administrative issues with the bill: How do you get these receipts? How are these receipts verifiable? It integrates very nicely into the initiative the minister is taking on the seamless smart card thing. I think the smart card and the tracks thing should be part of it, because the overall objective here should be a measured benchmark of increased ridership, not the mileage of track used or otherwise. Increasing ridership on existing infrastructure is a very good place to start to demonstrate to the public in a public policy mode that public transit is here to stay and public transit needs to be supported.

In fact, arguably, most people here would know, whether it's the Bay Area Rapid Transit system or the London Underground—my daughter tells me that she and her husband take the underground every single day to go into the city of London. They have a perimeter tax there for getting into downtown London, England. Those are some of the solutions the minister may have to address. But transit is widely used there. I've been there several times myself, and I would say it's functional and it's got the density that makes transit work.

You can't have buses driving around concession roads, as they are today, to pump up the numbers so they get more of the gas tax. It just doesn't make sense. Big 60-passenger buses roaming down the concession roads doesn't make any sense at all to me. I see Jeff Leal of Peterborough. I look at the buses in Peterborough and they're empty half the time.

Mr. Leal: No, transit is up.

Mr. O'Toole: Half the time, Jeff. Pay attention. It's a whole debate. I understand that. I'm just trying to make balanced discussion work here. I'm bringing up the idea of making it affordable so people will make the move.

We don't quite have the density of a San Francisco, a New York City or a London, England. But Toronto does and the GTA does and will, and we're early enough, as Dave Ryan said, to get it right.

That's kind of a simple media scan of what the response has been. They basically are saying that he's out of gas and there's no compass in the car; it's just sort of randomly driving around and perhaps just wasting time.

I'll get back to the bill. The bill says it's all about transit; it's not about transportation. If the viewer at home wants to find out, you can call me or e-mail me; there's a website. We have a discussion paper out on gridlock, which addresses a lot of issues, including transit, the environment, infrastructure and partnering with all levels of government. I may get to it in the limited time I have left.

I think the viewer should read the five or six sections that are critical. The sections that I need to refer to and put on the record: The governance model is the very beginning. It's problematic. It's structurally dysfunctional.

That's in section 9, for those who want a copy of this or pay attention as we move along. Again, in the purpose clause you get all these soft, fuzzy kind of motherhood things: The duties of the directors are to promote, facilitate and coordinate. That's almost like saying, "Phone the minister and he'll tell you what to do," and he's probably capable of doing that. I'm sure he will, because most of the authority comes from cabinet and orders in council. As a matter of fact, it starts right at the very genesis. The governance model is a puppet for the minister. The two people with complete control—guess what? I'll read it here. It's section 9, under "Board of directors." "The business and affairs of the corporation shall be managed by its board of directors."

Here's the composition. It's really interesting: "two persons appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister;"

They're some of his friends, probably some of his fundraisers or something. It could be. Hopefully they're going to be quality people. But they're going to be political appointments, I'm telling you right now. The minister will call them, maybe at his business or at his home—who knows?—and just tell them what he needs. They're the chair and the vice-chair. That's the part.

Here's the other precarious balance. You'll find this because there's no member for Barrie—Simcoe—Bradford on here. Are you willing to take the challenge yourself?

Anyway, it goes on here and says, "the following persons appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council"—here it is. These are the following members of an 11-member board; I think it's 11 members: There are four from the city of Toronto. In terms of pure numbers, volume, revenue and expenditures, there's no question it should be Toronto, and that's the debate here. Glen Grunwald would probably agree. He's the president of the board of trade, who really has driven this initiative. I give him credit as well. That's the governance issue: Is Toronto going to run it? If they do, all of the other regions, including York, Durham, Peel—I believe that Hamilton will be in here. So you've got Halton, York, Durham and the other areas.

Toronto has four. So now we've got two from the government, four from Toronto, one person from Hamilton, one from Durham region, one person from Halton, one person from Peel and one person from York. So basically you've got five people from the surrounding GTA and four from Toronto, so Toronto can't run it, and unless all the regions agree, they can't win either. Then you have the chair and the vice-chair, who have the deciding vote, technically, so they run it. If you look at this governance model, who runs it? In fact the minister runs it. He just tells these people, "Here's the answer"—not the question; "Here's the answer." They call him with the questions.

That's the governance provision, which is section 9. I encourage the reader to review it. I'm quite open to commentary on it.

Section 16 is quite interesting too. Now we're getting into a bit of what I'd call the glue of the bill. Section 16

is also worth a cursory review. It's the powers, and this is quite interesting because it says:

"(1) Except as limited by this act," which is really the essence of it all, "the corporation has the capacity, rights, powers and privileges of a natural person...."

"(2) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1)...."

"(a) to hold, manage, operate, fund and deliver any local transit system or other transportation service within the regional transportation area by agreement"—that's the key—"to be served by the system...." and/or the agreement to hold, operate, fund. That's basically what it says.

It goes on in "Limitation re subsidiaries," in section 17, to say, "The corporation may establish ... corporations in or outside Ontario subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council," which is the short term for the Premier. So there it is. He has to sign off on that.

Under "Agreements," it's the same thing, which is section 19. It says, "Where the corporation enters into an agreement with a person in a jurisdiction outside of Ontario, it may, in respect of such agreement and with the approval of the Minister of Finance, waive any immunity outside of Ontario...." So the Ministry of Finance runs that. There's no agreement that it's going to have what I would call the credit-worthiness, which would probably be the legal term, to actually establish capital and operating agreements.

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Actually, if you want to get into financial matters, here is another important part. It's section 24—page 13 of the bill, for those following along. It says:

"Budget and other financial information

"24(1) On or before August 31 in each year, or another date specified by the minister"—there he is again, giving them a phone call—"the corporation shall submit its budget for the following fiscal year, or for any other period of time specified by the minister"—there he is, telling them when, where, why and how, now—"to the minister for his ... approval." He's got complete approval, absolute signoff; no question. There is no power; there is no money.

We've got it here. Section 24: Read it. It's worth paying attention to, because it's what the papers are saying. They finally found out. I've talked to some of them: There's no question. I obviously haven't had any role in what their opinions are. I, as the critic, must be accountable to the public in whatever form it is.

It says:

"Additional Information

"(3) The corporation shall give the minister additional financial information as the minister may at any time request." He's going to call them and tell them, "This is the information you need to know." It really goes on and on.

Subsection 31(1):

"Provincial funding of corporation and subsidiaries

"31(1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may raise by way of loan in the manner provided by the Financial Administration Act such sums as the Lieutenant Gover-

nor in Council considers necessary for the purposes of this Act." There we have the cabinet minister saying, "Thou shalt borrow, loan, debenture," whatever.

It goes on to subsection 31(2):

"(2) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may by order authorize the Minister of Finance to make loans to the corporation or to any" subsidiaries, "including loans of the sums raised under subsection (1), on the terms and conditions that the Minister of Finance may determine."

They have complete control. I wouldn't be surprised if some world-class people look at this and say, "Gee, I'm just a puppet." If they take it on, it's probably because there will be a fairly significant stipend for it. I hope that's going to be publicly disclosed as well. An appropriate amount would be similar to what members here make. Members here make around \$90,000, unless you're a minister; you make almost double. Well, they don't make enough, either. I'll be honest with that. Given the work that you take and the criticism you take, there would be an argument for that. But the directors shouldn't make more than the MPPs, that's for sure. I mean, we're often told what to do as well, as the minister will be telling these directors what to do.

Accountability: This is really important. "Transparency" and "accountability" are fancy words that lack actual substance today. This is about ministerial directives; this is good. The minister's actually paying attention to this, which is encouraging. He probably hasn't read it.

"32(1) The minister may issue directives in writing to the corporation in respect of any matter under this act"—and I'm certain he will.

We talked about the Greater Toronto Services Board itself being dysfunctional. Our critic of education and former finance minister, Frank Klees, the member from Oak Ridges, knows full well—we're admitting it now—that the services board, for a lot of reasons, couldn't get along. Maybe they had too many functional responsibilities. Operationally they couldn't connect the dots because nobody from Halton to Durham would agree with what day it was, let alone giving up some of their autonomy and power. That's the sad part: In Bill 81, in schedule H, they slipped in this thing so that they're going to have a four-year term now. So you've got four years of dysfunctionality, which is not at their level, but in trying to get the municipalities to coordinate, I think the minister needs more power here through this board.

Mr. Delaney: I hear a point of order coming, John.

Mr. O'Toole: A point of order on this bill, from the member from Mississauga, Hazel McCallion's member, I believe. He worked directly for her, at least.

I would say that regulations are always quoted as an important part of the bill. You need to pay careful attention to section 42, regulations. Here's the deal: The regulations are basically the ultimate working document. This bill is a framework document. Much of it is controlled through directions by the minister, which may be appropriate for a new organization; I will give some room on this. But in the regulations, where you actually get the

detailed mechanics of how this thing will work, section 42(1) says, “The minister may make regulations....” There you have it: He makes them all. He sets the rules, he pays the bills, he tells them what to do. You’ve got way too much power here, Minister. I think you should get a raise if you’re going to be running all this stuff and it’s actually going to work.

It says here the minister may prescribe “the area that comprises the GO Transit service area;” prescribe “additional areas....” I hope it includes Barrie. At some point in time Barrie is going to have to fit into this for sure. There is no question about it.

It goes on in clause 42(1)(e), “prescribing other matters to be addressed and other information to be included in the Corporation’s transportation plan....

“(f) prescribing classes of bylaws....

“(g) prescribing additional powers....

“(h) prescribing the circumstances....

