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Jeudi 18 mai 2006

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L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 18 May 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 18 mai 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

FARM MUTUAL INSURANCE INDUSTRY

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should continue to support the increasing solvency and vitality of the farm mutual insurance industry as a key component of the economic and social fabric of rural Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Perth–Middlesex.

Mr. Wilkinson: It is with pride that I rise to debate the resolution I have placed before the Legislature today. We are here this morning to discuss the farm mutual insurance industry. Many in Ontario would not instantly recognize farm mutuals as the rural bedrock that they are. I hope that my time here today, along with the words of my colleagues, will shed some light on why we should celebrate this important aspect of rural Ontario through my private member's resolution. I'm most grateful that my caucus-mates the members for Huron–Bruce, Peterborough and Hastings–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington have all agreed to join this debate this morning in support of my resolution.

Today I will speak to a number of different facets of the farm mutual insurance industry. I will touch on the history of Ontario's farm mutuals, as well as the characteristics that make them uniquely self-sustaining. My colleagues will highlight their importance to both the economic and social fabric of rural Ontario, as well as their many notable achievements.

First I'd like to share with the House a letter I received from my constituents Brian and Wendy Anderson. They are dairy farmers near Stratford in the former South Easthope township.

"Just as we finished milking at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday, August 23, 2003, fire broke out in our three-year-old dairy barn. We lost the entire tie-stall barn, the roof from our milking parlour and about 30 purebred Holstein cows. Even as the flames were still consuming the rubble, we received warnings to watch out for the insurance people—dealing with them would only add to our difficulties!

"We need not have worried. Our family has dealt with South Easthope Mutual Insurance Co. for generations for both business and personal insurance. Having just expanded our business, we were well insured for both loss and business interruption.

"The fire department was still working when the first of the company directors arrived to offer their support. By the end of the morning, about half of the directors had been to see us. On Monday morning, our agent brought the general manager of the company to meet us and to assure us that their goal was to get Athlone Farms up and running again as soon as possible. One of the directors, also an adjuster, was assigned to our claim and we worked closely with Murray throughout the planning process for our new barn. All of our plans were approved with very little discussion—the company replaced everything that we had lost and we assumed the cost of any extras that we needed for the new facility. During the eight months that it took for our cows to come home, we met monthly with our claim supervisor to go over our expenses for maintaining the herd and the invoices for the construction project. We were able to keep all of our accounts current due to the efficient release of funds from the insurance company.

"At the time, our claim of well over \$1 million was the largest on record for South Easthope Mutual Insurance Co. and we hope that is still the case! It was a very difficult time in our lives and an experience that we would not want to wish on anyone. Dealing with our local insurance company, with people who understand agriculture and farmers' needs, made that part of the rebuilding as pain-free as possible. If only South Easthope Mutual controlled the weather, the construction would have gone much faster!"

That letter says it all.

I am lucky to have a number of mutuals serving Perth–Middlesex. Middlesex Mutual, based in Ilderton, was formed in 1998 when two local mutuals merged to better serve Middlesex residents: McGillivray Mutual, formed in 1876, and London Township Mutual, formed in 1882. Middlesex Mutual has served my communities for more than 246 combined years of service. Tradition Mutual of Sebringville was founded by a merger in 2003. Blanshard Mutual and Downie Mutual combined their more than 100 years of service in 2003. Tradition Mutual serves 6,500 policyholders in Perth–Middlesex, writing \$10.5 million in premiums and holding more than \$20 million in assets. South Easthope Mutual, based just outside my riding's boundaries in Tavistock, serves citizens in Perth–Middlesex, like the Andersons. Founded in 1871,

South Easthope Mutual was founded by local farmers and businessmen in need of affordable fire insurance for their community. These are just three of the 45 farm mutuals across Ontario.

Ontario's farm mutuals were fostered out of co-operation and community goodwill. Communities came together in the face of a mutual threat: fire. The prospect of fire is devastating for a farmer as it can ruin not only their business but also their home. This was a significant concern in the 1800s, when families often cooked, ate and slept all in one room. Lightning was a hazard, and without modern fire prevention technology it was invariably disastrous. In the 1800s it was nearly impossible to get insurance if you were a farmer. The insurance companies were based in England, with offices in Quebec. Service was impractical and insurance was not affordable.

It was under this threat that communities banded together to form mutuals. In the spirit of co-operation and mutual dependence, citizens established non-profit insurance companies that they themselves owned. That is the key: If you're a farm mutual policyholder, you're an owner. Everyone has a vote, and the board of directors is elected by policyholders.

Farm mutuals were extremely popular because they reflected their communities. They were staffed, operated and directed by farmers themselves. Because the farmers involved knew each other personally, they were able to underwrite easily. Community benefit was the motive, not profit.

Rural Ontario worked hard to make sure that farm mutuals had the foundations for longevity. Farmers petitioned governments to pass legislation to establish farm mutuals, and in 1836, 170 years ago, their wish came true. Legislation enshrined the principles of mutual insurance protection. This act allowed the formation of one mutual fire insurance company in each district—the beginning of farm mutuals in Ontario.

Farm mutuals have been among Ontario's most successful businesses. The oldest remaining mutual in Ontario is Dumfries Mutual Insurance Co. Dumfries Mutual was founded in 1856, 150 years ago, in the village of Roseville, and serves 7,500 policyholders in the Cambridge, Guelph and Hamilton areas today.

By the late 1880s, more than 70 mutual insurance companies were offering services in rural Ontario. This led to the founding of the first industry association, the Mutual Fire Underwriters' Association of Ontario, to promote the interests of mutuals and to help coordinate the industry. Now known as the Ontario Mutual Insurance Association, they continue to represent the interests of mutuals at Queen's Park and in the communities they serve.

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Since that time, mutual insurance has grown enormously, evolving into a modern industry, yet still embodying the spirit of community, co-operation and trust.

Farm mutuals currently have almost 400,000 policyholders and offer a wide variety of insurance services.

Services today go beyond fire insurance; wind and other damage were added in the 1950s. The 1970s saw mutuals offer liability and auto insurance. Commercial coverage was added in the 1980s.

Farm mutuals have consistently grown with the times, and changes to their mandate are necessary to ensure that the industry can adequately serve their communities well into the future.

The 2006 budget announced our intention to amend the Insurance Act and to make changes to the Corporations Act by updating investment rules and corporate governance provisions for Ontario-incorporated insurers, which include farm mutuals. Minister Duncan is responding to the request from farm mutuals for greater flexibility for investment rules, consistent with those that apply to federally incorporated companies. Most Ontario insurers are now federally incorporated and therefore governed by federal rules of investments, which provide for a prudent portfolio approach, giving companies flexibility in their investments and supporting strong corporate governance. The prudent portfolio approach to effective regulation is based on the appropriateness of the entire investment and loan portfolio to the insurer and the management of conflict of interest in investment decisions.

I can tell you that our government is proposing to follow generally the approach taken in the federal act, with some modifications that would take into account the smaller size of Ontario insurers, as other provinces have done.

Smart, effective regulation of Ontario-incorporated insurers ultimately strengthens the security of insurance benefits for policyholders while keeping costs down by allowing insurers appropriate flexibility to manage their business affairs.

Farm mutuals have evolved and will continue to evolve. That's why I seek the support of this House regarding my resolution today. The farm mutual insurance industry has been owned and operated by policyholders on a non-profit basis for some 170 years. Mutuals continue to employ countless residents in rural Ontario who provide non-profit, community-based service. The mutuals remain intimately involved in their communities as sponsors and volunteers for local events, charities and service organizations. Farm mutuals are a made-in-Ontario success story. That's why expanding the services they provide, as well as the support of this House today, will go a long way to ensure that farm mutuals remain central to their communities for years to come. I support the farm mutual insurance industry and believe that it is why I ask all of my colleagues to support this resolution.

I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak on a subject that's dear to my own heart and to those of the residents of my riding of Perth-Middlesex. They have a tremendous impact on all of rural Ontario. I look forward to the comments of my colleagues on this resolution. I want to say to the Anderson family, thank you so much for sharing your own personal story with all of our colleagues today. It gives us the best proof that we

could ask for as to why we need to support this resolution.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It's a pleasure to join my friend from Perth–Middlesex this morning, or to join others in supporting the resolution of the member from Perth–Middlesex with regard to his support for the farm mutual insurance industry in the province of Ontario. It certainly is something that I can wholeheartedly stand in support of. Mr. Wilkinson has gone through the history and the chronology of farm mutuals here in the province of Ontario, so it's not necessary that we go through all of that again, but I certainly agree on the benefits it has accorded people in rural Ontario and rural communities.

When it comes right down to it—and I do support the member. Sometimes we disagree on different things, but we certainly do recognize jointly and severally the importance of rural Ontario here in this House and how much we must fight in order to ensure that rural Ontario, not only the farm mutual insurance industry in rural Ontario but rural Ontario itself, remains viable.

I certainly appreciate the hospitality that has been shown to me through the farm mutuals, attending their conferences and breakfasts. I want to thank Gord Huckabone again for taking me to those events and getting an insight into just how important a service they do provide to farmers and rural people in this province. As Mr. Wilkinson said, there are nearly 400 policy holders in this province—

Mr. Wilkinson: Nearly 400,000.

Mr. Yakabuski: Did I say “400”? I'm sorry. Let me correct that record before we sit down. I appreciate it. Sometimes heckling is actually good, you see? It's 400,000. Let me emphasize that: It's 400,000. A number of them serve people in my riding. There's not actually a brokerage established in my riding, but there are some surrounding: Lanark Mutual Insurance Co. in Perth and the Lennox and Addington in Napanee serve people in my riding with regard to their insurance needs.

The insurance business, as we know, is changing. A lot of things are changing in the landscape of Ontario. I think it is fair to say that some of those bedrock institutions require a certain amount of our support and encouragement to ensure that institutions that have served this province since before Confederation are allowed to continue and prosper in this province.

This is one of those occasions when you may notice that my voice is more soothing in this House than at other times, because it's one of those occasions when, in a completely non-partisan way—and I am not a partisan person, as you know, but I certainly am one who feels it necessary to make significant points at times on behalf of the constituents we serve and on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario. In the nature of government, you don't always agree. It is absolutely necessary and it is our responsibility to disagree. Not only is it our privilege, but we are bound to do that when we feel we must. But in situations like this, it is so obvious and so clear that this

is something that we can support without reservation. I'm pleased that the member from Perth–Middlesex has seen fit to bring this to the attention of the House for us on this day for this particular debate. I certainly hope that I speak for all members of my caucus when I say I'm going to stand here and rise in support of this bill when the vote comes later this morning or early afternoon because this is something I'm looking forward to.

However, there are, of course, other issues that we disagree on. I see that the government, under tremendous pressure from our side, has decided to inject some sanity into the Minister of Health with regard to the tremendous, terrible draconian measures they were about to inflict on farmers' markets and church suppers in this province. I appreciate that the government has made a positive move in that respect, but not without some very heavy pressure on the part of the members of this side, particularly my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, who comes under a great deal of criticism on this side of the House from the members opposite but who carries himself with tremendous comportsment. His work and his fight for rural people never go unnoticed on my part and theirs.

I'm just about out of time here, because there are people who want to speak on this side as well. But I do want to say “congratulations” to the member for Perth–Middlesex. Well done. We'll be there at 12 o'clock.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I'm very pleased to rise today to not only speak to this motion but to support this motion brought forward by the good member from Perth–Middlesex. Farm mutual insurance companies provide a vital service in the riding that I have the honour and privilege to represent. They are part of the economic diversity and prosperity of rural Ontario. There are 45 farm mutual insurance companies across Ontario, and seven are located in the riding of Huron–Bruce. I want to take this opportunity to speak about all seven that are located in the riding.

The first is Trillium Mutual, which is located in Formosa and Elma. It's the second-largest farm mutual in Ontario. Formosa Mutual and Elma Mutual combined in 2004, and together they have over 200 years of service.

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Howick Mutual, which is located in Wroxeter, was founded in 1883 as a result of a public meeting that was held in the home of a local resident. The first annual report was written in 1873, and it indicated that \$114.72 in premiums had been written and no claims were incurred. They offered scholarships to six local students annually, and they sponsored the Wingham Town Hall Heritage Theatre.

The next, Culross Mutual, is located in Teeswater, and they have total assets in excess of \$2.2 million. They were founded in 1872 and they built their first office building in 1992. That was after starting a fund in 1983.

The next, West Wawanosh, is located in Dungannon. They were founded in 1879, and they write approximately 3,000 farms. They are among the top 10 Ontario mutuals in premiums written.

Lastly, I have McKillop Mutual, which is located in Seaforth. It was founded in 1876, and it serves not only Huron county but Perth as well. There are approximately 500 policyholders. They manage more than \$16 million in assets.

That is the list of seven, and it is a very strong indication of how important the mutuals are to all of rural Ontario.

As you can see, all the mutual insurance companies in my riding clearly demonstrate the commitment and the dedication to rural Ontario, and they have been doing it for well over 100 years. It also demonstrates their continuous support of local organizations, fall fairs, festivals and plowing matches, and that's just to name a few. You can't go to an event in my riding where you don't see the logos. They are so strong in our communities.

All company directors—I believe this is one of the strengths they bring forward—are policyholders, and they're elected by policyholders, which ensures local input. These policyholders live in the communities, so they understand the local issues and concerns. Therefore, their services are customized to their communities.

I, along with the member from Essex, as part of the rural caucus, had the opportunity to work with the Ontario Mutual Insurance Association to strengthen it. As a result, the 2006 provincial budget announced the government's intention to amend the Insurance Act and make changes to the Corporations Act by updating investment rules. This came from a request from farm mutuals for greater flexibility in investment rules. We worked on their behalf—the rural caucus remains strong—because we felt that these companies needed that in order to remain strong.

Another unique service the mutual insurance companies offer is called Mutual Protect. They have joined services with the Ontario Provincial Police, and it's a simple, reliable way to have your valuables permanently linked to your licence plate by engraving your licence plate number on a sticker and placing that on your valuables. That's how they have worked with the OPP to track all our valuables.

As a member representing rural Ontario, I fully support this resolution. Farm mutuals are a vital part of our rural communities, and I know they will be for years to come. I just want to say thank you to the mutuals for inviting me to their annual meeting in Toronto. It once again gives us the opportunity to have further discussions and to ensure that they continue to be a vital part of our communities.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): It's a pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of the resolution "that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should continue to support the increasing solvency and vitality of the farm mutual insurance industry," given the fact that with nearly 400,000 policyholders, this industry, owned by rural Ontarians for rural Ontario, is "a key component of the economic and social fabric of rural Ontario," brought forward by my colleague from Perth–Middlesex.