“(i) prescribing purposes....

“(j) prescribing additional matters....

He’s going to be almost like a pharmacist here. He’ll be writing out prescriptions all the time.

“(2) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations,

“(a) prescribing additional objects and duties of the corporation;

“(b) respecting revenue raising and financing opportunities for the corporation;”

Probably the only thing it does here, quite frankly, and this is a matter of principle—perhaps the minister will respond to this one.

Section 43 is called “Dissolution of GO Transit.” GO Transit: I will have a bit of time to go into what we did and what some of our record is on this file.

“Members terminated” is section 43.

“The terms of office of the members of GO Transit who are in office immediately before its dissolution are terminated on the day of the dissolution.” What this means is that most of those logistics people—coordinating, communications and experts in those areas—are going to be fired and they’re going to be rehired the next day and they’ll change the thing from “GO Transit” on their uniform to “GTTA.” They’ll get a severance package. I want to know how much that severance package is. It is not their fault. It’s the minister’s method or mechanics of doing it.

Can you imagine that? These people who work for GO Transit are going to get a severance package and a new uniform with a new badge on it. I’m surprised. The scrutiny needs to be tightened on this. We need to do some work on Bill 104. It’s going nowhere, except that the government is in control. In fact, I say with some sadness that they’ll probably force it through without proper hearing or proper debate. It’s discouraging. As a member who serves 10 or 12 years, the severances are—

Mr. Chudleigh: How much will the severances cost?

Mr. O’Toole: The severances are—when they took away—

Interjection.

Mr. O’Toole: Pardon me, Mr. Speaker. I’ve got to recognize the member from Halton. He just interjected and Hansard will get this. What he suggested is, what’s the severance going to be? I have no idea, but it’s always too much.

Now here’s the deal: The only reference I have on this is when they dissolve under the new LHINs, the local health integrated networks—this is Bill 36. This needs to be part of the public record. The people working for the district health council, God bless them, probably are analysts and health scientists and are doing great work. Fired. The problem is that they were hired back the next day. They got the severance package and probably got double the salary. Some of them are making hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): No. Not more than us.

Mr. O’Toole: The member from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock has a great history working as a professional nurse in health care in many jurisdictions, including Ontario, and does a wonderful job. Her caring attitude—I saw it last night, actually, in terms of her compassion and reaching out just to be with others.

On a serious level, they actually got a severance. That sets the template for the way Dalton is doing it. They are doing it with the nurses; they’re doing it with the LHINs; they’re doing it here. I can only say to you that Bill 104 hardly deserves the time to go to committee. It should just be—one of the members the other day used one of those dramatic things. What he did was—pardon me, Mr. Speaker—he went rip.

Quite frankly that’s what should happen. They should start again. This bill has nothing in it. I’ve got the Toronto Star and the minister’s briefing notes; they say it. The bill itself says it, if you read it. There’s no plan in here; there’s no money. There’s no plan and there are no smart cards coming any time soon.

Our suggestion here, Minister, if we could just settle down and stop some of the theatrics—I mean on my part—is to say this: We want to work with you on this. Our leader has given us clear directions that yes, we need seamless integrated transit for all the right reasons. We do need that. All we need here is to sort of start again. The need to work on consensus building is absent here, and I find that even Hazel McCallion has now gotten suspicions. When she’s against you, you’re finished. If she doesn’t like this, you can cancel it. I think your minister was involved in giving her a fine the other day.

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Mr. Leal: No.

Mr. O’Toole: Yes. She got a fine for something or other. It would be the Highway Traffic Act; that’s your job. She got a fine. I think it was \$110 or something like that.

Mr. Chudleigh: It was \$115.

Mr. O’Toole: She could probably expense it, I suppose. Anyway, we are digressing.

In respect, I do want to go back to establish a few things. I probably shouldn’t be doing this; I’ve not been a

cabinet minister. After 11 years, I've been a member of cabinet committees. It was a privilege to do that work, and I'd do it for less money, to be quite frank with you. I think it's important work.

This is a confidential document on the SuperBuild Ontario transit renewal program. It's dated November 2, 2005. It's a cabinet document. It's labelled, "Confidential for internal discussion only." I have that one. This thing here does operate what the member from Oak Ridges said. I think the Ministry of Transportation people and the new deputy minister—she was before public accounts the other day, and I made a public statement that I commended her leadership, working with some very, very skilled people. I have the greatest respect for MTO and the work they do at an operational level—no question. They've helped me in my riding of Durham numerous times, so this isn't meant to be criticism.

In fact, the continuum here, if you really face the facts—we don't like to say this, but here's how it actually works. There are about five phases over 10 years to get some idea, a concept, into law. You've got the conceptualization, the consultation, the drafting, the debate and the regulations. It's about 10 years from concept to implementation. Let's be honest; it really is. I've been elected since 1982—not here all the time; I've been in different functions, I suppose—but I've always paid attention, because I believe leadership from the province is critical, whether it's in education, health care, you name it.

Here's another document. Again, it's labelled "Classified," but around here we call it a leaked cabinet document. These are old, but the reason I brought them out of hiding—not hiding, but into the public forum here today. This is actually the minister's briefing notes. If you'd lend me that book, I won't tell a soul: the one you use to give us all the answers, the one that staff write for you. I know how it works; I think that's important. You've got to stay on message and blah blah blah.

But here's the thing: In this document, you were proud to announce—and I commend you for it. The only thing is, you should have had Frank Klees with you. If you look at the ministry documents and the estimates process, those HOV lanes were in our budget. You were there for the ribbon cutting, and that's good. Thank you for doing it, but you should have had Frank Klees there with you. But that's the way politics works.

I'd say that the evidence of good government is the continuum and the building and the moving forward stuff, but we often have to withstand a torrent of criticism, some of it earned, some of it completely unfounded. When they say it without knowledge, sometimes it's hard to refute that. In the very limited time I've been given today, I'm going to attempt to refute some of the misinformation that's been perpetrated on the people of Ontario.

Again, this is a confidential document on the capital plan for 2003. Here's the deal: "Transit capital." Here it is, right in the writing, and I'm reading it. I guess I can give it to Hansard. They're part of the permanent staff here, so they don't get involved in politics, fortunately.

Federal transit assistance, \$14 million; transit renewal, \$109 million; GO Transit base capital, \$93.6 million; TIPs and GTIP, \$105 million. This goes on in some detail to explain the programs within each of those.

Part of the transit initiative was a "\$9-billion investment over 10 years to renew and expand transit," starting with \$3.25 billion in provincial funding.

"Aligning investments with Smart Growth/regional transportation directions." Smart Growth; they call it Places to Grow. Who cares? It's a different name; same plan. The ministry people are moving forward, and the politicians get in the way most of the time.

Transit renewal: "Renew aging Ontario bus fleet through replacement and refurbishment."

GO Transit capital base needed to maintain \$2 billion in assets; seeking federal matching funds for several projects, like working on Union Station.

They're still working on it. In fact, the consultants just resigned from that project of trying to find that destination plan. Whether it's a partnership plan, a privatization plan, or it's the city of Toronto that owns it, it's hard to say, but they're still working on it. In fact, the consultants just quit. The reason they quit is because nobody wants to invest. That's the deal.

There are a lot of documents here, and I want to go on. It says, "The capital plan"—I would say, quite frankly, there is new money in the past budget, this current budget that was announced a few months ago. It seems like a long time ago. I'm still getting over the health tax. Holy smoke; I just did my income tax. For my family, it was like two grand. I don't mind paying more, but am I getting anything for it? I'm paying more and getting less. That how I feel. Sometimes these expressions come to mind so easily. I don't mind paying more. If I go to a ball game and I pay more, I usually get a better seat. Do you understand? It's a choice I make. I can pay less and sit on the wall. Do you understand? I can pay nothing and watch it on television. So these are about choices. There are no choices with the health tax. The waiting lists are getting longer. It's frightening. I don't know if they can last until 2007. This is my worry, that there is going to be a revolt—not by me; I won't participate in things like that.

With this bill, technically the intentions are there but it's hollow. As Ian Urquhart said, they've run out of gas, which is another way, a very trite way, a comical way, of saying they have no plan, no vision and no intention of completing it. But some of these initiatives the minister announced will come to pass, and I think, whether it's the York-Spadina or whatever subway is built ultimately—the fact that Greg Sorbara announced that early is something members shouldn't do with their privileged information. They take the oath. You should be quiet on that stuff. Greg's a smart guy. I think he does a great job. He will probably be back in cabinet when Gerard resigns, but then again, Gerard probably won't resign, because he won't win as leader and he hasn't got a job. That's a question for another day. Probably Howard will ask that next week, because we're wondering what he's doing.

He's getting paid—so are we. He's getting paid, and he's a special adviser to the Premier, as I understand it, which probably means he is getting his cabinet salary. He'll be back. He will probably be the Minister of Transportation when he comes back, because he has left education in turmoil. In fact, they're all in deficit. It's tragic, actually.

The major highway projects: I always pay attention to the detail in these ministerial documents. I wish I had more of them. I would say that when you look at the capital projects, not just in my riding, the 416 was approved under our government. The HOV lanes were approved and funded in the budget. They may not have been completed. These projects happen between and through and past elections, but it's the vision that was there under co-ordinated transit. So working together with the minister is very important.

There's a whole list of issues here on rehabilitation projects. The billion dollars gets spent, and I'm sure the minister will recognize that within the Durham region, the completion, I would say, in fairness—and this is part of this bill, because it's a transportation bill. It's not just a transit bill, although it is that. You shouldn't have changed that name, the Greater Toronto Transit Authority. It's not the "transportation" authority. It has nothing to do with transportation, technically. I will put an amendment through for that: unanimous consent to amend the title of the bill.