Certainly in my area, in the riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, we have enjoyed the service of Farmers' Mutual since 1895, so it was soon after it was first created in 1856. It was to provide insurance to farmers in Victoria county who couldn't find companies to insure them. The only insurance products offered by them back then were fire and lightning policies to insure farm buildings, chattels and livestock. In the first year of business, they wrote policies for 197 policyholders and collected slightly over \$1,200 in premiums.

Today's Farmers' Mutual in Lindsay is the largest farm mutual insurance company in Ontario, and it offers a complete range of insurance products, including residential, automobile, commercial, farm and watercraft. They employ 75 full-time employees. Last year I was at the grand opening of their new building, a state-of-the-art building, which I encourage everyone to visit. It's just on Angeline Street, towards Highway 7.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's a beautiful building.

Ms. Scott: It is a beautiful building, my colleague from Peterborough mentions, and it's located right beside the new Lindsay agricultural fairgrounds that are going to open in the next year. It's a great location and a great tie-in to the community and the services they provide in rural Ontario.

I myself have my insurance with Farmers' Mutual. I try not to use it too much. Occasionally, I do deer hunt with my car, but it's just the nature of the area we live in and the number of deer there—not that we're advertising for that.

They have done a great job. They're wonderful community members. It has been mentioned before that they sponsor and support community team projects. I've been able to go to the big Farmers' Mutual banquet they have each year in Toronto. You just cannot meet a finer group of individuals than you meet at these dinners.

Mr. Leal: Salt of the earth.

Ms. Scott: They are the salt of the earth. The tie-in to the agricultural community is there. They consider families, communities. They are the epitome of rural Ontario and a great example of what caring about your neighbour is for. That is a lot of their history and why they were formed: strength in unity, neighbour helping neighbour. The mutuals evolved through the decades to be up to date, to offer people the best insurance, the best coverage they could realize.

They're community-owned and owned by policyholders, and that makes a difference. I know that whenever I meet them in the communities, they are always adaptable to what goes on in each community. They're not the cookie-cutter approach. They adjust to what's needed in the communities. In this day and age, when you can have that type of service, it's to be valued. They come to our houses, our farms and take in everyone's situation individually. They are an important aspect of rural Ontario. They're important, with their dedication and their commitment.

I wholly support this resolution brought forward by the member from Perth–Middlesex. Anything we can do

to continue to support the farm mutual insurance industry so they can remain viable is what we in the Legislature should do.

I know that I need to share my time with another colleague who wants to support this bill. Thank you very much.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I am probably going to be the only speaker today who is a city boy, who has lived his whole life in the city. In fact, in my entire life I have never been on a farm. But I am going to live on a farm this year for part of my vacation. I have determined that it is important that I get to understand a farmer's life, waking up in the morning and finding out what this is all about, so I will be spending at least one week on a farm near Creemore, Ontario. I hope to report to all of you how—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: This is in Ontario, not Quebec. I make sure that when I learn something, I learn it in this province.

I'm going to go there, and I hope to report back to you when the House resumes in September or October what I have learned about life as a farmer, although in one week I don't think I will be one of the world's great experts. But I do think it's important that city people try to understand the farming community, farmers and the very many difficulties they're having.

When I looked at the bill, I thought, "Of course we're going to support it," and of course in the end I'm going to support it. But I wonder why, with all respect, it is here. It's not a bill; it's a resolution.

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The resolution says that "the government of Ontario should continue to support the increasing solvency and vitality of the farm mutual insurance industry," given the fact that it has all the policyholders and is "a key component of the economic and social fabric of rural Ontario." It never crossed my mind for even a moment that this policy of supporting the farm mutual insurance industry in Ontario was at risk, that anyone was thinking even for a moment of not supporting an institution that has done so much good for so many in this province. Maybe the mover of the resolution, when he wraps up, can explain why he thinks it's necessary to reiterate that support. Is it somehow under risk? Is somebody trying to do away with it? Are other insurance agencies perhaps trying to become interlopers? Are they trying to move in on this field and take over from the farmers' own self-regulated and self-owned insurance industry? Maybe that's happening and I, as a city boy, just don't understand.

I do understand, though, the whole concept of co-ops, because co-ops are not just those on the farms; co-ops exist in many forms, in terms of factories, banking institutions, farms and farm products right across the width and breadth of the province of Ontario. In fact, I had an opportunity over the last two years to work with the co-op movement because they're trying to re-energize themselves, to give government a better understanding of what they do and perhaps to change legislation relating to co-

ops in Ontario. I was the New Democratic Party representative in that ongoing discussion. There were members from the Conservative party, of course, and Liberals, but I was the New Democrat who was there and I attended most of their meetings. The co-op movement, I'm glad to say, is alive and well. They exist to benefit society as a whole and the greater good of the people who live in this province. They also return all the profits they make back to the shareholders. In some cases, those shareholders are very needy people indeed.

So I support the motion because this is, in part, part of that very co-operative movement that has existed in the province for many, many years. But I have to ask—and I guess this is where the debate might become a little partisan for a moment—what would be the sense of protecting this vital and wonderful industry if there are no farmers left to use it? In the last few years in this Legislature there have been a great many questions asked and very few answers coming about farmers and the farming community in general. I have to tell you that it's been a bit of an eye-opener to me. As I said, as I started out in the preface to my remarks, I've never been on a farm, but many farmers come see me in my role as MPP and talk about the difficulty they are having that continues to exist in this province.

The tobacco farmers came maybe two weeks ago to see me with tears in their eyes. They know that their day is done. They know that the tobacco industry in Ontario is not going to survive. They know that the monies they have spent, the millions of dollars they have put in tobacco harvesting equipment and the flues and the cures and all the things that are on the farms today, probably are all for naught. Society has made the decision that tobacco is going to be phased out. I put my hand up to phase out tobacco because I know that it is a carcinogen. I know that society has changed its attitude towards the smoking of tobacco in public places. I'm hoping that before I die, and I hope that's a long time from now, tobacco will be a thing that used to happen, just like spittoons used to be on the floor for chewing tobacco. You don't see that anymore. I'm hoping you won't see the lighting up of cigarettes anymore as well.

But the tobacco farmers know that, and what they're looking for is not unreasonable. They're looking for fair and just compensation. They're looking for the government to do something for them, to assist them in getting into another line of work and perhaps getting out of farming altogether. As one farmer explained to me, again with tears in his eyes, his land on sandy soil is probably not good for a great range of anything—not vegetable farming or anything. Before that it was forested land, and he suggests that perhaps he should go into the tree business because that might be the only thing that is growable there. I don't know what kind of a market there is for the sale of trees, save and except those that you pot and transplant.

I also have to ask the whole question about the long-standing farmers and the number who appear to be on the brink of bankruptcy. They have come to see me. They

have asked why the government doesn't have a risk management program, exactly like what the member from Perth-Middlesex is talking about today. Farm mutual insurance is a program developed by farmers for farmers. What they are asking is, why hasn't the government developed a plan that mirrors that, which will help farmers to keep themselves and their families firmly in the realm where they have lived, many times for generations?

There are many farm crises out there. We have to ask the question, in support of the farmers who ultimately will use the service of the farm mutual insurance industry: What needs to be done first? The Manitoba government has shown some considerable leadership. They've decided that they will help their grain farmers survive the punishing US subsidies. We haven't done that here in Ontario; we haven't done anything of the sort. In fact, for those who grow corn—and we're talking about all the wonders of ethanol these days—we have no protection in Ontario that we will use home-grown corn in our ethanol. In fact, farmers in their fields full of corn watch the US corn coming in by truckloads across the border to go to the brand new ethanol plants, and they wonder why. It is becoming extremely difficult for them to continue in the face of that giant behemoth to the south, that giant country which subsidizes its farmers and makes it almost impossible for them to compete.

It's not just Manitoba that is doing something; Quebec is doing something. Quebec has a whole farm insurance program, a whole farm subsidy program for its farmers. Alberta has subsidy programs for their farmers. Ontario does not. I've heard what the minister and the Premier have to say about this, and it seems that the focus always goes to blaming the federal government for not doing enough. With the greatest of respect, agriculture is one of only two jurisdictions that are shared under the former British North America Act, which is still extant because it sets out the roles and privileges of the provinces and the roles and privileges of the federal government. There are only two shared jurisdictions. One jurisdiction is agriculture, in which each can do its own thing, both the province and the federal government. They can do it mutually; they can do it apart; they can do it severally; they can do it. The only other one is immigration, and this government and previous governments in this Legislature took a long time getting into the immigration field. It took a very long time before we were doing what we should have done 20, 30 or 50 years ago and certainly what other provinces, most notably Quebec, have done in that field.

We need to understand that we have an obligation to those farmers. We have an obligation to the people who are still on the land, to the dwindling numbers of families who make their living on the land. We in cities, people like me, know where the food comes from. I don't grow my own. I wouldn't know how to grow my own. I know how to go to the supermarket and I know whence that food comes. Whether it be Ontario or elsewhere in Canada or the United States, or Chilean apples, we know that a farmer somewhere has done the right thing.

Farmers have grown the crops and produced the food, and we need to protect them.

But in Ontario we need to protect more than that. Although times are good and there are no problems in importing products from South Africa, Chile, Argentina or Israel—and I can see products from all over the world on the supermarket shelves—we need to know that there is food security and that our farmers are capable of producing adequate food supplies should anything happen to us, to our country or to our province. Should it sometime be difficult for us to gain food access from other countries, we need to know that we can produce our own. We need to make sure as a form of national security. I don't want to overblow this, but it is a form of national security that, in the end, we can produce our own food and we can make sure that our own food is safe and can be consumed by us in times of national emergency.

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Farmers need something from this Legislature. Farmers need a long-term commitment in order that they can put the crops in the ground and produce and make us safe. The question has been asked, and some people have talked about why there are lower and lower numbers of families willing to work on the farm. The question is a financial one, quite bluntly. There are not a lot of profits to be made by most farmers today. They stay on the land because it is theirs, because it is their way of life and because they love it. But all too often, their children are reluctant to stay. All too often, the children move away to the cities, to the factories, to the lure of bright jobs, to technology, to whatever people want to do. I don't blame them, because that is what they want to do with their lives.

Increasingly, it has become difficult for farmers to maintain their land. Is it because they're not efficient? I don't think so. Is it because the land is not good? I don't think so either, because we in Ontario have some of the most fertile and wonderful farmland in the entire world. The problem is that we don't do enough in this Legislature for our farmers, we don't do enough to help them, and we certainly have not listened long and hard enough to them.

I've talked about the tobacco farmers. I've talked about the grains and oilseeds farmers who have been here. There was also a dairy farmer who camped out in his car in front of this Legislature for nearly a month. He was fighting, I think, for his livelihood, for himself, for his industry. His name was Stephen Webster, and he lived there for a month. In the end, all that happened to Stephen Webster was that he finally had to give up, and he went home and back to his cows and back to his life. I'm sure he is a very frustrated man, because he came here looking for help and he went home with absolutely nothing.

I believe that the McGuinty government, through this resolution, has to get very serious and implement a risk management program. Grains and oilseeds farmers, dairy heifer producers and tobacco farmers all need farm

mutual insurance, but first they need to be protected against the unfair subsidies of American farmers. They need to be protected by this government because, in the end, if we don't protect them, they will not be the users of the institution we're trying to save today.

Mr. Leal: It's a delight for me to have the opportunity to speak to this resolution this morning. We know that farm mutuals provide wonderful service and indeed are part of the framework for rural Ontario. I want to thank the member from Perth–Middlesex this morning for bringing this resolution forward from his riding, one of the great centres in Ontario for hog and dairy production. I know the member is certainly in touch daily with the individuals in the rural community in his riding.

I think one of the reasons this resolution is here this morning is that it really highlights one of the great success stories in Ontario: the work of farm mutuals. If you don't take the time every once in a while to profile some of the success stories in this province—indeed, for people who are tuning in here today, this is an opportunity to hear not only the history of farm mutuals in Ontario, but the success that they have providing insurance for some 400,000 policyholders in the province.

A little bit of history: During a period of time, from 1919 to 1923, under the Premiership of Mr. Drury, the United Farmers of Ontario were in power in this province. During that particular time, one of the key policy initiatives for that government, the United Farmers, was to expand the farm mutuals in the province, actively nurturing that business throughout rural Ontario. At a time when Ontario was still basically a rural province where most of the individuals were living during that period of time, bringing people together through farm mutuals made a great deal of sense.

In my particular area of Ontario we have two farm mutual operations. We have the Farmers' Mutual of Lindsay, Ontario, which was founded in 1895. Today, they have assets in excess of \$152 million and investments of \$101 million. The other one that's in my area is the Hamilton Township Mutual, headquartered in Coburg, Ontario, in the riding of my friend Mr. Rinaldi, the member for Northumberland. One of the active directors for the Hamilton Township Mutual was an individual who had a very distinguished career as a member of the Ontario Legislature: Mr. Howard Sheppard. Many people would know Mr. Sheppard. He was a real advocate for the farm community. Indeed, since his career as an MPP for the riding of Northumberland closed, Mr. Sheppard has devoted a lot of time to the Hamilton Township Mutual board of directors.

One of the great things about farm mutuals is that they're operated by their members themselves. Their directors are elected from their policyholders. There are no stockholders, and any surplus either remains in the company surplus account or may be refunded to the policyholders at the discretion of the policy directors.

Since they're owned and operated by policyholders, the services of farm mutuals are customized for their communities. I think that's a very important point, an

opportunity for people to get the kind of insurance that they need. I know that in the city of Peterborough there are many individuals who have policies through the operation in Lindsay, Ontario, and, indeed, the operation in Coburg.

In 1998, there was the famous ice storm that hit eastern Ontario and through into Quebec. After that ice storm in 1998, the eastern Ontario farm mutuals paid more than \$11 million to their policyholders. I'm told, of all the insurance companies, it was the farm mutuals that reacted the quickest to help out their farmers.

It's indeed a very important resolution here today, and we all need to support it.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I'm pleased to stand in the House today in support of the private member's resolution from the member for Perth–Middlesex, that the government should continue to support the increasing solvency and vitality of the farm mutual insurance. Again, I commend him for bringing forward this resolution. I have the offices of three different farm mutual companies in my riding: the Oxford Mutual, the South Easthope Mutual and the Blenheim Mutual. I say "the offices of three," but we have many more farm mutuals that look after the needs of the farmers in Oxford county, and I want to commend them all for their work.