Interjection: All right.

Mr. O'Toole: Okay? Do we have that?

Mr. Berardinetti: No.

Mr. O'Toole: Somebody said no. The Liberals are against even changing the name. So what is the sense of debating this, because it is sort of a *fait accompli*?

The point that needs to be put on the record here—there are some other points. The minister should make a commitment here, I think, to say we're going to do it. Tell them. You have the authority in the bill to tell them that Howard Moscoe doesn't run the TTC and get the money for nothing. Give them the gas money and say, "Get that smart card going"—at least that. They've got the volume. There are going to be some technology issues; I understand that. You'll have to contract that out, do an RFP, and do it openly and I hope transparently. Get that going, because that will go right back to the transit tax credit.

I believe you are a very clever man. I would say that. I have read your CV and I have great respect for what you have achieved and done and your remarks. We all are held to very high levels of accountability here in this office. What I'm trying to say here is that if you were to give one signal—for instance, this transit card I think is the key, and they will be fighting about that, Minister. Having served on regional council, they will be fighting about that, and if Hazel doesn't like it, it will never pass; if David doesn't like it, it will never pass. Do you understand? You get the dissenting because, "My idea is the best idea." So the minister and the Premier have to actually step into this thing: "We're going to do it. Here it is. Here's the template. Here's the probably \$20 million

or \$40 million. Take it out of the gas tax money and implement the plan." Then I'll actually be here, and I believe John Tory will be here, to say, "By golly, these guys actually mean business." We'll have to sit up and take notice.

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Right now, I've put in an hour here and I've been fairly critical, but in fact there's no reason for being critical, because there's nothing here to criticize. It's a shell. I mean that respectfully. Somebody caught you on an off-day to sign off on this thing, I think. I've given some time to the capital transit plan from 2000-01 up to 2003. I actually have the election plan here. I know what your plan was. It's right here. I would put for the key facts here, "On September 27, 2001, this government announced"—that was when we were government—"a ... new, visionary plan for transit that provides for a 10-year, \$9-billion plan to ensure the province has a transit system that will help strengthen the economy and protect the environment." That's a Tory message back on September 27, 2001, so you're on the right track. I mean the transit track here. Go for it. "The investment is made up of \$3.25 billion from the provincial government...." It's probably the same money that was talked about then that you're talking about now. We also had the Ontario transit renewal program, which I've mentioned. In that plan there was a cost-shared plan of \$103 million for OTRP in 2003 on January 16; an additional \$100 million in 2002.

Here's a key one—and this one here may not connect directly to this, but we get criticized for our lack of support for transit. You know, if you keep pouring money into the existing dysfunctional structure, there won't be integration. It's hard enough in Durham region to integrate the transit systems between Ajax, Pickering, Whitby, Oshawa and the surrounding communities. It's been a nightmare. They have done it. And the impact on your household tax, Deputy Sergeant at Arms—and that's your tax and mine—is basically, I think, about \$20 a household. That doesn't sound much, but it's still money that you don't get to spend. You should ask yourself, "Is it any better?" That's just simple analysis. You don't have to be a consultant. Well, you can be a consultant if you want.

This is one of the things that they did here that we did. "On January 1, 2002, the province also reassumed responsibility for the operating and base capital" budget "of GO Transit." Now then, how does that manifest? That decision was made because prior to that, under the Greater Toronto Services Board realignment, they had coordinated what they had called pool funding. The regions all had to chip in money into the operational budget. Durham and most of the regions, like Halton, were upset that they were into the pooling to support transit. But we took over that budget and that gave them tax room at the municipal level, probably about \$20 million in Durham region, which they used to increase the number and frequency of routes within, for instance, Clarington, Scugog and parts that were not serviced prior to that. Now they've moved along, with the gas tax

money from the federal and provincial governments, to increase the number of routes. So there is some integrated transit going on very slowly within Durham region. York region is well advanced; Waterloo region is well advanced; Ottawa region is well advanced. Toronto is doing the job as well as it can with the infrastructure it has, and maybe has too much politics in it, I suppose. It needs to have more strength from the province.

But here's the deal: If the TTC is by far the biggest one—and it goes back to Bill 104 here. Here's what I meant by the governance dysfunctionality: If the government makes an agreement with the TTC that you're going to spend your money to increase the routes to Mississauga, and the money is at the TTC, they're not going to give them the money unless the minister forces them to by some measure or some regulation, because it's there, the city of Toronto, and it's the riders' money. Quite honestly, it's pretty hard to force someone or to absolutely strongly encourage them if you don't have the clout to do it. That is basically the money—or the law. The law can be fairly punitive in a negative way of working cooperatively.

But a good way to start to engage the ridership issue, again, is the monthly pass and the transit tax credit. I'd be happy to work with you on that. I just say that when I looked at some of the recent comments in the media, I was anxious to use most of the time on this bill today to say that we're struggling on the idea of supporting it.

A couple of issues under the transit critic's role: As I said, the private issuing network was before the auditor's report this past week, I believe it was—Monday, maybe, or last Thursday. Shelly Jamieson is the new deputy and did a great job in terms of informing us. But the private issuing network is where you actually get your licence certificate, your plate and your certificate—not the training and testing; it's a separate thing. The private issuing networks are in serious trouble. They get very little money for what they do. That has been an issue from about 1980, actually. It's been in every auditor's report since the early 1980s. So I'd say take some action on that one, and I made it very clear that we would be in support of making sure that they address the security of the documents themselves under today's security issues.

The other one, too, is something I would encourage. There was an article in the paper that I think pretty well summed it up. It talked about the trash on the roads, the cleanliness of our interchanges. Mayor Dave Ryan seems to be quite outspoken. He might be silenced now, if they give him some kind of reward. But the issue there is that at most of the interchanges there has been a real reduction in the ministry's operational budget for cleaning these exit and entrance ramps. It's affecting us in Clarington as well. I've talked to the mayor there; they are very concerned, whereas the city of Toronto spends more money on that than the ministry itself. So there's some work to be done there as well, Minister, just keeping the existing infrastructure and human spaces clean and appropriate to reflect Ontario, a beautiful province, and Toronto, a great city for tourism. It's kind of "Operation

Cleanup." I say that because we just got back the response to the Earth Day celebrations in my riding. I was overwhelmed by the number of people who brought this to my attention as I participated in some community events.

Also, I was somewhat critical of the unlicensed drivers. I asked a question on this today too. Driver safety—we're talking transportation, although the bill is transit, let's face it. In transportation, I said driver safety is probably the primary issue. In fact, I think that's what you use—the safest highways in Ontario; we all want that. What was brought to my attention by MADD today was that 75% of Ontario's suspended drivers continue to drive. That becomes a bit of an enforcement issue and a re-licensing issue. I hope there is some attention paid to that not just by the auditor, but by the minister, who is here today.

The issue here that we're dealing with in Bill 104 is transit. The point I've made is that the transit plan is not a plan that most of the commentators that I referred to today say will work. It lacks the clout; it lacks the authority and resources to act decisively to get this thing rolling. As Ian Urquhart said in his article, it has run out of gas. I heard an interview on the CBC with Gord Perks. He is a well-known pro-public-transit fellow who said that this bill was "tinkering." I think that's the word he used on CBC with Andy Barrie in the morning. I do listen to that. I listen to all the critics, because we at some point, probably in 2007-08, will be facing the same questions. From what I see here, most of it is post-election, which means nothing is going to happen. It's disappointing, because we all recognize the importance of public transit. There has to be a movement; there has to be a real vision and a plan of action to move this thing to the next step, to the operational level. There's nothing in this bill that's going to make it operational, and it's disappointing.

I don't want to be negative—because I do recognize our role in opposition is to be critical. But on the positive side, I respect the work the minister is trying to do. I'm suspicious that it might be that Dalton is not giving him enough power. He's a little afraid that maybe he'll go off the tracks a bit.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: No. And we're saying here publicly, John Tory, who ran for the mayor of the city of Toronto, knows full well it takes a healthy transit infrastructure to move people safely and effectively and in an environment that's clean, in a place to come and celebrate. This bill won't do that. It won't get me to the ball game any cheaper on the GO train and the TTC, or any faster; it will only cost more. So until I see something in here, some movement—just work with Minister Flaherty or their new transportation minister federally. I'm sure you'll get along. What I'm saying is: Embrace the transit tax idea. I'll work with you; I've done a lot of work. Dr. Roschlau has done a lot of work, and he says that the problem with my bill was the administration issue: How do you collect these little receipts? Well, I'm showing

you right now today, if you buy a weekly 10-trip ticket, you get the receipt. The smart card would be real simple.

1630

In fact, I've met a group, and I don't want to put their name on the record because I'm not lobbying for anyone, nor would I. I am sitting tonight with Dave Bradley and the Ontario Trucking Association, a great group of people who I believe are part of the speed-limiter issue that you've been meeting on. I'm sure you're going to move on that sometime after 2007. We will be. I believe that we will, because it's good for the environment and the economy. There are implications for it. Its time has come. The time now happens to be when you're in the chair. You have the power; the thing is just the execution of that power.

Dr. Roschlau said the administrative problem was the problem. I made the point already. I'm sure you understand, Speaker from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, who normally sits beside me. He recently just got back from a trip, I understand. I knew nothing about it.