On June 3, 2003, I had the opportunity to attend the 125th anniversary of the Oxford Mutual Insurance Company. Imagine, they had been around 125 years—128 years now. In the celebration, they had a part of the program where they gave out grants to community organizations who were in need of funding to help build a strong rural community in Oxford county, and we want to thank them for doing that.

1050

The other thing I wanted to say—and I'm sure members of the Legislature and members of the public have seen the ad on television where we have a father and son getting into the car because they're going out to get together with their neighbours to set up a farm mutual insurance company. The little boy says to the father as they're driving away, "Dad, does this mean we won't be farmers anymore?" And the father says—and I've paraphrased it a little—"No. This will mean that all the community will help us to remain farmers, because we will work collectively to make that happen." I think that really explains the principle of the farm mutual.

The problem I have with the resolution is the terminology "the government will continue to work for the farm mutual insurance companies." What has been happening since this government was elected—and again, this isn't negative to the resolution before us—is that the people in rural Ontario have been having real concerns as to whether the government really is working with them to build strong rural communities.

I will just quickly go through some of that. In the May 2004 budget, this government removed \$128 million from the agriculture, food and rural affairs budget. That would not indicate to me that they are looking to help build a strong rural community, because the support is

diminishing. As was mentioned by the member from East York, the best way to protect and help the farm mutual companies is to help and protect the farmers in Ontario, who are the policyholders and indeed own the company. Of course, by cutting the budget, that doesn't do that. Incidentally, in that year, that was the largest cut of any ministry in the provincial budget.

Again, in the 2005 budget, the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs was cut by 23.1%. It's written right in the budget: "We are proud of the fact we were able to find ministries where we could find savings. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs will be cut by 23.1%." And here we go again, in the budget of 2006: one more time, no help for rural Ontario. Again I say, if we helped rural Ontario, we would indeed help the farmers.

If you don't believe me, it was written in the Sudbury Star on March 27, 2006, right after the budget: "If there was ever a budget that made it more clear where a government's priorities lie, we have yet to see it. This is pandering to the urban majority and virtually ignoring the breadbasket of the province. It is an insult, a slap in the face for small-town Ontario." I think that sums it up. I know the members on the government side would suggest that that isn't what happened, but that indeed is the view of the people in Sudbury who wrote that article in the paper, that this government was not standing up for rural Ontario but was letting it go by the wayside.

Very quickly, I just want to mention—and I have spoken to the minister about this before. As we look at the infrastructure in rural Ontario, we presently have a real problem with the viability of the farm co-ops, which are having great difficulty because of insurance and pension liabilities that were created through the sale of one of the largest co-ops in the province, and now all the smaller ones are being held liable for that. In fact this spring, many of them are having trouble paying for their inputs, and they can't get inputs unless they come up with the money first. I'm hoping the minister will be looking at that and keeping one of those rural entities alive and flourishing in rural Ontario.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I'm delighted to have an opportunity to speak to the private member's bill that has been introduced by the member for Perth–Middlesex, who himself is a great advocate for his constituents and particularly for rural Ontario and farmers.

I have to say that before I address my remarks to the resolution on the floor, it's important that I correct the record. It's really quite surprising that members of the opposition and the third party don't understand the budget, particularly that the former minister wouldn't realize that our government in fact increased the budget at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Given the very serious circumstances that farmers have found themselves in over the course of the last year, we committed \$125 million in extraordinary support; new money that was not in my budget. We committed 125 million new dollars, we increased the budget at the

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and both the opposition and the third party voted against that. So I think it's very clear in this Legislature who is really working for farmers.

I do want to talk about farm mutuals and how important they are in rural Ontario, in the many communities that benefit from the services they provide. The resolution before us speaks to the fact that we would support increasing solvency and vitality of farm mutuals. I think it's important that we understand that when farm mutuals increase their solvency and vitality, that's returned to the community; that's returned to farmers. This is an industry that is owned and operated by farmers—100% Canadian. It commits their surpluses to a fund. This fund guarantees that, should a farm mutual become insolvent, 100% of the claims in that farm mutual will be covered by this fund. They're looking out for each other.

I want to talk a bit about an individual from my riding who was very key to introducing this provision. A driving force behind the guarantee fund was Bruce Caughey, who is a dairy farmer from Amherst Island. For more than half a century, Mr. Caughey was a director of the Amherst Island Mutual Fire Insurance Co. I just want to explain a little bit about what that kind of commitment would mean. Mr. Caughey lived on Amherst Island. Amherst Island is serviced by a ferry. Ferry service stopped at 6 o'clock at night. So when Mr. Caughey was out working on behalf of his community, for the good of farm mutuals and their costumers, his road closed at 6 o'clock and it meant that he had to go home either on the ice or he had to arrange his own boat transportation back and forth after hours. That demonstrates the commitment of these early folks who were involved in farm mutuals.

The member from Oxford talked about the commercial that runs on television. I have to tell you, the nature of that individual is very much in keeping with the people who I know in my riding are connected with farm mutuals.

According to Farm and Country magazine, not only did Mr. Caughey receive little remuneration for countless hours of community service; he did it on days when he had to deal with this challenge of transportation. But he was rewarded in a manner of speaking in that he was inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame in 1999.

There are other good folks in my riding who work so very hard on behalf of the people who are part of the farm mutual industry. Rick Walters from Napanee is always very good to ensure that I get my invitation every year to their annual luncheon. He wants me to sit down and break bread with them and understand the circumstances of their industry every year. I see Rick in our community. As was already indicated, they provide much support within our community. Also, Don Martin from Tweed, a good friend of mine: His family hosted the Hastings county plowing match last year. These are people who reflect what it is that we do in rural Ontario, and that is, contribute and work hard for our neighbours, for the benefit of our community. I can't think of any better group than farm mutuals to demonstrate this ethic.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Perth–Middlesex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilkinson: I'd like to draw the attention of my colleagues to the members' gallery. I want to welcome five representatives of the farm mutual industry who have joined us here this morning: Joe Facey, Joan Schmidt, Bill Horvath, Don Brubacher and Lawrence Diamond. Here they are right here. I'd like to say, welcome to urban Ontario and gridlock.

I want to commend my colleagues for speaking in support of the resolution today: the members for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Huron–Bruce, Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, Beaches–East York, Peterborough, Oxford, and of course our own minister of rural affairs, the member for Hastings–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

I also would like to close by thanking my legislative intern, Mark Peverini, who I know has been with the member from Timmins–James Bay for half of his term, and now he is with me. The member from Timmins and I both agree that Mark is a wonderful intern. He had a lot to do with preparing the remarks today for all members, and I want to thank Mark.

I want to close by having members recall what it is that Brian and Wendy Anderson told me in the letter that I shared with the House. What they were able to do was to clearly state how very, very important it is that there is a farm mutual industry in this province. It is a wonderful part of our economic and social life in rural Ontario, but when times are tough, when there's a fire, it's your neighbours coming to help you. Despite the massive amount of damage and the wonderful experience they had, as someone who comes from the insurance industry—insurance does not take away the pain, but it takes away the insult. That is what the farm mutuals do right across rural Ontario at their core: neighbours looking after neighbours and sharing a risk. I would ask all of the members to support my resolution at noon today.

1100

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): I'd like to move the following: That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should immediately eliminate the illegitimate health tax, beginning with serving military personnel and senior citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The member has moved ballot item number 38. The Chair recognizes the member.

Ms. MacLeod: It's my pleasure today to introduce and debate my first private member's resolution. I hope to receive cross-partisan support today, because this is the right thing to do for our seniors and our soldiers. This is a promise I made to my constituents in Nepean–Carleton during the recent by-election. I believe it is motherhood and apple pie.

Today is a sober day of thought for all of us in Canada when we think of our men and women in the armed

forces. Yesterday, Canada lost its first-ever female to a combat battle death. Nichola Goddard was only 26, and my thoughts and prayers are with her family. I want to reflect on her sacrifice and the sacrifices of all our soldiers during this dialogue today.

There are over 30,000 serving military personnel living in Ontario. They are Brian Nelson of Nepean, they are Shawn Hoopey of Ottawa and they are Adele Donaldson of Barrhaven. As someone who has the fortune of sharing a riding with the federal Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Gordon O'Connor—the general, as we sometimes like to call him—I can tell you that the military is in our hearts and minds in Nepean–Carleton, as I am sure it is with every constituency across this province. In Nepean–Carleton, home to many soldiers of the Canadian Armed Forces, I see many soldiers who make daily sacrifices for us. We know they are put in harm's way, especially now, while they serve in Afghanistan to protect us.

That brings me back to my resolution. I don't believe that anybody who protects this country or who built this province should pay the health tax. In a few short weeks I have been able to accumulate thousands of signatures from across Ontario on a petition calling on the government of Ontario to immediately eliminate the province's illegitimate health tax, beginning with seniors and serving military personnel.

There is widespread support from across Ontario for this resolution. I have received encouragement from the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Gordon O'Connor. I have received support from Senator Michael Forrestall, the Vice-Chair of the Senate standing committee on national defence and security. I've received support from literally thousands of Ontarians, including veterans like retired Captain Bill Donaldson and retired Lieutenant Colonel Graham Baskerville, and I hope to count on the support of my colleagues in this Legislature today.

I know that eliminating the health tax for soldiers has been raised before in this Legislature. The leader of the official opposition, John Tory, does not feel it is appropriate to charge the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces this health tax, especially since they do not use the health care system in Ontario. I am also proud that John Tory has made the commitment to phase out the health tax for everyone once he becomes Premier. My colleague the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who has a large military base in his riding of Petawawa, has stood up for our soldiers and has demanded that this health tax be eliminated for them as well. I'm very pleased he will be joining us in this debate today.

Other provinces, such as Alberta and British Columbia, have exempted military personnel from health care levies and taxes because their health care costs are covered by the federal government. I think we ought to do the same in this Legislature. I think it is imprudent to make our military men and women pay more and get nothing, absolutely nothing, in return.

I also think we must protect our seniors who are on fixed incomes. According to the ministry's website, 52% of seniors who file taxes are paying this health tax. I don't have to tell you that many Ontario seniors are living on fixed incomes. For many of these seniors, rising costs such as property taxes eat into their fixed incomes.

A report from the Ontario Health Quality Council says that low-income people are the ones not getting health care, yet they are paying a greater percentage of their income toward the health tax. This scares me. It means that seniors who are on a fixed income and coping with increased costs—higher fuel costs, mounting property tax increases and delisted medical services—are arguably paying a greater percentage of their income to this tax.

To add insult to injury, the Ontario home property tax relief for seniors, which ensured that every eligible senior homeowner or renter would receive an average property tax rebate of \$475—for up to one million senior households—was rolled back by the McGuinty government when it assumed office. Now Ontario seniors have been twice bitten—once by a rollback of \$475 and now with this new tax, taking at least \$450 out of their fixed income.

I think we ought to do something about this. We must respect those people who have built this province. Thousands across this province agree. Vera Collier from Nepean, a woman who has worked tirelessly for seniors in my community, has added her voice to call for the elimination of this tax for seniors on fixed incomes; so have Helen Byers and Shirley Mahoney, both volunteers with Nepean Seniors' Home Support. They agree that approximately 1.6 million people over the age of 65 who are paying this tax should see some relief.

If this resolution is successful, we could be responsible, together, for giving close to \$390 million, in my humble estimation, back to Ontario's seniors and soldiers. This, of course, is a little more than the \$200 million of health tax funds allocated to the Ministry of the Environment, not to our hospitals, in 2004, and substantially less than the \$3 billion in unbudgeted revenue in the 2006 budget. Our seniors and soldiers deserve this relief.

I will expect today normal pushback from opponents of my philosophy. They will ask what I am going to cut. They will say, "This is a tax that applies to every citizen equally," and they will use an example, I'm sure, of a wealthy senior—one of the few—to try to make their point for this tax grab. My response to all of the above will be that according to the recent Liberal budget there was \$3 billion in unbudgeted revenue that could have helped us give back to our seniors and soldiers, those people who have built Ontario and who protect Canada. I will say, on the point of equity, I think it is unfair, unjust and inequitable that those in the military must pay this tax yet they receive nothing for it because their health care is provided for by the federal government. I will say too that most seniors I know live on modest means, especially as they grow older. With fixed incomes and increasing taxes, fees and costs, the extra costs of delisted health care services and this health care tax, it's making it more difficult for seniors to make ends meet.

Before I conclude, I'd like to touch briefly on the health tax, and I'm sure my colleague the member from Erie—Lincoln, the PC finance critic, will have more to add when he joins the discussion. But we must remember that this is a tax. Even the finance minister is now referring to it as a tax, or at least he did on Wednesday, April 5, even though we were promised during the 2003 election that there would be no new tax increases. Yet that promise was somehow forgotten, and now this government will have collected a total of \$4.1 billion since the inception of this tax to the end of fiscal 2005-06, and they are forecasting \$2.6 billion in health tax revenue for next year. The chart in the expenditure estimates document reveals that this government plans to collect a staggering 8% more from the health tax in 2006-07 than in the current fiscal year. Let's compare this 8% increase with a few other tax revenues: Income tax revenues are expected to go up by 3%; sales tax revenues are expected to go up by 4%; the employer health tax—yes, that's another health tax—is expected to go up 2.6%; and sales tax revenues, at 4%, are the next-highest increase to this health tax.

According to these numbers, I think we can, with good, clear conscience, do the right thing in this Legislature today and salute our soldiers and our seniors by eliminating this tax for seniors and serving military personnel and putting \$390 million back into their pockets, not into general revenues.

I urge all colleagues today to support this resolution for the good of our seniors and for the good of our soldiers because, as I have said, this is the right thing to do. It is motherhood and apple pie, and it can be done.

I look forward to debate and will be happy to respond to any questions or comments.

1110

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I'm pleased to stand today in the House and speak to this resolution brought by the member for Nepean—Carleton.

The resolution reads, "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should immediately eliminate the illegitimate health tax, beginning with serving military personnel and senior citizens." This isn't a resolution about our respect for the military. Of course, every member of this House has the utmost respect for our men and women serving the country. I have a military base in my riding, and those constituents of my riding are of the utmost importance to me.