I think the point I'm trying to make is that the smart card, Minister, would be one way that you could be decisive and move quickly. I would encourage you to look at the latest and best technology. The SIM card technology is the way to go. It's programmable, functional and it communicates wirelessly. You're a technical person; I understand that. You could actually walk by a scanner with your BlackBerry on, and it would record your fare, just like the 407. It could be done. Do it, and we'll probably be the first to support you.

There's only 46 seconds left. This small bill has allowed me to walk around the area of transit and talk about Mothers Against Drunk Driving and road safety, because there's nothing in this bill that's actually going to make it more affordable for my constituents, the couple who talked to me, who are paying \$10,000 a year to get to work in Toronto, after tax. Think of it. Do the right thing. Make it affordable. Gas is going up, and you don't control that; I understand that. Dalton does.

Do the right thing. Technically, if transit's affordable, they'll move from the car when gas is \$1.50 a litre. They'll move. Then you'll have the money and the public policy motive to do the right thing. We'll be there to support you.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to congratulate the member for Durham for not only giving us a review of the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority Act but also giving us a circuitous tour of the greater Toronto area, not to mention a circuitous tour of the on-again, off-again transportation policy. I'm sure I'll want to get the Hansard to see if I can follow the dotted line in terms of all the area that was covered.

I do have to commend him for making some very salient points. One of them was that there's a lot of paper in this bill, but after you get past the paper, there ain't much. This is not what was promised by Dalton McGuinty during the election. If memory serves me cor-

rectly, I think this body, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority and this bill has been promised in no less than three throne speeches, two budgets and probably about a dozen other places. So we were all thinking that, boy, there must be something really formidable here. There must be something really quite substantive. I want to thank the member for Durham for pointing out the fact that after you go on this very circuitous around, up and over, there's hardly anything here. This body doesn't seem to have any authority. It sure as heck doesn't have any money. I wonder if they'd even be able to fix a flat tire, never mind run a transit authority. So I want to congratulate the member for Durham for pointing that out in his circuitous way.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the members from Durham and Kenora-Rainy River. Actually it's incredible that you can talk for an hour and say nothing; really, it's incredible. The member took one hour to read the bill. I can understand that. Maybe this was the only time he had to read the bill, so finally he read the bill.

Let me address some of the issues he raised, which had nothing to do with the bill, but he raised other issues. HOV lanes advocated by the previous government: Yes, maybe they started it, but it's typical of the previous government to have plastic cheques issued, and that's what they did. They never financed it. They never provided any money.

He talked about Hazel McCallion's issue, saying, if she didn't support it, what will happen? Let me read this letter from Mayor McCallion. She said there's a "huge backlog in transit that the former Harris government created by cutting off the capital funding of buses and contribution towards the deficit of the transit systems." That is what she said. Then she went on further to say, "I hope that you give me an opportunity"—she wrote it to the Mississauga News—"to express to the Mississauga News the appreciation of the city of Mississauga that the Liberal government, under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty, has taken action on trying to help the municipalities by providing a gas tax and in fact, not only for the capital funding but they have made it very lenient by allowing us to use it for the operating budget of transit."

The member from Durham talked about public policy. The previous government didn't have a public policy on transit, so I don't know what he's talking about. There was no public transit policy. They reduced the funding from \$660 million in 1995-96 to about nothing in 2000-01. That's the record of the previous government.

Mr. Klees: That's not true.

Hon. Mr. Takhar: I can show you. That's the record of the previous government. The former minister doesn't want to accept it, but that's the truth and that's the record.

Ms. Scott: I'm pleased to comment today on Bill 104 and the hour-long, informative and analytical dissection of Bill 104, as opposed to what the Minister of Transportation described. The member from Durham has done

a great job of analysis of the bill. I'm sure if you go back in Hansard, you'll see that.

The member from Durham and I sat on the gridlock task force, because this is an important issue to our areas, not just the GTA. We heard a lot of feedback, and a lot of work has to be done. He mentioned being in ridings that neighbour each other, the expansion of the 407 and how we would like to see that proceed and the business and economic opportunities that would come after that expansion. Certainly the four-laning of Highway 35 through my riding, starting at the 115, would be of great financial and economic benefit to our area. I'm glad the Minister of Transportation is here today to keep in the forefront of his mind what we need in our areas in Durham and Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

The member from Durham has also done a great job with his transit tax credit that he brought forward, a great initiative, a great incentive. We saw that the federal Conservatives have supported that. I know that MP Barry Devolin is here today and is very supportive of that measure federally, of what Prime Minister Harper did, and I think the province should move towards that.

But getting back to the bill, we all agree that we have to solve the problem of gridlock in the GTA and we want to see something happen. In this bill—even commented on in the *Toronto Star*, “Sadly, this new authority has no clout and few resources.” I think that's what we've heard over and over again.

Ms. Horwath: I had to leave the chamber for a few minutes and I guess the member's speech went downhill from there, because when I was here, for the first little while anyway, the member from Durham made a number of comments about the bill that I thought were salient, ones that I likely will be raising as well. In my recollection, he talked about concern over lack of real power that this authority is going to have and whether or not they're actually going to have the dollars to do the work that they want to do. The recommendations they'll bring forward are just that: recommendations that the government would then need to ensure that they fund appropriately to have reasonable implementation of any of those plans.

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I guess at the end of those remarks the member spent some time reviewing the various sections of the bill, as members often do. Unfortunately, I had to step away for a few minutes and wasn't able to hear all of those comments. But I do think it's important that members, as they go through this legislation, highlight the pieces that are important and relevant in their own minds and to their own communities, and also in terms of the broader perspectives that they bring.

I look forward to, hopefully this evening, making some comments as well. For the first time, the city of Hamilton has been included in the GTTA. The members from Hamilton probably spent some time with the minister indicating to him how important we think that is. I would agree with that and would applaud that part being in there. However, I do have some other concerns

and comments that need to be made. I agree with the member that the gridlock that we're experiencing and the smog, pollution and air quality issues need to be solved. We need to make sure that the GTTA, although it could possibly have a role in doing that, has the teeth and the tools to undertake that extremely important work. I don't think that this bill necessarily brings us there.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for a response. The Chair recognizes the member from Durham.

Mr. O'Toole: I'm very pleased with the response from the leader of the third party and the member from Hamilton East, as well as the minister and others who have commented.

Yes, there was a lot of time allocated to this. It's the way the House leader set this up and allocated the time. I did try to use that time, although it was obviously too much time for that bill because, as I said, the laudable objectives are endorsed, the content is weak and designed to fail. The minister seems to stand behind it. His analysis is certainly different than mine, and we have the right to disagree on that. It is my duty to point out the frailties in the bill and under the sections that I made comment on: 9, 16, 24, 35, 36 and 42.

There is a hollow shell here. We are prepared to work going forward. I would certainly encourage public hearings to look at designing an integrated plan, making some really serious commitments, both financially and otherwise. Striking some power in the governance model would be a really good place to start.

I can only say to the minister and his response that at the personal level I would put to you that I have been here for some time, have served for some time, so I'm somewhat offended, but I won't act negatively. I know a lot about this bill, actually, and I sometimes question your competency. I'll leave that level for another day, but don't you tell me about what's in here when everyone I've cited says there is nothing in here. Minister, you either don't understand or you—I'm offended by that comment personally. I am. I've been here 11 years. You said we did nothing. I've shown you cabinet documents. You have not seen those, so you're saying things about things you know nothing about. I'm surprised at the tone, for the minister to be here and not listen respectfully.

The Acting Speaker: Time for further debate.

Ms. Horwath: I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to the GTTA bill. I have to say that I've spent some time looking at not only the bill itself but the remarks of our lead critic on this file, the member from Toronto–Danforth, Peter Tabuns. He spent some time speaking to Bill 104 already and I'm certainly going to be reflecting some of the issues that he raised and also tying that, hopefully, to my own experience. I am someone who is on the very—what would that be?—western edge of this area, in the city of Hamilton, and have spent the last two years since being elected in the by-election in Hamilton East. Oh, that anniversary is coming up. I think May 13 was the date of that election, so it's about—what?—nine days away. I'll have to remember to celebrate.

It was interesting, in my initial couple of months, trying to figure out how to get from Hamilton to Toronto and from Toronto to Hamilton during rush hour. I can tell you, there was no end of frustration. Actually, at that time, the government side had a different House leader and we had a lot of midnight sessions, and it really was quite difficult. I was trying as much as possible to use the transit system, to take the GO train from Hamilton, which at the time was a block away from where I lived. It's still there; I've moved my home to a different location. The GO Transit system was what I was trying to rely on in terms of GO trains and it was extremely difficult. Why was it difficult? Well, for a couple of reasons. The first one was the lack of frequency of trains. Toronto to Hamilton, Hamilton to Toronto, only provides three trains in the morning and four trains in the afternoon/evening. So if you don't get on any of the three trains in the morning, you're forced to drive into another jurisdiction with your car to get the GO train. That's really not the solution. We want to get people out of cars, not into cars.

Part of the problem we have in the city of Hamilton is a severe and significant lack of service from GO. That is exacerbated by the lack of funding and the lack of support the city of Hamilton has been able to rely upon from the provincial government for its own transit system. Again, I certainly support the idea, the concept, of an integrated system across regions. I think it's a wise direction to go in, but the problem becomes, if the feeder communities don't have solid transit systems already, then your whole plan falls apart.

I would submit that the government needs to take a really close look at what's happening in communities like Hamilton. Unfortunately, between the downloading that the previous government did and the cost of GO Transit that was put on municipalities—the downloading overall, not just transportation, that municipalities are struggling under—it has meant that they've been in budget squeezes year after year. We know that because year after year, they come here and tell the provincial government that that needs to be fixed. Unfortunately, it still has not yet been fixed.

In the meanwhile, local transit systems have been eroded over the last couple of years, and I know this for a fact. I was on city council in Hamilton as we struggled under the burden of downloading to try to find the appropriate opportunities for investment in our transit system. What happens when there's not enough money in a transit system? Your equipment begins to be a bit run-down, your buses are not top of the line, they're not air conditioned, they're not as reliable, they break down, and for the rider it's not a very positive experience. So that's one thing that happens.

What's another thing that happens? Well, another thing that happens is that, in the squeeze, the politicians are saying, "You can't come in with budget increases to this department or that department," and the HSR—Hamilton Street Railway—was one of those departments, like every other department under the burden of downloading, that had to come in with budget savings. Of

course, if you're going to try to save money in your budget, there's one really good way to do that, and that is to reduce the route options or the frequency of buses in your system. That might reduce your budget, that might reduce the amount of time your buses are on the roads and the amount of gas you're using and the amount of labour you're paying for and all of these things, but what else does that do? It reduces the reliability of your system. It takes away access. It takes away the convenience. And it reduces ridership, and that's problematic, because we want to go in the other direction, right?

If we're going to have these fully integrated systems operating at the best capacity, so that we actually have an effect on gridlock and smog, then the only way we're going to get there—and I think members around this chamber would have to agree—is by optimizing our individual transit systems within these various communities that are part of the GTTA and, as well, the GO system that connects them together. But, as I was saying before, that's not going to happen if individual transit systems are withering on the vine for lack of fertilization by provincial funding and provincial support. So that's a big problem.

There's another thing that happens when you're strapped for dollars at your local level. You've already tried to trim your routes, reduce your frequency or expand the wait times between buses throughout the various routes. The other thing you do when you can no longer cut is that you have to find a way to deal with your budget, so you start thinking, "Well, maybe it's time we raised the fares." My community struggled with that year after year and we were able to successfully prevent fares from going up.

1650

Why did people struggle? I was one of those councillors, when I was on city council in Hamilton dealing with the HSR budget, who just refused to agree to rate increases. And why was that? There were a couple of reasons. Certainly part of it was affordability. Whenever there's a rate increase, it's not just 10 cents' extra fare. There are also a number of things—perhaps I could ask for a glass of water please, that would be very helpful, thank you—that we look at with a fare increase: the packages, right? There are the students' fares and the seniors' fares and all of those package deals, if you want to call them that, or those rate packages that are especially put together for certain groups of riders.

Invariably, when the rate is going to go up by a dime or whatever it's going to be, it's not only going to impact the person who's paying the regular, at-the-box fare, but it's also going to affect senior citizens and it's also often going to affect students, because their prices are being pushed up as well. So yes, there's an affordability problem that comes with fare rate increases, but the statistics show that every time the fares go up, ridership is reduced again. When you're cutting services, cutting corners on your routes, and you're trying to cut back to try to save money—thank you very much. I appreciate that, Zachery.

Mr. Chudleigh: Zachery's a great page.

Ms. Horwath: Zachery is a wonderful page. I needed that drink of water, and I really appreciate it. Lovely. Thank you.

When you're grappling with all these possible options on how to reduce your budget, what's happening regardless of where you're pushing, whether it's reduction of routes, reduction of frequency or increase in fares, is that all of those things result in reduced ridership. That's the exact opposite of what the stated goal is, not only of this legislation but of any dense urban area that's trying to deal with issues like smog. The bottom line is that what we want to do is get more people on to our transit systems; we want more people taking the bus.

I can remember a very frustrating debate in the city of Hamilton, when our advisory committee was talking about putting racks on our buses so people could cycle to the bus and put the bike on the bus on a rack. Then the bus would continue on, and when they were finished work, they would do the same thing on the way back. They could cycle to the bus stop and be able to use their bike part of the way. It was a very frustrating experience because a big part of the challenge was the capital investment to outfit enough buses to make the system work.

Pardon me, Mr. Speaker, while I'm coughing. I'm getting over a cold and I'm losing my voice. I've lost my voice. I can't talk anymore. It's gone all of a sudden. I want to keep talking about this issue and I don't have any other members to take over for me. I really have been battling a very bad cold. I'm going to try to keep going and see what happens, but it's very bad.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Mario Sergio): Excuse me. I would like to ask the member if she would like to ask for unanimous consent to move on, and then she can come back.

Ms. Horwath: If I could get unanimous consent to take a voice break and have another member speak, I would much appreciate it. I still have nine minutes left on the clock.

The Acting Speaker: She's asking for unanimous consent. Agreed? Agreed.

Further debate?

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I'll be happy to speak for my 10 minutes, Mr. Speaker, if you allow me.

Interjections.

Mr. Racco: Twenty minutes? I'll be happy to speak even for an hour, if it's allowed, on second reading of this very important bill, Bill 104.

Mr. Speaker, you know very well what I'm going to say, because your riding is next to mine. We know how important it is that this honourable House spends significant time to address one of the most important issues in the province of Ontario, certainly within the GTA, and that is public transportation. We have a major problem and we must address it. The GTTA is going to address this problem. Surely in the long run we will have to make some adjustments, but it is a "must" bill. I'm surprised when I hear some of my friends on the other side

speaking in favour of public transportation but somehow they believe this bill does not address the issue, in their opinion—which, in my opinion, is not correct.

There is no question that Bill 104 has significant support. At the launching of this issue we had people from all over attending Minister Takhar's announcement at the convention centre in Toronto. From my area, I want to stress that the chairman of the region and a number of mayors were there, both physically and also with their minds, because they felt that was a very, very important announcement. I know they are supportive of this bill. Quite frankly, they feel that much time has been wasted on this very important issue. To give you an example—I spoke about this a few days ago in the House—in the city of Vaughan, which is one city I represent, together with the town of Markham, a piece of each of the two municipalities, a study was done and the results were announced last Monday, so three days ago. The chairman of that committee is Julian Fantino; we all know him. That study made it clear that the most important issue in the city of Vaughan is public transportation. The number, by the way, was 16%. The next item of importance to the people of Vaughan was crime, and that was at 15%. Health care was at 5%. Education, I believe, was about 4%. By a significant margin, my constituents feel that public transportation is the most important issue. And the GTTA will be addressing this issue that should have been addressed probably 15 years ago.

We know that the prior government attempted to do something, and they failed. Within three years, the committee they put together, the GTSB, failed and was removed. I believe their time was from 1999 to 2002. One of the reasons they failed was because it was too large, made up of about 42 people, I believe, and was made up strictly of politicians. The GTTA is made up of 11 people, and they don't have to be politicians. I hope and trust that in fact there will be a mix so we will have a better balance of the needs and wants of the people in the province and the GTA more specifically, including Hamilton.

We live in a region of over 5.5 million people, including Hamilton. It's time that we did long-term planning, and Bill 104 is attempting to do exactly that. It's giving power to 11 people to plan for the greater Toronto area, do long-term planning, a five-year plan, and of course update those plans as necessary. So in the near future we are going to be able to fix the existing system we have and we are going to do better and improve it so that our standard of living will be significantly better than it is today.

1700

There is no question that public transportation is affecting our everyday life. Many of us spend significant time in gridlock—gridlock that, if I may say, is mostly caused by the poor decisions made by the prior administration, by the prior government. Not only did they not pay attention to public transportation but they also eliminated any subsidies to public transportation and left all the costs to the municipalities and the regions.

That has affected us so much that it will be many years before we are able to reach a decent, acceptable level and then do major investments, as we are doing now, for the long term.

I also wanted to stress that in Bill 104, one of the differences with the GTTA is that we are concentrating on the area of transportation planning and priorities. Unfortunately, the GTSB was all over the map. They were trying to address water and sewers; they were trying to address transit, roads and highways, social services, housing, economic development and trade, and growth management. They were not focused clearly on what they really wanted to do, and of course we know the results: In less than three years, they had to close and leave public transportation in the mess it was and is in even today. No matter how much investment we have made, we still have so much catch-up to do. But there is no question for me that Minister Takhar and the present government have put in and will continue to put in significant dollars to make public transportation something that in the long run we will be proud of.

We also need to create what I consider stable public transportation. In the past, we responded to pressure, either because there was political pressure or there were friends who had an interest in seeing some lands being developed. The pressure on the government of the day was to make sure that some transportation lines or roads were to be built only so their property could be built on, and that is not really good planning. We have to stop doing that, and that's what the GTTA is going to do. We're going to plan for many, many years to come, because only when we plan and invest a significant dollar amount yearly can we feel comfortable that the right thing will be done.

A stable public transportation industry is good not only because we will have a better transportation system, but at the same time it will also give some security to those employees working in this industry. We have people who were hired to build a subway, and that small section of the subway was completed and these individuals were left without a job. That is not something that we should encourage. Those people have lives, families, responsibilities, mortgages, things to do, and certainly not many people would be interested in getting involved in that type of employment when there is no reasonable security.

This industry also has been poorly dealt with. That is probably one of the reasons that, whenever we try to do something in public transportation today, the costs might be—are, in my opinion—more than what would normally be expected, because there is no consistency. There are no people doing the same job, if they choose to, for a long time. That means we may train and educate some individuals, but then, very shortly, they will have to look for another job because there is no security in that job. Therefore, next time there is an investment in transportation, some new people will be hired and again we'll have to start from scratch. There is nothing that makes sense in continuing in that direction.

I believe that long-term and consistent planning is needed. The GTTA is going to do that. Nothing in this world is perfect, but it is a very good start, and hopefully all of us will see the merit in supporting it.