What I want to speak to today is the fact that this member is proposing we phase out the health premium and, in that, we bring back the Mike Harris days. As those of you in the House will remember, when we came into government, we inherited a number of deficits, including an infrastructure deficit, a health care deficit, an education deficit, and of course a whopping \$6.4-billion financial deficit.

I would like to know what the member for Nepean—Carleton and her leader, Mr. John Tory, would like to cut when we cut \$2.4 billion out of health care. Would you like to cut the wait-time strategy where we've had such

success and seen our wait times reduced across the province? Would you like to cut our investment in hospitals?

Interjection.

Ms. Smith: I know the people in North Bay are looking forward to the groundbreaking on our new North Bay hospital, which we've been waiting for for years and for which, I might add to the member for Erie–Lincoln, we've had a poster in our hospital showing a finishing date of 2005 with former Premier Mike Harris in that photo announcing the hospital. Unfortunately, the former Premier never came up with the money for the hospital. So if you were to cut the two—

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): You delayed it.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please. Member from Erie–Lincoln, the member from Nipissing was very respectful to Ms. MacLeod when she was speaking. Can you pay her the same courtesy?

Ms. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just remind the members opposite that the hospital in North Bay did not go forward under Mike Harris because the money wasn't there. If we're to cut \$2.4 billion out of our health care spending, where will the money come from?

Our family health teams, an initiative our government has introduced, are seeing many more patients having family docs in our various communities. This is an important initiative in North Bay. We have one of the first family health teams in the province. We are seeing more of our residents having a family doctor. These family doctors are able to provide more care to more people, including our seniors. They are able to spend more time with our seniors, and that's incredibly important. If we slash \$2.4 billion out of our health care budget, are we taking away family doctors from our seniors? That's a question I have for the member from Nepean–Carleton.

More nurses in hospitals: We have invested in nursing across this province. We are seeing more full-time nursing in the province than ever before. We're up to almost 60% full-time nursing. This is a huge improvement over where we were. We are showing much more respect. We are investing in our nurses. We don't want to go back to the days of treating the nurses like hula hoop workers, as the Mike Harris government I think referred to them. We don't want to see a slash of \$2.4 billion out of our health care budget in order to treat our nurses badly. We need to invest in nursing across the province. We need to provide quality health care where it's needed across the province.

Home care is another issue where we've seen a record investment of \$1.4 billion. This is direct care for seniors in their homes. During the previous campaign in 2003, while I knocked on doors in my riding, I met with seniors who had recently experienced cuts to their home care that was going to mean they were going to have to move into a long-term-care home. That's not where they wanted to be or where they needed to be. With a little bit of home care they were able to stay at home.

We've reinvested in home care. We are seeing our seniors age in place in more places across the province, and that's what they want. With a cut of \$2.4 billion out

of our health care budget, we would see that slashed and we would see our seniors losing those services that they so dearly need.

We would also see cuts to the funding that we've flowed to mental health in our communities and to our long-term-care homes, which I know are incredibly important to everyone in this House.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): You're making that up. Is that parliamentary?

The Acting Speaker: I'm glad that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has joined us, but we want to hear from the member from Nipissing.

Ms. Smith: It is amazing that the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke can find something to say when he hasn't actually been here to hear what I was talking about. I'm talking about the \$2.4 billion that your party wants to cut—

Mr. Yakabuski: You don't have to be here to know what you're going to say.

The Acting Speaker: Member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order.

Mr. Yakabuski: She referred to my absence, sir.

The Acting Speaker: Member, one more outburst and that's it.

Member from Nipissing.

Ms. Smith: I seem to have hit a nerve this morning, perhaps because they are sensitive to the fact that they are proposing a cut of \$2.4 billion from our health care budget. We all know that health care is the most important issue for Ontarians. People in Ontario want to see quality health care close to home, and that is what our government is providing.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this resolution. As I've indicated, I will not be supporting this resolution today.

Mr. Yakabuski: I'm glad to join the debate. I hope the member for Nipissing will stay to hear what I have to say, but it's highly unlikely.

This resolution on the part of my recently elected colleague from Nepean–Carleton speaks to an issue which I raised in this House shortly after the disastrous budget this government brought forth, bringing forward the largest tax increase foisted on the people of Ontario in the history of this great province. I remember sending a letter to the Minister of Health, to which I got no good response. I did get a response, thank you very much, but I did not get a good response.

It is an issue that we have raised repeatedly in this House, not only in the context of debate but in the context of questions as well, and not only myself but the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey, John Tory, has also raised it in the context of questions. So I commend the member for Nepean–Carleton for bringing this forward in the form of a resolution to this House so that perhaps—unlikely, but perhaps—the members opposite will have the freedom to make a decision on this without being whipped or without being told by the Premier's office that this is the

way it's going to be, that they might actually be able to make a decision based on what is right and fair.

When we talk about our military personnel, they don't get their health care from the provincial government. This government can call it a health care tax, they can call it whatever they want, but it is just another hand in the pockets of the hard-working people of the province of Ontario. Over 25,000 military personnel from Ontario have that dip into their pockets on the part of the McGuinty government.

They don't get their health care from the province of Ontario. The federal government is solely responsible for providing health care to our military personnel. In fact, they don't get an OHIP card. They have a DND card that provides them with health care. This shouldn't surprise people when it comes to this government, but what it amounts to is the old double-dip. They want to get them on the tax, like they're getting everybody in this province, and how much longer they can take that, I don't know. But they want to get them on the tax and then, when the military personnel go and procure medical treatment of any nature, they send the bill to the federal government as well. It's the old double-dipping routine on the part of this government.

1120

Mind you, when you see some of the appointments they've been making, we can understand how they feel so in tune with the phrase "double-dipping." I think we're going to see a few more in the next couple of weeks, some nice, plum appointments made by this government before we recess for the summer, which is their habit: hoping that as the press sort of takes the focus off the Legislature—you who sit on the government agencies committee will see that there will be a number of plum appointments to the friends of the McGuinty Liberals coming in the next few weeks.

This is an issue of fairness, and the Premier has had it placed straight in front of him. His responses have been absolutely brutal, and then he has passed it on to the Minister of Finance, whose responses have been brutaler yet—or more brutal, in case there's an English teacher in the crowd. I want to make sure I got that correct.

What they said was how much they respect and care about our military personnel. I want to take a moment to say that I'm sure all members of this assembly, indeed all Ontarians—our hearts go out to the family of Captain Goddard, who was our first-ever female casualty of war of our country ever in history, in Afghanistan yesterday, defending democracy in that torn country. Our thoughts and prayers go out to her family and also to our serving military personnel who have lost one of their own.

Again I say, this is a fundamental issue of fairness. The member for Nipissing, babbling on over there about what she says this government is doing or not doing, talking about this party talking about taking money out of health care—that, I categorically state here right now for the people watching on television and for our friends in the gallery, has never been said by this party. What we are going to do through the course of our first term in

office is eliminate this regressive, punitive health tax because we will manage the affairs of this province in a prudent fiscal manner that will make that unnecessary. In fact, if this government had any fiscal bones in its body, they could have balanced this budget without instituting this health tax, but they chose not to for purely political reasons. That is what is truly unfortunate about this government. Everything they're doing has a partisan, political reason behind it. It is not about serving Ontarians; it is not about serving citizens; it is not about being fair to those men and women who are defending our interests and the interests of democracy around the world; it is about the Liberal Party's partisan plan and will to be re-elected at any cost to anybody in this province.

I'll say again that I'm pleased and most thankful that my colleague from Nepean—Carleton has brought forth this motion to ensure that fairness will be on the table for military personnel in our armed forces across this province. The McGuinty government has to show some interest in fiscal responsibility because they can balance the budget in this province without that punitive tax. That is only one, and I'm sure that my good friend from Erie—Lincoln, our finance critic, is going to probably touch on some of the other disgraceful moves this government has made to take more money out of the pockets of working families and seniors across this province.

My time is just about up, but I do want to thank you for this opportunity and assure you that for the rest of the day I'll be on my best behaviour, because the last thing I'd want is to be sent home early on a Thursday.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's certainly my pleasure to speak to this resolution put forward by the member for Nepean—Carleton. I wanted to start by saying that absolutely, definitely, New Democrats have been on the record time and time again—and being a New Democrat, that makes me in agreement with that position—opposing the McGuinty Liberal government's regressive health tax that they chose to introduce in the province of Ontario. I'm going to speak about that at some length in a few minutes.

But I also have to state—with quite an ironic lilt to my voice, I guess—that I also oppose the irresponsible actions of the former government in the way they dealt with Ontario's tax system in the first place. They made decisions and chose to cut taxes in a way that has forever reduced Ontario's fiscal capacity. I think everyone would agree that that's the case. Regardless of what party you happen to belong to or what position you happen to take on any particular issue, that party over there, the member for Nepean—Carleton's party, when they were in government, made real decisions that reduced the fiscal capacity of the province of Ontario to meet the needs of the people of Ontario. From my perspective, that was extremely irresponsible and has ended up with disastrous results in this province.

I was sitting on municipal council at the city of Hamilton during that time frame—not quite the entire time frame, but almost the entire time frame—when that party was in government, and I can tell you, today we are

still reeling at the city level with the results of their decisions from a fiscal perspective. It started off with their illusory tax cuts. Ask anybody who lives in a city and get them to tell you that those tax cuts really had any results on the pocketbook; they did the opposite. They might have gotten a couple hundred bucks from the Tories, but when it came to everyday life in their cities, in their communities, they paid through the nose and they're still paying through the nose.

We just have to look at the big mess of the property tax system to see what that group over there did when they were in government. It is a mess, and now they're scrambling, through this bill and a bill from another one of their members, to fix the problems that they messed up in the first place. So it's ironic that we're here talking about this current government's fix, which, again, I oppose—and I will speak about that in a few minutes—but let's face it, it was the Tories who messed up the fiscal issues in the province of Ontario. They reduced the ability of our provincial ministries to meet the needs of Ontario citizens, and that includes the Ministry of Health. I think that's something we all have to acknowledge as an underpinning of this debate, and that means senior citizens and working families and young people and older people; it means everybody. Yes, it's appropriate to debate this issue, and yes, it's appropriate to pay positive respect to our senior citizens and to our serving members of the military. On behalf of the New Democrats, I too want to say that we mourn the loss of the woman killed in action on the front lines, the first Canadian woman to be killed in action in battle. We certainly do mourn her loss and have the greatest of condolences to her family and to her colleagues on the front lines in Afghanistan.

But I have to say that this debate is not about those issues; it's more about the choices that governments make in attempting to meet the needs of the people of Ontario. I have to say that previous governments, in the way they dealt with the choices in front of them, decided on illusory tax cuts that led to property tax increases at the municipal level, which are through the roof as a result of downloading and as a result of a messed-up MPAC system, the municipal property assessment system, which, we know, we've had some stinging criticisms of recently. It included a number of local-level user fee increases that were foisted upon users of various municipal services because municipalities were unable to deal with the provision of service at the local level under the crushing burden of downloading that this previous government, the Tories, decided to foist on municipalities. It put local governments in chaos, and they are still struggling to get through that chaos. Quite generally, they made a mess, and now, through private members' bills here and there, they're trying to pretend that they didn't make a mess or that they have the solutions. Well, they didn't have the solutions when they were in government, and they don't have the solutions now, I would submit to you.

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However, having said that, I actually don't disagree with the fact that the Liberal McGuinty government

made a big mistake when they decided to foist a new tax on the people of Ontario, when they decided that a regressive health tax was the right way to go to raise some of the money that the Tories, the previous government, so recklessly cut out of our ability to meet the needs of Ontarians.

The Tories decided it was the best thing to do, to cut health care, to cut education, to cut social assistance, to cut affordable housing, and to ignore crumbling infrastructure and crumbling transit systems. That was their legacy: at the same time pretending to give people money in their pocket while really increasing all the other taxes and user fees they had to pay.

This government, the one we're dealing with now, decides, after promising—this must have been, if not the first broken promise, certainly the worst in terms of broken promises. It is arguably the most odious of the broken promises of the McGuinty Liberal government. Why do I say that? The McGuinty Liberal government had choices when it came to their decisions about how they were going to redress some of the transgressions of the previous government. They had some real choices. But what did they choose to do? They chose to introduce a regressive health tax. Why do I call it a regressive health tax? Because it quite obviously is, if you do the math and figure out in real dollar terms who's paying what amount on their health tax.

Let me give you an example. A family with two income earners, earning maybe a little over \$36,000, will be paying \$900 annually for their health tax; \$900 on \$36,000. Two income earners with \$50,000 in income are going to pay about \$1,200. You figure, well, you know what? That's kind of going in the right direction. You earn a little more, you pay a little more. But a multi-millionaire in the province of Ontario, an individual making millions of dollars, is not going to pay \$1,200. You thought maybe \$1,500, maybe \$2,000, maybe \$2,500, based on the fact they're making so much money. What is that multi-millionaire going to pay? It's \$900, the same as a family with two incomes that's earning \$36,000 a year. That is a regressive system. It's a system that New Democrats at every stage have said is inappropriate, just wrong-headed and the wrong thing to do.

So yes, the McGuinty Liberals had choices. If they were going to break their promise on taxes, they could have introduced progressive taxation. They could have done all kinds of things to make our tax system in Ontario more progressive, meaning that the people who earn more money pay proportionately more in their taxes to help cover off the costs of the services that are required to keep this a thriving, competitive, healthy and environmentally sustainable province. But no, they chose not to do that. They chose not to raise these revenues that the previous government so callously cut out of the provincial revenue capability. Instead of introducing progressive taxes, they introduced a new regressive health tax that they said they weren't going to do.

What could they have done? They could have made some incremental increases in income taxes for those

who are earning over \$100,000, for example. There are choices they could have made. They could have chosen to do something that would be less harmful to middle-income Ontarians, middle-income people, working families, that they like to talk about now. They could have done something to make sure those hard-working families in Ontario weren't hurt financially by their revenue-raising policies. But no, the McGuinty Liberal government chose very clearly: Bay Street over working families; Bay Street over Main Street.

That's what the government decided to do. The McGuinty Liberals decided they weren't going to look at high income earners in Ontario. In fact, in this last budget, what did they decide to do? They accelerated the capital tax elimination, losing \$3 billion over the time frame of the full implementation of that move. What does that do? Well, that helps the banks. It helps the insurance companies maybe. But it doesn't help working Ontarians. It doesn't help middle-income families who are the ones being disproportionately hit by this McGuinty Liberal health tax. That's the choice they made.

They didn't choose to cut the loopholes, for example. Right now, large corporate sectors have got a lot of loopholes in terms of employer health taxes that are not being paid, but they didn't go after ensuring that employer health taxes are being paid consistently across all employers in Ontario. No, they didn't choose to do that. Instead, they chose to hit moderate-income and low-income families and senior citizens and everybody else with a very regressive tax.

What else did they do? You know what? You could almost fall into some of the arguments the member from Nipissing was raising a little earlier on. She liked to talk about all the things they're accomplishing in the health care sector, but she also made it sound like they had no choices. I've just clearly indicated that they had many choices. Instead, they chose to implement a regressive health tax.

What else did they do? We know they haven't hired all the nurses they said they were going to hire. We know there's still a crisis in hospital care. We know that elderly patients in hospitals, particularly in long-term-care facilities, are having a very poor quality of life because of lack of investment by this government, notwithstanding the regressive health tax they've foisted on the people of Ontario.

We know there have been increased user fees as well as the new tax. We now see optometry, routine eye exams, having a new user fee, no longer covered by OHIP, and physiotherapy, chiropractic, all of those things, no longer covered. We have to pay for those things out of our own pocket, except those who are lucky enough to have a health plan at work, and some people do and that's great. But those fees used to be covered under OHIP. Now you're paying for those out of your own pocket, as well as paying your health tax out of your own pocket.

This doesn't help the ability of Ontarians to receive the kind of health care that they need and that they want.

It doesn't help working families to afford all the other things they are faced with in the province of Ontario when it comes to increased cost of living, when it comes to things like hydro rates, when it comes to things like increasing gas costs, when it comes to all of those regular, daily expenses. Then on top of that, working families are faced with a health tax that penalizes, that proportionately they have to pay more for than the high income earners and wealthy people in Ontario.

The government had many choices when it came to how to deal with the previous government's mess in terms of reducing the fiscal capacity of the province of Ontario. The McGuinty Liberal government chose not only to break a promise on taxes but to implement a regressive health tax that is disproportionately burdening working families and lower-income Ontarians compared to others, when they could have had all kinds of other measures put in place that didn't include a health tax but that did include a fairer taxation system that was much more progressive.

New Democrats stand soundly against the health tax.

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Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I'm pleased to spend four or five minutes joining the debate today. I must say that it's an interesting resolution, a tax-cut resolution. I shouldn't be surprised. This really falls back to the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves days, where tax cuts were the solution to all of our problems.

I must say to the member from Nepean–Carleton, it may be the only opportunity during the balance of this mandate to bring forward a private member's bill or resolution. Often, it's an opportunity to bring forward something on behalf of constituents or those interest groups or stakeholders in the province to move an agenda forward. That's a progressive approach, and, unfortunately, although they're trying to recapture the Progressive Conservative moniker through Mr. Tory, this tax-cut resolution is clearly anything but progressive.

It would seem to me that Mike Harris ran as the Tax-fighter in the early 1990s. No one really rose to that particular agenda, so he reframed it and became the defender of the Common Sense Revolution. It was another tax cut agenda. This really is just one further step in that regard.

This particular item has already been certainly discussed, if not debated entirely in this Legislature, over the past little while, but let's just remind ourselves what it was that the former government did with their tax cuts, what they did to health care during that period of time, and what would happen if we removed from the health system at this point in time some \$2.4 billion, since that's what's being asked for: the elimination of the health tax. Let's just remember that there were some 28 hospital closures; that over 5,000 hospital beds were eliminated in just two years during the early Mike Harris days; that there were 8,000 fewer nurses working in Ontario from 1995 to about 1998; and that underserved communities in this province ballooned from some 63 to 142. So we know where that agenda took health care, and we clearly know why it is that we need to invest in health care in this province.

I know that in my neck of the woods, both in my own riding and those constituents who have to get service within the area beyond my riding, they very much appreciate the investment we're currently making, and will need to make, on the operating side of our capital investments in places like Lakeridge Health, the Rouge Valley Health System, the Sam McLaughlin cancer care centre and the newly announced west Durham health team, and in expanded dialysis for those in our communities. To make those investments that my constituents can take advantage of within a reasonable geography, if not within their own riding, requires an investment in health care beyond what this resolution would achieve. This resolution would achieve the elimination of some \$2.4 billion from the health care system.

I want to talk about what we're doing for health care in the province of Ontario with the money that we're raising from the health premium. What is it doing? It's bringing down those wait times; it's bringing down wait times for cataracts, for those seniors in our communities who, more often than not, are the ones getting cataract surgeries.

It's improving health care through the establishment of 150 family health teams. Well ahead of the target for the mandate, 150 have been announced to allow those health teams to get themselves established and begin providing that primary health care to begin filling the void created by that astronomical leap in underserved communities during the Mike Harris days.

We're paying for more nurses in our hospitals, in long-term care and in home care. It's providing the opportunity to guarantee places for newly graduating nurses here in the province of Ontario so that they don't have to look elsewhere. We can guarantee them a future here in Ontario.

It's helping to move health care from hospitals to communities. It's driving a primary care agenda. It's getting care closer to home, it's getting care quicker when it's needed, and it's getting care from physicians and support workers who know the patient, not in an emergency room.

It's providing increases for the first time in more than a decade in mental health, certainly a sorely neglected agenda for so long for those in our community with so much need.

We've added new vaccines, free of charge, for young children. That's a savings to families of some \$600 per child, often from families who are least able to afford those out-of-pocket expenses for those particular needs.

The premium is necessary, quite frankly, because of the actions of the previous government. They not only left us with a fiscal deficit, but they clearly left us with a substantial health deficit. Our choice would not have been to have a health premium in the form of a tax. Having said that, the agenda for health care is more important than the neglect that would have occurred without the health premium.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. Hudak: I'm pleased to rise and debate the private member's resolution of my colleague, the new member

from Nepean–Carleton, and I congratulate her on bringing this issue forward. I think members who have gotten to know the member from Nepean–Carleton know she's not one to simply dip her toe in the shallow end to test the water but instead is someone willing to dive right into the pool with a thoughtful, well-reasoned, meaningful resolution before the House today, standing up for her constituents in Nepean–Carleton. I encourage members of the governing party to stand up for their constituents and against Dalton McGuinty and support this resolution here today.

I'd say, as a priority, I commend the member from Nepean–Carleton, who, today, on the very day Canadian soldiers, men and women over in Afghanistan, fighting for Canadian values of freedom and liberty, bringing those values to the country of Afghanistan—my colleagues have mentioned the tragic passing of Captain Goddard just yesterday. The notion that those soldiers, those women and men overseas, have to pay this Dalton McGuinty health tax when they don't benefit from the Ontario health care system directly is an affront to those courageous women and men. I commend my colleague for saying that the first act should be to take the health tax off the backs of our soldiers here in the province of Ontario.

Secondly—the member is exactly right—seniors, those who built our province and made it strong, who constructed our highways, who built hospitals like the Port Colborne general hospital, Douglas Memorial and West Lincoln Memorial Hospital, to name but three, now into retirement on fixed incomes, looking forward to enjoying their retirement, who for five, six, seven, sometimes eight decades have paid taxes into our health care system, now get whacked with a massive tax hike courtesy of Dalton McGuinty, despite solemn campaign promises to the contrary.

Think of seniors today in the province of Ontario, those in Glanbrook, those living in upper Stoney Creek or Beamsville. Every time they turn around their costs are going up: new user fees brought in by Dalton McGuinty's Liberals, higher home heating costs, higher gas prices, steadily in the high 90 cents to over a dollar, and, despite promises to the contrary, Dalton McGuinty hiked taxes on our seniors and he hiked hydro rates by some 55%.

It is hard to imagine how Dalton McGuinty can sleep at night when he looked into that camera and said solemnly to seniors, looked them in the eye when he was campaigning and told them he would not raise their taxes, he would not raise their hydro bills, and then his first acts in this Legislature were to do just the opposite and break those promises.

The other thing I'd say to my colleagues is that this notion that this health tax goes into the things my colleague from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge listed is nothing but one big pile—and I'm conscious of the young students here today, Mr. Speaker—of horse feathers. It's nonsense. This goes into that big revenue pool collecting over at the Ministry of Finance. Those taxes you pay if

you purchase tobacco, if you lose some money at the blackjack table down at Casino Niagara, the sales tax you pay when you buy clothing: It all goes into the same place as the health tax, and that's the giant pile growing at the treasury under Dalton McGuinty. It doesn't go into health care. Not one dime of this goes directly to health care. This is nothing but a massive income tax on the backs of working families and seniors as part of a gluttonous and greedy attack by Dalton McGuinty on your pocketbooks.

Do you know how much revenue Dalton McGuinty has taken out of your pockets if you're a working family in Ontario, a senior citizen or a small business trying to get by? He has taken \$17 billion. It's the biggest tax hike in the history of the province when people can barely make ends meet—\$17 billion.

Let me tell you this: This notion that the Ontario Liberal Party is some big defender of health care is nothing but more horse feathers.

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I remember them campaigning, saying they were against public-private partnerships: "No way; that is the privatization of health care." My friend from Ottawa-Orléans said that during the campaign. But instead, they have increased the number of public-private partnerships and increased the number of privately financed hospitals in this province more than we dared. It would probably make Nelson Rockefeller blush, these 3P hospitals across the province—not that I disagree with the philosophy, but I wish you had told the truth during the campaign and said you were bringing in those 3P hospitals.

At the same time that they raised taxes in a gluttonous attack on pocketbooks, they delisted chiropractic care, they delisted physiotherapy and they delisted optician services in the province, effectively creating two-tier health care for the people who need these services. To this day, despite the \$17-billion increase in revenue, they still make patients of those services pay out of their own pocketbooks.

We have an unsatisfactory announcement by the province for the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital. There's a great staff there; great patient service. People in Grimsby, Smithville and Beamsville all depend on this hospital. But the announcement that it won't be until 2009 at best that this government plans on breaking ground with a very unsatisfactory level of provincial funding is a shame. I suspect that this is just one more promise by Dalton McGuinty to try to sneak through the next election, which he plans on breaking if he is successful. I certainly hope that is not the case.

Then health card clinics, which we benefited from in Beamsville, Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Dunnville for years, so seniors wouldn't have to drive to St. Catharines, so mothers and fathers taking care of their children, trying to run them around to sports and school—now they can no longer get their health cards renewed at the Beamsville seniors' centre because they're cutting out health card clinics. They probably don't cost that much:

The space is provided voluntarily, for example, in Beamsville by the seniors' centre.

I want to bring to the attention of the members of the Legislative Assembly the cut in the TBT procedure, an important women's health issue, to attack stress urinary incontinence, increasingly affecting women as they get older. It has now been substantially reduced at our local hospital, despite Dalton McGuinty's promises to the contrary.

I'd say, in conclusion: Congratulations to my colleague. This is a sensible, well-thought-out and important resolution reflecting what I think all of us hear from our constituents on a regular basis. This is not connected to health care; it is nothing but a massive tax increase on the backs of seniors and working families. They should reduce it, beginning with those in the military and our hard-working senior citizens.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I'm pleased to speak to ballot item number 38, the elimination of the health tax for military personnel and seniors. It's quite coincidental that today we're mourning the death of Nichola Goddard, who made the supreme sacrifice: She gave up her life for Canada.

I'd like to thank the member from Nepean-Carleton for bringing this motion forward, but I wonder how the member can do that—suggest that the health premium be slashed—when our government has spent its mandate cleaning up the mess that the Tories left across Ontario and particularly in the Ottawa area.

Under the Harris and Baird government, the Ottawa area suffered immensely from the cuts to health care. The Tories closed two hospitals, Riverside and Grace, and they tried to close the Montfort, except they lost the court case. Thank goodness for Gisèle Lalonde; they won the court case. Our community hospital in Orléans is not only there—the Montfort is doing well—but it's going to be doubled in size, and includes a whole wing for the military. That was the legacy left by the Tories in Ottawa, people who were supposed to be supporting us.

We had the 14th-longest wait times out of 14 in the province. That's according to the report from Access to Health Services in Ontario, April 2005, the ICES report. We were the worst-served in the province of Ontario. All you could get out of the member from Nepean-Carleton or the member from Lanark-whatever was, "Well, it's because of Quebec." Minister Smitherman has changed that. Minister Smitherman has put money into Ottawa. We have increased the capacity and we've increased MRI exams by 43% in two and a half short years and we're continuing to provide the health care that we in Ottawa deserve and that the member for Nepean-Carleton wants to follow her predecessors and destroy.

The honourable member suggests eliminating the health tax for senior citizens. As a senior citizen, I need that, and as a high-earning senior citizen I'm pleased to pay the health tax. It's important. I'm going to need those services and my family is going to need those services. Seniors come to me and tell me they want better health

care services. They don't want to save those dollars. They want to make sure the health care services are there.

What about our military personnel? I think this is a different situation. I support that part about the military. It is a situation where the federal government is paying. But when you were down in my riding on Tuesday instead of being in this House, members for Nepean–Carleton and Erie–Lincoln, you should have talked to Royal Galipeau, the federal member. We should get those transfer payments. There's a major gap, and we can't afford the health care in Ontario that they can afford in other provinces across the country because we support every province, other than Alberta and maybe British Columbia, through the inequity, that gap that we talk about. When you're down in my riding next time, talk to Royal Galipeau, who hosted your meeting, and make sure—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Time for a response.

Ms. MacLeod: I really appreciate the members from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Hamilton East, Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, Erie–Lincoln and Ottawa–Orléans. This is my first foray into private members' business. It is something that is very important to my constituents. I have a lot of seniors and military personnel who expect this premium, this illegitimate tax, this broken promise, to be cut. I find it highly ironic that the member from Ottawa–Orléans, whose riding is affectionately called CFB–Orléans, with the amount of military personnel there, would speak against this resolution. I have—right in front of me, in fact—petitions, signed, from his riding when I attended his riding.

I've got a letter from Cornwall that says, "I've written and spoken to my MPP Jim Brownell on a number of occasions about this"—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Member from Huron–Bruce, we're close to being finished. Can you please be quiet?

Ms. MacLeod: I have petitions from the army, navy and air force veterans' unit in Stratford. These are not Conservative ridings; they're Liberal ridings. The people of Ontario don't want to pay this tax, because it's not going to health care. They don't want to pay this tax as seniors or serving military personnel. I find it highly offensive that they don't support our military, but I do and my colleagues do and the Conservative Party of Canada does. Thankfully, last night they continued to support our mission in Afghanistan.