I also want to touch again on the importance of this committee to coordinate the entire GTA. Today, as we all know, the government has allocated \$670 million to the expansion of the Spadina-York subway extension all the way to the corporate centre in the riding of Thornhill, which is my riding, and I'm very proud of that, or the city of Vaughan, as some people know better.

But that is not the only subway line that the GTA needs. We certainly are looking at Yonge Street as an area of higher transportation that needs significant attention. There is also a need for the Scarborough extension. There is also going to be a need for an extension from the Scarborough line that will connect the municipality of Markham right at city hall, where the town of Markham has done significant planning for a number of years. Today, if you drive around that area, you can see what good planning has gone into the works.

This is a very important topic. To conclude, I hope that all of you will appreciate the needs of having such a body that is made up with an interesting number. We have four people from Toronto and four people from the 905 area, so that we have the same representation and the same number of people. So the 905 in this matter certainly has been dealt with properly. Of course, we've got one from Hamilton and two people from the province of Ontario to make sure the decisions will be made wisely and well for the good of Ontarians. I trust that, as this committee starts working, their work will be very much appreciated by all of us and certainly by Ontarians, because there is no other way to go but this way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Time for questions and comments.

Mr. Chudleigh: It's interesting that this is a government bill that is coming forward and the government is supposed to be promoting this bill, and yet not once during this debate—and this is the second day of debate—has a government member used up his time on this debate. They're not really trying to sell this bill. You would think that maybe this bill is not as important to them as they would lead you to believe. Why is it that they don't take all their time to try to sell the bill? I say to the people at home: They are over there yapping. You can't hear them, but they're all over there yapping and they are not trying to sell their legislation. I think they are taking a backseat on this stuff so that when it comes time for an election and they have to defend this stuff, they will say, "Well, no, I wasn't all that supportive of it. No, I didn't speak to it. Well, I had to speak to it for a few minutes. I didn't speak to it for very long, because I don't really believe in it."

Anyway, I'm amazed. When we were over there, you filled the time allotted because you were proud of what you were doing and you were trying to sell the legislation to the people of Ontario.

The member talked about this being a long-term plan, and that was fine. Being a long-term plan, that's wonderful. We're all in agreement with that, but that's not what they promised during the election. During the election, they promised that there would be a transit card in place within 18 months. Now, this is the fifth or sixth announcement. They've made five or six announcements of it, and there is no transit card in place within 18 months of their election. No, sir, there's no transit card there, but they've announced it five or six times, in two throne speeches and three budgets. Three budgets and two throne speeches they've announced it, and we still don't have anything to show for it.

1710

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments?

Ms. Horwath: I'm going to speak with less of a tone.
Applause.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you. I want to thank the members for allowing me to take a bit of a voice rest. I want to thank the member for Thornhill for jumping in so quickly and taking some time to speak to the bill. Hopefully, I'll be all right in the next round and be able to make some more remarks.

The bill is definitely one that's not without controversy; there's no doubt about it. But it's also one that I think people will acknowledge at least the principle of: We need to move forward in some way in dealing with our transportation systems in the province.

It's unfortunate that the bill that has finally come forward is one that in many ways is disappointing to so many people, particularly in regard—and I've mentioned this before—to the lack of real power the board has to actually implement anything, because everything has to be decided at the provincial level once recommendations come forward from the authority. The other piece, of course, is the concern around the extent to which financing or funding or opportunities to generate revenue are going to be available to implement any of the recommendations that do come forward.

Speaking from the position of the city of Hamilton, which is pleased to be included in the GTTA, there still remain a number of concerns not only with the smart card and the implementation of that and the way to achieve the seamlessness that we all like to talk about, but also the extent to which the feeder municipalities, if you want to call them that, the individual municipalities, have transit systems that are functioning at a capacity that ensures that people are getting out of their cars and using them to then use the interregional system.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): I certainly agree with the member for Thornhill that this is extremely important across the GTA because we absolutely need a body to plan, prioritize and integrate transit systems across the GTA and the city of Hamilton.

Let me give you an example of what we've done in York region. Of course, the member for Oak Ridges is familiar with that in terms of history. A few years ago,

York region amalgamated various transit systems, including Markham transit and Richmond Hill transit, to form York Region Transit. At that time, I was on Markham and York regional council, and there were these naysayers who said, "No, this is not going to work. We in Markham are going to lose control of our transit system and our residents will not be well served," and on and on and on.

What has happened? York Region Transit has done extremely well, and people are actually saying, "Gee, this is really meeting the needs of the region, including residents in Markham, Richmond Hill and others who had transit systems before, as well as those who did not have a transit system, such as residents of Georgina." So I am quite convinced that if we have a centralized body responsible for overall planning and prioritizing, then it's going to work.

I want to talk briefly about a comment made by a previous speaker with respect to whether the minister will have control of the GTTA board simply because the two provincial appointees will be the chair and vice-chair respectively. This could not be further from the truth. I think this is actually a very rational, balanced approach. If there is going to be an appointee from the Toronto area or from the 905 area, then the other members will say, "Gee, this is going to be controlled by Toronto or controlled by the 905. We may as well pack it in."

Mr. Klees: I look forward to my 20 minutes coming up, in case anyone is tempted to turn off the television. It's coming very shortly.

In the meantime, I want to commend the member for her comments relating to this bill. I look forward to hearing her complete her debate. I think all of us in this House look forward to substance. I don't think there's anyone in this House—I can't imagine—who would disagree with the stated intent and purpose of the bill. What we all are looking forward to is some sense that there is more than spin here and more than another announcement.

I say this often: This government, without question, has the best spin doctors I have ever encountered in politics. They have the ability to put into the window a policy announcement. They have the ability to announce it and reannounce it and make it sound as though it's the latest and the newest. The problem is that after a number of months we see another reannouncement, and they all are as enthusiastic as they were on the first day they announced it, knowing that they haven't done anything about it. My concern, on behalf of my constituents and the people in this province, is that we have yet one more very nicely packaged announcement here, and when we get the wrapping off, we find an empty box.

So we're hopeful. We're hopeful that as time goes on we at least can force the minister to make some declaration of content that might accompany this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Time for a response.

Mr. Racco: Let me thank the members from Halton, Hamilton East, Markham and Oak Ridges. To the member from Halton I'll say that the bill is very simple

and it's wanted. That's why there's no need to waste hours on debating it, at least on our side. We know what we want, the objectives are met and we are happy to vote on it as soon as possible.

I want to remind the member from Hamilton East that her surrounding area is very much supportive of the GTTA. The articles in the local newspapers are making it clear. I am sure that if she will take direction from her neighbourhood ridings, she will be supportive of this bill when the vote will come.

My friend from Markham is quite familiar, as much as I am, with the needs of public transportation. His comments are clear that we need this type, because it happened not only in Markham but of course in Vaughan and Richmond Hill and so on, where we were able to increase significantly the use of public transportation. I want to remind this House that after we allocated the money from the tax on gas, the number in the region of York went up about 18.6%, when the average in Ontario went up 3.2%. That means the region of York needs a better way of making a decision on public transportation.

Again to the member from Oak Ridges, who talks about spin doctors: With the highest respect that I have for him, there isn't a better spin doctor than he in this House, and I don't have to remind him about the plastic cheques that my friend enjoyed showing. We don't do that. We provide actual funding to make sure that public transportation takes priority in this honourable House. We have made public transportation one of the most important issues in Ontario because we need it and it's the right thing to do.

The Acting Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to return to the member from Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: I'm going to try to get through these last nine minutes of my speech because I think this bill is extremely important to speak to. I've already run down some of the issues and concerns that I have from the perspective of someone who knows what it's like to deal with a transit system that is starved for cash, that is starved for dollars, that is starved for operating dollars and that is starved for capital dollars. I had a chance to talk a little bit about the Catch-22 that happens in a municipality when they're trying to find ways to make those budgets work, when the solutions inevitably end up leading to decreased ridership, which in and of itself is problematic because then it continues to reduce the efficiency of the system.

The areas in the bill that we are particularly concerned about—it's not necessarily specific to any area, but we're concerned that the bill itself is not going to achieve much at all. That's what is problematic about it. We don't think it's going to achieve much because we don't think that the GTTA, as it's put together in the bill, is going to be able to actually accomplish anything. We don't think it has the power to accomplish anything. In fact, our lead critic on this, the member from Toronto—Danforth, our newest member, Peter Tabuns, I think describes the bill as being an empty vessel. It's like a structure but without

any meat. It's a skeleton without meat on the bones, and that's a problem.

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Unfortunately, the recommendations that come forward are going to need to be implemented by government, so all of the most wonderful recommendations possible could come forward but not be implemented because the government simply is not prepared to implement them.

We were hopeful. Many people were hopeful. I think there were millions of people who were hopeful that we would see some real action on this situation. Why were people hopeful? Because, as I was saying to you earlier, the frustration of trying to get in and around the GTA as a commuter is absolutely frightening. I can remember the long weekend over Easter that we just had not too long ago. I left here, and I happened to have my car that day. That's the other thing: The frustrating part about this is that if people are not able to achieve a reasonable time frame getting to work or getting into the GTA using the transit system, they're going to go back to their cars. That's what is happening in a lot of cases. But on this particular Thursday, I did happen to have my car here.

From Toronto to Hamilton or Hamilton to Toronto is about 72 kilometres. At 100 kilometres an hour, you could get back and forth fairly quickly if you were driving at the speed limit. But the problem is that you never or rarely drive at the speed limit. I'm not saying it's because you drive faster; I'm saying that because invariably you're bumper to bumper all the way from the Gardiner Expressway right through to the Skyway bridge in Hamilton, and that has happened to me a number of times.