I urge my colleagues to do the right thing, something that should have been motherhood and apple pie earlier today. But you're going to sit down. You're going to vote against it because you don't know how to do the right thing. You'll just break another promise. You've lost your moral compass. I'm just shocked and appalled. I'm upset. The people in Nepean–Carleton will be disappointed today if this does not pass.

The Acting Speaker: The time for private members' public business has now ended.

FARM MUTUAL INSURANCE INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): We'll deal with ballot item number 37, which is a resolution by the member from Perth–Middlesex, Mr. Wilkinson. It reads:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should continue to support the increasing solvency and vitality of the farm mutual insurance industry as a key component of the economic and social fabric of rural Ontario."

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

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We'll defer the vote for a few moments. Now we'll deal with ballot item number 38.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Ms. MacLeod has put forth a resolution:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should immediately eliminate the illegitimate health tax, beginning with serving military personnel and senior citizens." Is it the pleasure of the House that this motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We'll call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell, and we will deal with both ballot item numbers.

The division bells rang from 1200 to 1205.

FARM MUTUAL INSURANCE INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Mr. Wilkinson has moved ballot item number 37. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Hudak, Tim	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Chudleigh, Ted	Leal, Jeff	Scott, Laurie
Delaney, Bob	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	MacLeod, Lisa	Smitherman, George
Di Cocco, Caroline	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Fonseca, Peter	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakubuski, John
Horwath, Andrea	Patten, Richard	
Hoy, Pat	Prue, Michael	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

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

The Acting Speaker: I declare that the resolution by Mr. Wilkinson, ballot item number 37, has passed.

The doors will now be open for 30 seconds.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Ms. MacLeod has moved ballot item number 38. All those in favour of the resolution, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John
Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed to the resolution, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Patten, Richard
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Delaney, Bob	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Di Cocco, Caroline	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 11; the nays are 21.

The Acting Speaker: I declare that the resolution is lost.

Private members' public business is now completed. The House will resume at 1:30 p.m. of the clock.

The House recessed from 1209 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

POPULATION COUNTS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I rise today to provide my colleagues with notice of a forthcoming proposal so they can consider its merits.

Substantial population growth in Ontario, particularly in the greater Toronto area, has created more than the usual number of headaches for local government. The province of Ontario provides funds to a number of partners based on population counts. Just as a stopped clock is correct twice a day, using census data from Stats Canada means the population counts are correct only twice a decade.

The town of Milton, which I represent, has a current population of 62,000 people, according to municipal planners, but receives provincial funding based on its 2001 population of only 32,000.

Out-of-date population counts are causing a real problem for the people in growth municipalities when it comes to funding for their hospitals, roads, potential gas tax sharings and other projects.

My motion addresses this problem. I will suggest that the government of Ontario immediately move to utilize more accurate population counts. Further, I will suggest that the method already in use to determine if an area is

underserved by physicians be adopted as the model for instances where the province uses population counts to determine funding. That method is to use household counts available through the municipal property tax rolls, which are very current, and apply a multiplier to account for children.

While no method of determining the population is 100% accurate, my proposal is fair, up to date, and simple to understand and use. I invite my colleagues to provide their input on this issue three Thursdays from now.

MIKE BRIDEAU

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I rise today in the House in support of Mike Brideau. He is a resident of the great riding of Nipissing and a finalist in the TSN/Lay's Greatest Canadian Hockey Fan contest.

Mike is a father of two and a devoted community member who spends his entire winter in rinks around our area and around the province, coaching hockey. When he's not coaching, he's watching. But he doesn't just watch hockey; he doesn't just collect hockey paraphernalia. He does. He coaches. He is the consummate fan who is taking his ability and putting it into action. He is coaching his son Zachary's Novice hockey team and his son Michael's Pee wee team. He has taught through the Tim Hortons hockey for beginners program for seven years, and this past year he was the head instructor. Not enough to devote a whole, long, northern winter to hockey—he's now coaching ball hockey in the summer.

In his submission to the Hockey Hall of Fame Greatest Canadian Hockey Fan contest, Mike noted, "I always instil fair play in my players and tell them at the beginning of the season that our main goal is to go out and have fun."

If he wins, Mike will receive a trip to Toronto to be honoured at the Hockey Hall of Fame as the first inductee as Canada's greatest hockey fan. I encourage all residents of Nipissing and across Ontario to go to www.tsn.ca/contests or www.lays.ca before June 2 to vote for Mike Brideau—not only Canada's greatest hockey fan, but one of the province's and North Bay's unsung heroes. Thank you to Mike.

SAFE DRINKING WATER LEGISLATION

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): We are all committed to ensuring clean drinking water for all Ontarians. Unfortunately, the Clean Water Act is just another McGuinty government broken promise.

The Liberal broken promise water act simply does not deliver. It does not deliver on their promise to implement all of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. It does not deliver on any financial support for municipalities and landowners. It does not deliver on substantive details; the bill lacks clear definitions.

It does not deliver on a proper appeal process. It does not deliver on a consultative approach, instead favouring

punitive, sweeping powers of a permit officer. It does not deliver compensation for expropriated land. It does not deliver a strong, realistic business case.

Justice O'Connor clearly states, in recommendation 78: "The provincial government should ensure that programs relating to the safety of drinking water are adequately funded."

The McGuinty government must have missed that part. You can't responsibly provide \$67.5 million for plan development and then not one red cent to help communities bear the cost of that plan.

The Liberal government's Clean Water Act pits neighbour against neighbour and smaller municipalities against their agricultural communities. They're playing a zero-sum game when we should be working together to create viable, sustainable solutions to protect our drinking water supply. The Clean Water Act is just another broken promise.

FRANKIE CHU

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): On May 12, school trustee Chris Bolton and I attended a memorial service for an 18-year-old Harbord Collegiate student, Frankie Chu, who died while playing a rugby game, a game he loved. The ceremony was very moving, as student after student and teachers spoke about the way Frankie touched their lives and whose absence they will forever miss.

He was a member of the so-called five musketeers. They were inseparable and there was much love between them. Frankie was in Canada for only four years, yet he made incredible strides socially and academically. I should point out that he benefited greatly from the ESL programs he was taking—a program that is in great demand yet in such short supply.

I congratulate the principal, the teachers, the students, and the Northern Secondary rugby team for showing up and for helping to create a touching memorial and a memorable day for the Chu family.

MEGAN'S WALK

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I rise in the House to commend over 100 people who joined me this past Sunday to pay tribute to a brave and inspirational young girl. My wife Anna-Marie, my son James and I participated in a fundraiser put together by Tracy Gusdal in Orleans. Ms. Gusdal was inspired to organize what was called Megan's Walk, in memory of four-year-old Megan Bebenek.

Megan passed away on June 17, 2001, after struggling with brain stem glioma, a rare and often inoperable form of cancer. Megan's mother, Denise Bebenek, organized a five-kilometre walk on Mother's Day back in 2001 around the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto to help raise money for brain stem glioma research. That first

year, over 900 people participated in the fundraiser, and together they raised over \$90,000 for this worthy cause. Last year over 1,800 people took part in Megan's Walk, raising \$180,000 for cancer research.

When Tracy Gusdal heard Megan's story and found out about Denise Bebenek's caring fundraiser in Toronto, she decided to bring Megan's Walk to Orleans. Ms. Gusdal met with Denise, who wanted to bring the walk to Ottawa but could not be there at the time, as she was organizing the same walk here in Toronto. Tracy decided to take on the task, and as a result held the first walk in Orleans this past Sunday on Mother's Day. The walk was extremely successful, raising nearly \$3,200 for cancer. Twenty-five per cent of the net proceeds will go to the CHEO cancer unit, while the remainder will help fund pediatric brain tumour research.

I was proud to participate in Megan's Walk in Orleans this year and hope to be there every year supporting the struggle to beat cancer.

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): A couple of verses here to share with my colleagues:

Simple Dalton met a pie man
 Going to the fair;
 Says simple Dalton to the pie man,
 "Let me test your wares."
 Said the pie man to simple Dalton,
 "My pies are good, made fresh today."
 But said the Premier, "Dalton knows best
 And I might just tax you along the way."

No doubt, people across the province of Ontario are thrilled with the notion that Dalton McGuinty is going to hire inspectors to go to farmers' markets across the province in the time ahead. Lord knows we need the help.

Is that pepperoni stick hot, extra hot or just a spicy form of mild? Who doesn't worry that they may be slipping a little too many apples into those apple pies or, heaven forbid, a little boysenberry slipped in there?

We need Dalton McGuinty's inspectors to make sure that that strawberry-rhubarb pie has the right amount of rhubarb and the right amount of strawberries.

Church suppers are under attack as well. This proposal to ensure that all potluck dishes are cooked in a central location kind of defeats the purpose, I think. Perhaps the geniuses in Dalton McGuinty's office are having too much luck with another kind of pot and not the one we're talking about.

Let me say this: Let's resign this idea to the trash heap of bad Dalton McGuinty ideas like the sushi police, the gummi bear inspectors, and that soup and salad tax.

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WEST SCARBOROUGH NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITY CENTRE

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest):

I'd like to take this opportunity to rise and congratulate the West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre on the occasion of their 50th anniversary. This valuable multi-service neighbourhood centre is located in the riding of Scarborough Southwest but also provides services throughout the former city of Scarborough and east Toronto.

The West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre is a natural outgrowth of the West Scarborough Boys and Girls Club, which was initiated by the Scarborough Civitan Service Club through community action. Originating in 1956, the organization grew to the point where, in 1965, after incorporation, it relocated and assumed all functions at the present location at 313 Pharmacy Avenue. In co-operation with the city of Scarborough and now the city of Toronto, the club has provided programs and services to both boys and girls throughout its history. In 1976, fully integrated co-ed programs and services were implemented.

The primary mission of the West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre is to offer neighbourhood programs and services designed to enhance the well-being of people in the context of their community, culture and environment. The centre has evolved over the years. From very humble and meagre beginnings has sprung an entire complex serving an ever-evolving community. From infants to seniors and everything in between, the West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre has truly become a welcoming place where there is room for everyone, a safe harbour where, in an inclusive environment, people help and people learn to help themselves.

Once again, I'd like to congratulate the West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre on its 50th anniversary.

SMOKING CESSATION

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): I rise in the House today to offer my sincerest congratulations to Lynn Marchand from Cornwall, Ontario, the recent grand prize winner of the Ministry of Health Promotion and Canadian Cancer Society's Driven to Quit Challenge. Ms. Marchand won the challenge, the grand prize being a brand new 2006 Honda Civic hybrid, by successfully quitting smoking after more than 20 years. What an accomplishment. I credit my good friend the Honourable Jim Watson and his innovative Ministry of Health Promotion for the contest's success. In Ms. Marchand's words, "The Driven to Quit Challenge was a great motivator for me."

Our government is encouraging Ontarians to quit smoking because we understand the power of preventive health. Tobacco-related diseases cost our health care system at least \$1.7 billion annually. Through the landmark Smoke-Free Ontario campaign, we are tackling our province's number one cause of premature death and disease: smoking. The campaign ranges from public health education and tobacco control to smoking cessation programs, programs that will assist constituents in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh and all Ontarians.

Today in this House I am certainly proud to salute Lynn Marchand on her courage and willpower and commitment to lifelong health. She has tackled her smoking problem. She is a model to all Ontarians that it's never too late to quit.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): It takes a split second for your life to be forever altered. It takes just a split second of poor judgment or distraction to take you from that lovely long holiday weekend that you were anticipating to tragedy.

I rise today to highlight the importance of driving safely and responsibly this Victoria Day weekend. So many accidents and deaths happen on long holiday weekends. People need to make the appropriate preparations for their road trips. Their vehicles have to be safe and in good working order. They need to be sober and well rested. The OPP will be out in full force to remind you of that. So beware and be prepared for that.

Public safety is a paramount concern of this government, and that's why we passed Bill 169, the Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act. We want people to know that if a car part detaches from your car, you and the person who installed it are liable. So be aware of that. You have to be safe.

The government also responded to the safety concerns of mothers, fathers and the police by requiring the use of booster seats for children who have outgrown the car seat but aren't quite ready for a regular seat belt. That is because a properly installed car seat does reduce the risk of serious injury or death by as much as 75%.

It only takes a second to kill or maim yourself, a loved one or a stranger. Do not forever alter your life, the life of a loved one or the life of someone else by poor judgment or distraction. Be careful out there. Take care and make sure that everybody else does, too.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): As today is the last day in the House for this group of pages, I know that all the members will want to join me in thanking them for their assistance over the last four weeks.

Applause.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

INCOME TAX AMENDMENT ACT (ONTARIO HOME ELECTRICITY RELIEF), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI DE L'IMPÔT SUR LE REVENU (AIDE AU TITRE DES FACTURES D'ÉLECTRICITÉ RÉSIDENTIELLE DE L'ONTARIO)

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 117, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for an Ontario home electricity payment / Projet de loi 117, Loi modifiant la Loi de l'impôt sur le revenu pour prévoir un paiement au titre des factures d'électricité résidentielle de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I'm pleased to rise today to introduce this legislation, which will help the most vulnerable in our society: low-income Ontarians who need assistance with their energy costs. Under this program, we are targeting a total of \$100 million to almost 1.5 million low-income families.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Ms. Munro and Ms. Elliott exchange places in order of precedence such that Ms. Munro assumes ballot item 78 and Ms. Elliott assumes ballot item 43, and that, pursuant to standing order 96(g), notice be waived for ballot item 43.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding a committee time change for the standing committee on general government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times, the standing committee on general government be authorized to meet Monday, May 29, 2006, between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 53, An Act to revise the City of Toronto Acts, 1997 (Nos. 1 and 2), to amend certain public Acts in relation to municipal powers and to repeal certain private Acts relating to the City of Toronto.

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The Acting Speaker: The government House leader has moved that, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times, the standing committee on general government be authorized to meet Monday, May 29, 2006, between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 53, An Act to revise the City of Toronto Acts, 1997 (Nos. 1 and 2), to amend certain public Acts in relation to municipal powers and to repeal certain private Acts relating to the City of Toronto. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding a committee time change for the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times, the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet on Thursday, June 1, 2006, and Thursday, June 8, 2006, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings and clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 11, An Act to enact the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2005, repeal the Provincial Parks Act and the Wilderness Areas Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

The Acting Speaker: The government House leader has moved that, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times, the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet on Thursday, June 1, 2006, and Thursday, June 8, 2006, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings and clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 11, An Act to enact the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2005, repeal the Provincial Parks Act and the Wilderness Areas Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HEALTH CARE

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm very pleased to rise in this

assembly today to share with all members the latest news about wait times in Ontario.