I left that one weekend on a—

Mr. Chudleigh: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to introduce my fiancée, Ms. Sandy Krueger, who's sitting in the west members' gallery. That's probably not a point of order, but it was an awful lot of fun.

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like confirmation from the lady in the gallery that that's actually a fact.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you for being here. You gave me an opportunity to have a voice break. I'm having trouble with my voice.

I left this place at about 10 minutes to 4, because I wasn't on duty that day, and I had to be back in Hamilton. I got back to Hamilton at 20 after 6. It took me two hours and 40 minutes to get from Toronto to Hamilton, and that's just insane. If there was a day, and sometimes there is—I'm being a bit facetious—from time to time when there are no major events going on in Toronto and it's a Sunday afternoon, you can actually drive it in about—now I have to figure out the math, because if I say the wrong amount of time, people will know how fast I drive on the highway—you can do it in about 50 minutes. In about 50 minutes you can get from Toronto to Hamilton on a clear day, as they say. But unfortunately

those days are not clear, because the GTA is paralyzed by gridlock. We all know it is.

We also know that there are other factors that have led to the gridlock that we have. It's not here by accident. It's here because of ongoing poor planning in the province; it's here because of massive urban sprawl that we continue to allow to occur. Unfortunately, those root causes are not being adequately addressed by the government. When those root causes aren't being addressed, when the real efforts aren't put in place to increase urban densities, reduce urban sprawl and to have firm urban boundaries so that development doesn't just continue to go on forever and ever without any end in sight, when those things continue to be allowed to happen in Ontario, we're not going to be able to ever really address the gridlock issue in any reasonable way.

But I want to get back to where we see some of the failures in the bill. It's not only the contributing factors, if you want to call them that, around the planning process and around the individual transit systems that will feed into the broader system that have been starved for so long and have not been able to provide a good option for commuters at the other end, but it's also when you acknowledge that the government has put in place basically an empty shell of a structure, an empty shell of a bill that, from what we can see, is not going to be able to easily achieve any number of solutions, because the process is going to require an entirely different set—if they were serious about moving forward in a speedy way, in a quick way, in a way that was going to get us some real solutions any time soon, you wouldn't see this kind of structure put in place.

I think everybody who is concerned about gridlock and the billions of dollars of lost economic activity because of gridlock would agree that something needs to be done. I think most people were looking quite carefully for the government to move forward on this particular file. Unfortunately, what we've ended up with is something where it is still really difficult to see how it's going to solve the problem.

We're concerned about the inability of the authority to implement anything that's got any teeth, but we also are concerned that the sources of revenue simply are not there for the implementation of any of these plans. They could come up with the greatest plans in the world, but unfortunately there's nothing at all built into this bill that guarantees or that in any way assists or helps the GTTA to find funding sources, or to be assured of funding sources or to be guaranteed funding sources for the solutions they find for our gridlock problems in the GTTA.

On the one hand, yes, as a Hamiltonian, it's nice for once for it to be acknowledged up front that our city is part of this Greater Golden Horseshoe area and needs to be part of the mix. Unfortunately, our transit system is falling apart. So are many others. This is not going to get us where we need to go.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Balkissoon: I'm pleased to add a few comments on Bill 104. The government's intention with Bill 104 is that the GTTA will bring together the province, municipalities and local transit agencies. The intent is for co-operation by the people who are appointed to the GTTA in the interests of the people we serve. To be honest with you, that's what the Canadian community is built on, democracy, that you can debate issues and come to conclusions.

A lot of the naysayers are saying that the bill has no teeth, that it has no power for the GTTA, and rightly so as they have read it to suit them because that's their ideology. I would remind them, though, that previous governments amalgamated the city of Toronto against the wishes of the people. I would remind them that the city of Toronto has struggled, that it has not worked. In fact, the cost for the city of Toronto has almost doubled. I was a member of the city of Toronto council.

I will also remind them that they ordered the GTSB—I was a member of the GTSB and it did not work because there was no co-operation.

I think the minister should be thanked for what he's doing here, which is giving those bodies, the transit authorities in the GTTA, a position on the board to sit and work out a strategy and make transit in this region work. We, as the government, will facilitate it. In fact, the government has already shown co-operation because we've actually brought in two cents of the gas tax to help the region with transit. If you talk to the mayors around the region, you'll see they're all thankful this government has done that.

There was a comment about the minister appointing political appointments. I got appointed to the previous government SHSC, which is a huge success.

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Mr. Chudleigh: The member for Scarborough—Rouge River makes an interesting point, that the GTSB failed because the organization of it didn't work. Yet that same organization is being reintroduced by the Minister of Transportation. That organization has already proved that it doesn't work. When you put one community against another community, you're not going to have any success. And that is unfortunate.

My comments should be directed towards the member from Hamilton, who very courageously finished her speech. I know the feeling when your voice leaves you, especially when you're in this business. It's your main asset. When your voice leaves you, it becomes very difficult. Congratulations on persevering, showing your courage and coming back and finishing your speech. That was great. Of course, it's not only finishing her speech, but what she said.

The points that she made were very important, in that this bill will probably not accomplish what it has to accomplish. The people of Hamilton, the people of Halton, the people of Durham, the people of Toronto and the people of York will not arrive at the point where they can count on public transit to get them to and from their work, to and from the places they want to go to, in the

future. That's a shame, because a city the size of Toronto and the surrounding areas really should have an integrated system that works, and works well. The member for Hamilton pointed out that that is not going to happen with this piece of legislation. Until we get this piece of legislation straightened out—and maybe it can be straightened out in committee; maybe there can be additions to it that will make it work. But until we get there, this legislation has a long way to go.

Mr. Hampton: I want to congratulate the member for Hamilton East for her valiant effort in speaking to this bill. I think anyone who was watching at home saw the great difficulty the member from Hamilton East was having in speaking about a bill that is essentially an empty vessel. In fact, this bill left her speechless on not one but two attempts. The reason it left her speechless is that we have to remember that this bill and what it's supposed to be about has been announced in three budgets, two throne speeches, a plethora of press conferences and a multitude of photo ops. Yet when it finally makes its appearance in the third year into the McGuinty government, while there is a lot of paper, there's hardly anything here.

Anyone knows that if you're going to run a transit system, you have to have a capital plan and capital capacity—money for capital. If you read this bill, as the member for Hamilton East pointed out, there is none. If you're going to run a transit system, you have to have an operating financial plan and operating financial capacity. But when you read this bill, there is none. So no wonder the member for Hamilton East was rendered speechless twice by this empty vessel.

I also want to thank the member for Hamilton East for pointing out just how serious this problem has become, that a lot of money and people's time is being lost in the economy of the greater Toronto area because there isn't a working, functioning, efficient transit system.

Mr. Peterson: It's a real pleasure to speak to a bill which I think puts forward long-range planning and ideas which surpass maybe the mundane nature that the members opposite wish to see in it. I used to fly to Japan on business, and we would go across the Pacific Ocean in 300 miles of beautiful clear skies. After 10 hours of flying we would see a thunder cloud. It wasn't a thunder cloud at all; it was Osaka and Tokyo clouded in smog and haze that only dissipated once a year when they closed down all the factories and a lot of the cars would be taken off the roads.

Part of planning transportation is getting rid of the biggest source of pollution we have in our environment, which is the automobile, and finding ways for people to travel and for goods to move in a less polluted, more efficient way. It is not an easy process to bring together different levels of government and different municipalities and it's not easy even to get the NDP—who, one would always think, would believe in the collective, would believe that we, as a group, can do more than we can as individuals—to buy into this. It amazes me.

Certainly when you try to herd cats, as you find in the Conservative Party, you couldn't get them to buy into it.

This is a very interesting approach to building a better future for our children, building a cleaner environment and for us to spend less of our time in the commute of life but rather in the fulfillment of life.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for a response. The Chair recognizes the member from Hamilton East.

Ms. Horwath: I want to thank the members for Scarborough–Rouge River, Halton, Rainy River and Mississauga South for their remarks, but before I speak to those, I wanted to also thank the member from Etobicoke North, who gave me advice in terms of trying to get my voice back. Unfortunately, he told me to go and put some steam in my face from the washroom here and maybe the steam would help my throat. Unfortunately, the water doesn't get hot enough, I found out. I guess we're trying to save money around here, too, which is always a good thing.

The members who spoke to my remarks focused on a number of different issues, and I think everybody's quite aware of the importance of us dealing with the gridlock. I want to thank the member for Scarborough–Rouge River, who spent some of his time, though, talking about ministerial political appointments, which I didn't raise in my remarks. Maybe he's feeling a little bit guilty about something over there—I'm not sure.

Nonetheless the member from Halton spent some time talking about his experience around reliability. I think that's extremely important and that's something I tried to illustrate as well. If people do not find the systems to be reliable, whether it's their own system in their own region or whether it's an inter-regional system, they're not going to be committed to it and we're not going to get that kind of buy-in.

To the member from Rainy River, I appreciate very much his comments, particularly around not only the lack of financing, which I raised in my speech, which is extremely important, but also the fact that this government has announced this over and over again, and then to come up with something that is so short on—

Mr. Hampton: Lame.

Ms. Horwath: Yes, so lame—so short on action is problematic and very concerning for all of us.

Finally, the member from Mississauga South spent some time talking about his own experiences in another city where smog was a big problem.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Oak Ridges.

Mr. Klees: I'm pleased to address this legislation before us. I want to say at the outset that I support the intent of this bill. In fact, if one believes, as I believe, that gridlock is one of the key issues in the greater Toronto area for any government to wrestle with, then it's appropriate that a government would bring forward specific legislation to deal with that. I'm sure that's the intent of the government with this legislation.

I have serious concerns, and that is that while the legislation, in broad terms, speaks about the importance

of planning, addresses the issue of broader coordination of transportation plans and transit plans, while it speaks about bringing the various regions into the planning process, it addresses what I believe to be important as well, and that is a broader coordinated and integrated fare card or policy.

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As has been mentioned by other speakers, there is very little substance in this bill. I want to start by referring to a comment made by the Minister of Transportation in his earlier remarks, in which he said that the previous government had no transit plan, had no transportation plan. I want to set the record straight to make it very clear that many of these items that are being brought forward now in this legislation were in fact part of our transportation and transit plan and strategy that was developed in consultation with stakeholders in transportation and in transit. The Smart Growth strategy, which unfortunately we don't hear this government speak about, was a planning strategy that incorporated a number of years of very important work that was done by the broader community. It was work that produced significant and very substantive planning documents for the greater Toronto area that addressed growth, that addressed transit and transportation, and identified certain priorities. My encouragement to the minister is to look into the filing drawers and look for those documents that relate to Smart Growth planning, and it will save you a lot of time. In fact, it will help to focus your priorities.

The minister also made the statement that there was never a transit or a transportation strategy. The fact is that we were working under a 10-year provincial transit investment program: \$335 million a year committed for 10 years. That was the long-term commitment under that program. In 2003, under that program, \$62.3 million was dedicated for TTC transit capital renewal. That was under the 2003 municipal transit renewal program, which the minister should know about. There was \$50.8 million per year as part of that, which was freed up for GO Transit capital costs resulting from the provincial uploading of GO Transit, which was all part of that transit strategy. There was \$13.3 million for inter-regional transit expansion. Those were under the GTIP program, which again supplemented the broader provincial transit strategy of our government. There was \$64 million for the TTC subway system and another \$511 million that the minister seems to forget about that was dedicated to the Sheppard subway. In addition to that, there was another \$50 million in 2001 for not only the Sheppard subway, but 55 other projects.

Now, if the minister can in all good conscience stand in his place and say, "There wasn't a transit strategy," I don't know what that was. But I ask the minister to go back to his own briefing notes. These are all in your drawer; I left them there for you. They're in the bottom left-hand drawer of your desk.

Hon. Mr. Takhar: There were none there.

Mr. Klees: Have a look, and you will find that not only was there a strategy there, but there was a commitment from the previous government.

With regard to transportation, in that same drawer, you will find our 10-year, \$10-billion strategy for transportation. While we were the government, we spent that money; we invested that money in Ontario's road systems. I wanted to set that record straight because I think it will benefit the minister significantly if he looks up some of that information.

But I want to get on to this bill that is before us. First of all, I'd like to speak about the structure. I commend the government for streamlining the size of this organization, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, and limiting it to the number of members of that board that they have. I think that is wise, and I will support that. However, here is where I believe a mistake has been made, and I ask the minister to give serious consideration to this. While there are appointments there from the city of Toronto—I believe there are four—and then one for each of the regions, and the minister has latitude to make, I believe, two appointments, what this legislation allows is that those appointments from the regions and the city of Toronto be elected officials.

Hon. Mr. Takhar: No, it doesn't.

Mr. Klees: Well, it allows. It doesn't say that they are restricted. It simply states—well, the minister says it doesn't, and I'm going to be very interested now in looking at this, because under section 9 it states:

"(2) The board shall be composed of,

"(a) two persons appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister," so obviously that is whoever the minister deems appropriate.

"(b) the following persons appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister:

"(i) four persons recommended by the council of the city of Toronto,

"(ii) one person recommended by the council of the city of Hamilton...."

Minister, unless I'm reading this incorrectly, that certainly leaves latitude for these councils to appoint an elected official. I'm saying to you in all sincerity, the member from Scarborough—Rouge River earlier mentioned and referred to the failure of the GTSB. That was a failure, and I believe as we discuss this issue with anyone, and perhaps the member from Scarborough—Rouge River will admit this, one of the reasons was the parochialism that developed on that board where we had politicians appointed to that board, obviously fighting for their own reasons and self-interest. That's why we had decision gridlock on that board.

As I was looking at this broader issue when I sat in that chair, the conclusion that I came to was that in order for a transportation authority like this to work, it should not be elected officials who sit or are appointed on that board. It should be individuals who have expertise in planning, who have expertise in transit or transportation

matters, so that the planning that takes place and the responsibilities as set out in this legislation can in fact be done not from the standpoint of what is politically expedient or whoever has the most political clout, but that it is what is in the best interests of transportation planning, transit planning, for the greater Toronto area.

My recommendation, Minister, is that you consider making an amendment to this legislation that would preclude an appointment of an elected official. Councils have the opportunity to meet with, to discuss their particular interests, and to do that through the appointed person, but I believe it's going to serve you well, and the government and the province of Ontario well, if you would consider that change.

I'd like to also refer to the responsibility that the corporation has. Under section 6, it states clearly:

“(1) In carrying out its objects as described in clause 5(1)(a), the corporation shall,

“(a) create a transportation plan for the regional transportation area and plan, coordinate and set priorities...,” and that's appropriate. That's a very important direction that you, as minister, give.

However, here's my concern. You move on then to 6(2)(a), and it reads as follows. The transportation plan required for implementation must,

“(a) take into consideration all modes of transportation, including highways, railways, local transit systems, the GO Transit system, cycling and walking;

“(b) be consistent with the minister's transportation strategy for the province...”

The reason I point this out is that I don't know what your transportation strategy is. There is none contained here in the legislation. There should be one. Perhaps you're working on that—I hope you are—but there isn't one now. So what we have here is a direction to this new organization that you're going to bring into being. You're asking them to set a transportation plan, which is appropriate, but it must be consistent with your provincial transportation strategy. I would ask the minister, perhaps in his reply, to tell the House what that transportation strategy is, where we can find it, where we can go to see it, or, if it's in development, when we can expect to see it. In fact, is there an opportunity for us to participate with you in the development of that if it isn't already packaged?

1750

There is no doubt in my mind that this transportation plan for the province of Ontario is probably one of the most important policy issues this government or any successive government will have to deal with. It deals not only with our quality of life; it deals with the economic impact. There isn't a person in this province who is not affected by the gridlock we are experiencing in the greater Toronto area and in many other parts of the province. We have a great deal of work to do, and it needs to be done in a way that is efficient and takes into consideration the various regional issues. I hope we'll hear from the minister regarding his provincial transportation strategy.

I want to also commend the minister and the government for assigning to the GTTA the responsibility to develop a common fare system. It's referred to in the legislation as a “unified fare system,” under section 7. It is absolutely true, and the minister will know, that the former government, and I, in my capacity as transportation minister, supported this. We already had a pilot project under development with GO Transit to develop a smart card system. The objective of that smart card system, of course, is to facilitate a unified fare card. I am interested to know what the status of that is, and from seeing it in this legislation now, I'm assuming that has been a successful exercise. I think anything we can do to streamline and make it easier for people to access public transit is our responsibility. One of the reasons people don't use transit is because it's too complicated for them. They're not sure when they can get access to a bus or a train, and then the fare system sometimes is complicated. It's a lot easier for people to say, “I'll forget all this and drive my car.”

Anything we can do to make it attractive for the consumer to use public transit, I support. I support the unified fare system; I think it's the right thing to do. We look forward to seeing that happen.

I'm running out of time. I know there's five minutes to go. I have so much more to say. I wonder if I can get unanimous consent for me to have another hour to carry on.

Interjections.

Mr. Klees: It's agreed. On that basis, I'll carry on.

I want to ask the minister—

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Klees, you have four minutes to go.

Mr. Klees: Thank you. I want everyone watching to know that members of the Legislature agreed unanimously to give me the hour. The Speaker is denying it. He's limiting me—

The Acting Speaker: I'm not denying it. This day: It's today we're dealing with.

Mr. Klees: I'll have to squeeze into four minutes what I would otherwise say in an hour. This is going to be difficult.

I want to draw attention to the issue of how the minister intends to create this transition, because this legislation now is dissolving GO Transit and effectively folding the responsibility for the operation of GO Transit into the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.

My concern here is that if we want this body to be the planning body, to load it up at the front end with operational responsibilities that are currently the responsibility of GO Transit—and, quite frankly, I think they're doing a great job—I would ask the minister to consider allowing this GTTA to do its business as a priority and not burden it with the responsibility of GO Transit operational responsibilities at the outset. If at some point it gets folded in, then that may well be fine.

Hon. Mr. Takhar: Agreed. That's what I said.

Mr. Klees: I hear the minister saying he agrees, and I'm encouraged by that. That's good. I was concerned when I read this, because I really believe that the priority

for this organization has to be the planning and the implementation.

Finally, it all comes down to money. While I see provisions here for the authority to have the responsibility of funding and developing funding or creating a mechanism for funding, at the end of the day, if the Minister of Transportation does not have the support of Management Board and cabinet to ensure that the funding is available, then again we're back to where my colleague from Hamilton East made her point, and that is that we have merely empty rhetoric here without any hope of seeing any substantive result.

I'll be looking forward, over the course of further debate and perhaps in committee, to finding out what the government's plan is for funding of the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. If we can deal with some of these issues that I have raised, I'll be the first one to support the minister in attempting to bring this matter forward. I believe, in the final analysis, in principle it's the right thing to do.

The Acting Speaker: It being approximately 6 p.m. on the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 8, 2006, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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