As you will know, our government has made shorter wait times a priority and, together with health care partners across the province, we're working to achieve this goal. Just months after taking office, we launched a comprehensive wait-times strategy, and our strategy has already shown dramatic results: We've increased the number of procedures and we've helped to reverse trend lines that saw waiting lists getting worse.

A key part of our strategy is our wait-times website, a website which shares up-to-date information on wait times with all Ontarians, broken down by procedure and by local health integration networks, allowing for better decision-making and increased accountability. The website has already shown itself to be a tremendous success, and I'm delighted to report that website hits are closing in on the one million mark, with 950,000 hits as of today. It's being used by patients, families of patients, doctors, nurses and hospital staff, and of course there have been countless visits by researchers in the offices of the official opposition.

The data on the website could not be more clear. It reflects the reality that wait times in Ontario are down across the board across the province. Whatever method you use to measure them, whatever criteria you use to calculate them, wait times are down. Whether you look at average wait times, median times or 90th percentile times, they're all there, they're all available and they're all down.

Of course, it is far too early to declare victory. Our wait-times initiative is ongoing, but these early results are tremendously encouraging and tremendously good news for the people of our province. Our goal is a consistent and ongoing reduction in wait times, first in the five key areas we've identified: Cataract surgery, hip and knee replacements, cardiac bypass surgery, MRI and CT scans, and cancer surgery. Another part of our goal is to identify bottlenecks or problems that may exist and to take quick action to correct them, and we are doing so.

Today, it is a great pleasure for me to advise all members of this assembly that we have updated the wait-times website with the most current data that we've compiled—data for February and March of this year.

Let me quickly run through the numbers for what we call "90% completed within." That's the figure for how long it takes for 90% of people to receive the procedure they need. This 90th percentile figure is much more meaningful than the average or median times, as it takes in 90% of patients. It is also the figure my honourable friend the Leader of the Opposition has been encouraging us to use, calling it more complete information.

I agree with my friend, so let me share these 90th percentile numbers with him and with all members of this assembly. For cancer surgeries in February and March, the "90% completed within" number averaged three days less than our baseline of last August and September. That is a 3.7% drop; angiography, a 41% drop; angioplasty down 25%; bypass surgery down 16%; CT scans also

down, 14.8%; MRIs down 26.7%; hip replacement surgery, a 4.3% drop; and knee replacement surgery, 10.2% better.

Let me also acknowledge that not all results are what we'd hoped for. The province-wide median wait time for CT scans, for example, has remained flat. If we break down the data by LHIN, as the website does, there are examples of wait times actually rising, like MRIs in the Central West LHIN or knee replacements in the Erie-St. Clair LHIN. We're certainly not hiding this. This information is on the website for all to see. In fact, that is one of the key purposes of the website: to help us identify these problem areas in order that we can focus our energy and resources on solving them, which is exactly what we're doing.

In recent weeks I have spoken to hundreds of doctors, nurses, hospital administrators and patients who are passionate supporters of the work we're doing together to reduce wait times. Because of the commitment and hard work of our health care workers, we're seeing remarkably encouraging results. To denigrate the remarkable successes we've seen is to denigrate the men and women who have been responsible for it.

I want this progress to continue. I want to see wait times continue to decline, not because it represents a useful number but because of what these shorter wait times represent for real people: a new lease on life for a cancer patient, new mobility for a senior suffering from hip problems, results from a CT scan to relieve a patient's anxiety, or enhanced vision from a successful cataract surgery. That's what this strategy is all about: real results for Ontarians and their families. That's what we're delivering, and I'm tremendously proud to share this good news with members of this Legislative Assembly and indeed with all Ontarians.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

COMPÉTENCES DES IMMIGRANTS

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Earlier today at Sunnybrook hospital, I was proud to announce the latest step in our government's plan to help internationally trained newcomers work in their trades and professions. Our government is investing an additional \$14 million in 24 newcomer bridge training programs to help more than 3,000 skilled newcomers work in their chosen field.

For many years our province has benefited from the sweat equity and talents of our immigrants who have chosen to make Ontario their new home, and we continue to benefit from their drive, their skills and the international experience they bring to Ontario. Newcomers have the global experience that Ontario companies need to compete in markets around the world. More than half of recent working-age newcomers have a university degree. Out of 125,000 newcomers who arrive annually in Ontario, about 65,000 are ready to work and contribute to Ontario communities big and small. Of those, 13,000

bring the required global experience to work in regulated professions or trades.

Our announcement today is an investment in our people. We are helping skilled newcomers work in a vast variety of trades, professions that range from carpentry to physiotherapy, engineering, architecture and tourism. These are areas where the internationally trained can put their global experience to work for Ontario's benefit.

Today's new investment brings the Ontario government's total investment in newcomer bridge training programs to more than \$34 million. This funding has supported more than 60 programs which have helped thousands of newcomers work in up to 100 different professions and trades.

Newcomer bridging projects deliver the skills that newcomers need to transition into the Ontario workforce. They offer training and mentoring opportunities that help individuals prepare for licensing exams. These bridge training programs have achieved great results. Thanks to bridge training, the pass rate for internationally trained pharmacists in their licensing exams has gone from 20% up to 80%. For internationally trained nurses, the pass rate has doubled to more than 70%; and for internationally trained midwives who take bridge-training courses, the success rate is 100% passed. They've had great success, and that's why we are expanding them today in 24 additional areas.

1400

With our latest investment, physiotherapists trained abroad, for example, will get the support they need to practise their profession here in Ontario. Carpenters trained overseas will be able to finish their apprenticeships here.

Today's announcement is about investing in Ontario's future, its economic prosperity and competitiveness, and the global economy.

Il est clair que la province est bénéficiaire quand les nouveaux arrivants s'intègrent rapidement. Quand les nouveaux arrivants réussissent, l'Ontario réussit. Ce programme de formation relais est une bonne chose non seulement pour les immigrants mais aussi pour l'Ontario.

Bridge training is just one way our government is helping les nouveaux arrivants reach their full potential. Last November, our government signed the groundbreaking Canada-Ontario immigration agreement. After 20 years, we have finally succeeded in getting the federal government to invest in Ontario's newcomers. It means 920 million in new federal dollars for Ontario's newcomers over the next five years. For the first time in our history, the 125,000 newcomers who come to Ontario every year will receive their fair share of federal dollars.

In March, we launched an international web portal, Ontarioimmigration.ca. This portal enables potential immigrants to get up-to-date information on everything from credentials and housing to health care and employment opportunities from their countries of origin. They can get this information prior to coming to Ontario, making their transition to Ontario much easier.

In February, we announced a 29% annual increase in newcomer settlement funding so that settlement agencies can better meet the demand for their services and help our newcomers integrate and contribute to their communities.

Ontario's prosperity is dependent on immigration and the global advantage newcomers bring here. The sooner newcomers integrate, upgrade their language skills and work in their field, the sooner we all benefit. The reality is simple: When newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds.

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO

UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I rise today in the House to pay tribute to those who have led the way in creating a smoke-free environment in Ontario. May 31 is the culmination of three decades of grassroots work done by volunteers in the charitable, medical, business, public health and research communities.

Il est rare qu'un gouvernement ait le privilège d'adopter une mesure législative qui accomplirait autant de progrès et qui aurait une incidence aussi positive sur la santé de nos électeurs.

However, we must take time to recognize that without the support of the community—and the majority of Ontarians do support a smoke-free Ontario—this progress would not be possible.

Representatives of those community leaders are members of my Smoke-Free Ontario campaign cabinet, many of whom are with us in the gallery today. I'd ask members to recognize them. We welcome them to Queen's Park.

I would like to recognize Mr. Manu Malkani from the Ontario Lung Association, Rocco Rossi from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, and Peter Goodhand from the Canadian Cancer Society. These gentlemen represent thousands upon thousands of volunteers who have worked tirelessly to educate the public on the impacts of second-hand smoke, inform us all of the importance of taking action, and advocate to all levels of government for healthy public policy.

The Ontario Lung Association has taken on the role of training and educating youth on the issue and the very positive impact young people can have; the Heart and Stroke Foundation has been integral in promoting public awareness; and the Canadian Cancer Society has led the way in local bylaw initiatives as well as supporting smokers as we create a smoke-free environment.

Dr. Ted Boadway, Dr. Steve Goren and Mr. Marc Kealey represent three separate sectors of professionals who have been leaders as well. The Ontario Medical Association provided sound medical support and advice on the issues around second-hand smoke; the Ontario Dental Association has taken a lead in ensuring that their members provide appropriate counselling to patients; and the Ontario Pharmacists' Association is conducting

public seminars as well as assisting in research related to cessation counselling.

Chief John Beaucage has assisted us in an awareness of issues facing First Nations people and the unique status tobacco has in the native community.

Dr. Andrew Pipe, Ms. Jenny Rajaballey and Dr. Terry Sullivan represent different sectors of the medical community through the Ottawa Heart Institute, Cambridge Memorial Hospital and Cancer Care Ontario.

Grâce à eux, nous avons accès à un réseau de spécialistes travaillant, au nouveau local, en milieu hospitalier de même que dans les domaines de la recherche et de la statistique, qui ont appuyé notre loi et nos mesures en vigueur par des arguments scientifiques, ce qui était nécessaire pour assurer que nous étions sur la bonne voie.

Mr. Michael Perley has been a tremendous source of support and information on everything from the international developments related to smoke-free issues to local community initiatives across Ontario and Canada.

Ms. Isabelle Michel from Sudbury and Ms. Carol Timmings represent our public health departments. There's no question that we had to be aware of the crucial role that public health plays in tobacco issues, everything from education, awareness and enforcement.

Ms. Michelle Tham represents the youth voice on this committee and all of the great work that young people throughout the province are doing through youth action alliances.

Comme vous pouvez le constater, nous avons fait appel aux plus fervents défenseurs d'un environnement sans fumée pour conseiller ce gouvernement au moment où il s'engage sur la voie de l'amélioration de la santé des Ontariennes et des Ontariens.

I want to thank this very talented and committed group of people and acknowledge the effort they represent.

I'm pleased to announce that in a reception just a few moments ago, I was able to present each and every one of these advisers with a Heather Crowe Award in recognition of their work.

I invite all members of the House to join me in congratulating and thanking everyone who helped lay the path for a smoke-free Ontario. My sincere thank you.

Applause.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): No more ministry statements? Time for responses.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to respond to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's announcement on bridge training. This announcement is a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done to ensure that barriers to having professional accreditation recognized in this province are removed. Everyone should be allowed to work to their full potential.

There are thousands of immigrants living in Ontario who have come to Canada, and specifically to Ontario, with expectations of making positive contributions to their communities and making a living on behalf of their families. Government must work hard with them to strengthen the system and remove the barriers they face every day in becoming involved in their professions and getting jobs in this province that they are trained for. I hope that the training funding announced today will take us towards that goal of equal opportunity for everyone, Ontarians and new Ontarians alike.

Thank you very much, Minister, for this announcement, and we look forward to other initiatives to make sure that everyone coming to this province can work to their full potential and achieve what they set out to achieve for their families, their friends and their community when they left their original place to come here and make a new life.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): It's a pleasure to bring this message on behalf of the PC Party of Ontario.

The people of Ontario continue to pay more and get less under the McGuinty Liberals. They want a health care system where they get the right care at the right time, but they don't get that from this government. Instead, they get higher taxes and longer wait times.

We've been questioning this minister for months on the data on his wait-times website, data he said was reliable and up to date, data that shows wait times clearly going up in communities across the province. And his response? He twists and turns and contorts himself to find a way to paint a picture that's not based in reality. He highlights the median wait time, which provides an incomplete picture. When he realizes that tactic won't hold up, he holds a press conference, claiming he had new data, which he didn't. He claims it showed that wait times were going down, and it didn't.

Do you know why? Because he deleted a whole month's worth of data. He actually removed data from his website in an attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of the people of Ontario. It was a complete sham. So we asked him about that. We asked this minister why he removed the data. His response? Let me quote from Hansard of May 1, 2006. The minister said:

"When the first wait-time information was provided, several hospitals weren't reporting, including the University Health Network, which is our largest hospital." The UHN wasn't reporting—that's what the minister said. But if one looked at the data from July, the data this minister removed from the website under a veil of silence, under the cover of darkness, one would see very clearly the UHN-reported wait-times data for all five priority areas for the month of July.

Interjections.

Ms. MacLeod: I can talk over them.

1410

So we asked the minister about that. His response? Again, I quote from May 11, 2006:

"If the honourable member were to be in touch with the University Health Network, they would tell her what they told our ministry, which is that they made mistakes in the data." That's a very different answer from his first, that they didn't report, and a very different claim from October 24, 2005, when the minister said this data was up to date and reliable. Either they didn't report, they did report and were inaccurate, or they did report and were accurate and the minister just didn't like the data. If they made mistakes, then how can we be sure that the data is in fact accurate, especially when it's being politically manipulated by the minister's office?

Even today the minister contradicts himself. He says that wait times are down across the board, but then he says that wait times are up. The minister just can't keep his stories in order. Cancer wait times, he says, are down. Let's look at the data: July, 69 days; February/March, 78 days—an increase, even from December to January.

The people of Ontario deserve a government that's going to be honest with them on this issue, especially when the government confirmed today that seniors are going to have to continue to pay an illegitimate health tax that is providing them with absolutely no relief with respect to wait times.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I'm going to respond to both those ministers.

First of all, on trying to urge people to quit smoking, it's a great idea. The only problem is, 60 pounds later, here I am. But anyway, I've just got to say, there is a danger on the other side of quitting smoking, now for some 13, 14 years.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I want to also respond to the Minister of Health, who talks about waiting lists. I've got to tell you, the longest waiting lists we have in this province are the undelivered promises that the McGuinty Liberals made in the last election, specifically those to seniors.

We know, for example, that they made some very specific promises while they were in opposition, saying that when they would be government, they would make sure to restore the—excuse me; I'll read it. It would be easier if I read it: "Invest in better nursing home care, providing an additional \$6,000 in care for every resident." This has been raised in the House a number of times. The government promised it in the last election, and yet they haven't done it.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's not true.

Mr. Bisson: The minister says it's not true. It's in a leaflet that was sent out by the Liberals.

The other promise they made is that they assured they would get personal care, including bringing back the 2.25 hours of minimum care they would provide, along with

the three baths per week. None of that has been done. The government promised they would do it in the last election. Instead, seniors are still in virtually the same condition they were at the turn of the last election. I say to the government, what is even more galling—it's not bad enough that they made the promises in the last election that they haven't delivered on, but then the promises were made over and over and over again by the Minister of Health in all kinds of examples.

On December 8, 2003, in the Toronto Star: "I want to bring a sense of missionary zeal to the work we do in this office...." He was talking specifically about these promises. Has anything been done? No.

On May 11 in the Toronto Star: "Many of the changes, to be announced in a news conference today, will require legislative changes and will be part of the reform package Smitherman said he will introduce in the fall session." That was 2004. Fall 2004 came and nothing happened; no delivery, no legislation.

We take a look at other comments made by the minister. On February 26, 2005, the Brantford Expositor says, "Important new legislation is expected to be introduced shortly." That was February 26, 2005, and it's still not here.

So I say to the government, if you're going to make promises in the last election and say that you're going to make life better for seniors living in long-term-care facilities, the very least you can do is keep them. But what is really worse is to get back after you're elected and say that you're going to do it, and three years later we're virtually where we were three years ago. I say to the government, it would be about time that you keep at least one of your promises.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I rise to address the announcement made by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. For a first step, it would be pretty good, but it's not enough. The minister knows that, I am sure.

To the Acting Premier: Please talk to the Premier and give this minister the budget he needs to deliver the programs and the assistance that newcomers to this country have to have.

What are we told? Three thousand new positions over the next three years, but more than 36,000 newcomers. Six thousand have been helped over the last three years. It sounds like we're declining.

I've talked to people in the newcomer communities: people from mainland China, from Bangladesh, from India. They're very angry. They're bitter. They go through the long process of coming to Canada. They come forward with their credentials. These are people who work hard, who want to work hard, who have skills and knowledge and commitment that could make a huge difference to this country.

I talked to a doctor from Bangladesh. At the last interview he had, he was asked in the store where he was

applying, “So how much can you lift at a time?” This is not enough to deal with the profound problem we have in our society. Acting Premier, please make sure that in the next cabinet meeting the Premier gives the minister the money he needs to do the job that I know he wants to do.

We have problems beyond funding. The Thomson report came out last fall. It called for an independent assessment appeals process so that people who have professional qualifications, if it were contested about whether those were adequate, would have a place to go.

I haven’t heard a peep. Why don’t we go ahead with those things that would not cost this government a lot, not cost this province a lot, but would make a huge difference to people’s lives? This announcement is far too little. It has to be built up; it has to be funded properly—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Thank you.

Mr. Tabuns: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to acknowledge Kelsey Bishop, a page from my riding, who served quite well here this past month. Thank you, Kelsey.

The Acting Speaker: They’ve all served very well.

DEFERRED VOTES

CLEAN WATER ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR L’EAU SAINTE

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 43, An Act to protect existing and future sources of drinking water and to make complementary and other amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 43, Loi visant à protéger les sources existantes et futures d’eau potable et à apporter des modifications complémentaires et autres à d’autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1417 to 1422.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Pupatello, Sandra
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Racco, Mario G.
Boutrogianni, Marie	Fonseca, Peter	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Smith, Monique
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smitherman, George
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Tabuns, Peter
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marchese, Rosario	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Watson, Jim
Cordiano, Joseph	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wong, Tony C.
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Zimmer, David
Dombrowsky, Leona	Peters, Steve	
Duguid, Brad	Phillips, Gerry	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakubuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Runciman, Robert W.	
MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 43; the nays are 10.

The Acting Speaker: The motion is carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I’d like to send the bill to the committee on social policy.

The Acting Speaker: So ordered.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): My question is to the Minister of Health. It deals with the regulation of farmers’ markets and church suppers and the McGuinty Liberals’ assault on rural Ontario.

A recent SES poll confirmed a growing belief among Ontarians, including urban Ontarians, that the McGuinty government favours urban over rural, that rural Ontario is getting the short end of the stick.

Yesterday, to great applause, you announced an exemption for farmers’ markets from your onerous regulations, but today—there’s a “but” along with this—we read that that exemption is not permanent. Minister, would you clarify your position: Are you exempting farmers’ markets or just playing a political delay game?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Let’s be clear in a fashion that the member’s rhetoric doesn’t allow. The regulation, regulation 562, has been on the books for 16 years, since 1990, and it remained on the books all through the days that that gentleman had the privilege of serving in the cabinet of the province of Ontario.

We’ve been working with Farmers’ Markets Ontario and through the office of the chief medical officer of health to take a different approach with respect to farmers’ markets, working co-operatively with them. What we felt was appropriate through the course of the summer season—which is important, of course, for farmers’ markets—was that we work on a proactive basis with vendors and others to inform them of some of the risks that are associated with some of the products. The honourable member scoffs at risks, but I do believe that drinking unpasteurized milk, as one example, wouldn’t be prudent. We have seen circumstances in Ontario where that has occurred.

We're working to identify risks on a proactive basis, along with the vendors and Farmers' Markets Ontario, because we recognize that this institution, in rural and urban Ontario, is essential, a great piece of culture and good economics. Accordingly, we want to work alongside those who believe that farmers' markets have a place not just today but well into the future, and we're securing the future.

Mr. Runciman: The example the minister continues to use is dead wrong. The provincial medical officer of health has said that there has not been one incident in 20 years.

I think the reality is that the McGuinty Liberal government is dead set on regulating the ingredients of grandma's apple pie instead of concentrating on the real problems in our health care system. We've got a downtown Toronto minister telling rural Ontarians what's good for them, trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist.

You are playing politics with the traditions of rural Ontario because you're feeling the heat and your backbenchers are feeling the heat; we've got an election on the horizon. Minister, will you do the right thing and stand up today and announce a permanent exemption?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Firstly, the honourable member's misinformation stream continues. He wants to talk about the circumstance that the chief medical officer of health has indicated that there have been no occasions in the last 20 years when people have suffered the consequences of drinking unpasteurized milk. He needs to go on a website and Google-search it and see the circumstances associated with the very same occurrence in your community. We had the hospitalization last year at Southlake hospital of young children who drank unpasteurized milk. It's an example of risks that the honourable member likes to pretend don't exist. It seems that the honourable member doesn't agree that there's a risk associated with, as an example, cheffing up some chicken that's been sitting out in the sun.

Of course, farmers' markets are amazing. We have them at city hall here in downtown Toronto, and we support them. We want to be able to bring good-quality product to market. We want to support farmers' markets, and we want to do so in a fashion alongside them that does indicate that there are risks, that we take a proactive approach to work our way through any of those risks. We believe that's prudent and gives us a chance to support farmers' markets.

1430

Mr. Runciman: The minister continues to play people for fools on this issue. They know that they're not getting unpasteurized milk at farmers' markets.

Minister, the McGuinty Liberal approach seems to be to calm the waters before the election, then hit them hard when it's over. You pulled the wool over voters' eyes in the last election; they're not going to fall for your flim-flam again. What you're really saying, when you cut through the rhetoric, is that once the election is over it's the last supper for church suppers.

Minister, if yesterday's announcement wasn't just another political con job, commit today to announcing the Liberal policy on regulations of farmers' markets and church suppers. Commit to making that announcement no later than this fall.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member for flim-flam stands and makes a statement like that, and he still hasn't fessed up to the people of Ontario for his lack of courage as a member of a previous government that stood at Magna and pretended the books were in balance while all the while it was masking a \$5.6-billion deficit. That's that honourable member's record.

That honourable member stood in the government that had farmers' markets regulated as if they were the same as restaurants and grocery stores, and we won't. It's our abiding recognition of the value of farmers' markets from a cultural and economic standpoint that sees us move forward on a proactive basis, which acknowledges that we must work together to make sure that farmers' markets not only survive but that they thrive. Accordingly, these are the policies this government will be on the side of.

When you take away the rhetoric from that honourable member's suggestions, there is nothing left but the ether.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member for Leeds–Grenville: a supplementary question?

Mr. Runciman: The Minister of Health must have a Ph.D. in fabrication, because none of that was true.

LIQUOR CONTROL BOARD OF ONTARIO

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): My question is to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Your government has opted to appoint an acting chair at the LCBO who we understand is working on a part-time basis; in other words, part-time oversight of the biggest revenue-generating agency the government has. Can you explain why you feel that part-time oversight of this \$3-billion business is appropriate?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues): No more trips for you, Bob—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Order. The Minister of Education, I'd like to hear the member, okay?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): We've had absolutely wonderful oversight of the LCBO historically, and I want to certainly pay tribute to Andrew Brandt, who led your LCBO with distinction for almost 15 years. Mr. Brandt decided to retire, and of course the vice-chair is acting as the chair until such time as a permanent decision is rendered.

As the legislation provides, it is a combined chair-president-CEO, and in the place of the president and CEO, Bob Peter, vice-president, is in that acting position as well until such time as we finalize and engage the board.

I want the member to absolutely rest assured that we have continuity on the LCBO board, that we have outstanding members of that board who have been ratified by the government agencies committee of this Legislature. I have full confidence in the vice-chair and now the acting chair, and in the new acting president and CEO to carry on their responsibilities for the social mandate, the revenue mandate and the support for important Ontario industries at the LCBO.

Mr. Runciman: Minister, what you've done here is rewarded a very active Liberal fundraiser, one Philip Olsson, through appointment to a job that has significant perks attached to it. But the real issue is oversight. You've increased the powers of the president, as you just indicated. You've appointed a Liberal bagman, who apparently only shows up one day a week to keep an eye on a \$3-billion enterprise.

Minister, I ask you again, other than rewarding your Liberal friends, why would you appoint a part-time chair for such an important government agency? Why would you do that?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I think I've answered the question. The member's rhetoric, quite frankly, is over the top.

Mr. Olsson and I were attending a wonderful event, launching Ontario's craft breweries and the official launch of summer earlier this week at the Summerhill LCBO store, a wonderful opportunity to promote the Ontario craft brewing industry. The chair of the LCBO, the acting president and CEO, did a phenomenal job supporting Ontario product, providing the kind of leadership that Ontarians would expect, making sure the LCBO is meeting not only the revenue mandate but also the social responsibility mandate that Ontarians would expect.

All appointments, of course, go through a proper process. They're vetted by the government agencies committee, and the member well knows that. In fact, that committee is chaired by a member of the opposition. They've reported to this Legislature. The positions were ratified and the vice-chair is in an acting position.

Mr. Runciman: That trip the minister mentioned is one day a week on the way to a Liberal fundraiser.

Minister, your government is clearly playing games with this situation. You've appointed Mr. Olsson on a part-time basis to avoid legislative scrutiny. We've already had issues raised in this House about the LCBO promoting foreign products, to the detriment of local producers. You've given LCBO management a free hand, with virtually no oversight, with a chair who, we're told, shows up for work one day a week. We believe this is wrong-headed and not in the best interests of Ontario taxpayers. We ask you to consent to having Mr. Olsson appear before the government agencies committee to review his appointment, his terms of employment and his mandate. Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The member is full of hot air, quite frankly. The LCBO has a very important role, not only to promote social responsibility and the responsible use of alcohol, not only to enhance the revenues that Ontarians have come to expect to invest in health, education and

infrastructure, but also to provide important supports to the Ontario industry. That includes a \$2-million, five-year strategy of investing annually in the wine and grape industry and having the Ontario industry as a feature of the month in Food and Drink magazine. This is the kind of leadership Mr. Olsson and the board have brought to the LCBO and to supporting what I think Ontarians would want to know is in place. We have important support.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I think Bob Runciman should be the new chair, myself.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Well, I don't agree with the Minister of Tourism, but I can tell you that when the government agencies committee met, the member from Waterloo supported the appointment of Mr. Olsson to the LCBO.

GOVERNMENT WEBSITE

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): A question to the Acting Premier: Who got the contract to design the government of Ontario website, and what ties, if any, does that person have to the Ontario Liberal Party?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I'm very happy to have an opportunity to talk about the website, especially the website we now have in place where our Premier has an opportunity to interact with Ontarians. I can say to the honourable member as well that we're very impressed with the way it has been presented and, obviously, with the up-to-date technological skills that our civil service has demonstrated.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): The cabinet office.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: It has been cabinet office. They have designed the site. They have provided the government with the resources we need to bring this kind of site to the people of Ontario so they can interact with their Premier.

Mr. Kormos: We were extremely concerned to learn that Dalton McGuinty, the self-proclaimed champ of squeaky-clean government, has awarded the government of Ontario website contract to Ontario Liberal Party website guy Lorne Kinsella, the brother of Warren Kinsella, one of the Premier's key political advisers. How much did the McGuinty government pay Mr. Kinsella to design the Ontario government website, and what other contracts have you awarded him?

1440

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I was having some difficulty hearing, but I believe the name you identified was Lorne Kinsella, who is a civil servant. Again, I say to the people of Ontario that I believe the civil service have demonstrated that they have some extraordinary ability.

Our government has made it very clear that we want to be open and accessible. The Premier certainly wants to

be that way. We want to inform people about what we're doing. We want to invite them to share their issues, their opinions, their concerns with the Premier, and that is why we have constructed this site.

With respect to the gentleman the member has identified, I believe if he were to go to the government phone book, he would find that he is a member of the civil service.

Mr. Kormos: I'm sending Haakim, the page, over with some copies of the front pages of these websites, including Mr. Kinsella's. Take that to the Acting Premier.

A quick visit to Mr. Kinsella's personal website shows that he has also designed websites for the Ministries of Education; Training, Colleges and Universities; Natural Resources; Finance; and Research and Innovation, not to mention the website for the Premier himself. Talk about a Liberal culture of entitlement. What's your explanation for this seeming patronage spree from Dalton McGuinty to Lorne Kinsella, the Liberal Party website guy and brother of one of the Premier's key political advisers?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I have to say that I'm very surprised that it would be a member of the NDP in this Legislature who is bringing this kind of information and these kinds of accusations about a member of our public service, a member of the civil service. As I've indicated to the honourable member, what you need to do is get the civil service directory and you will find this person's name. You will appreciate that he is an employee of the civil service. We thank them, all of them, for the good work they do on behalf of the people of Ontario. They have done a splendid job on this website as well.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): To the Acting Premier: Working families in Bath and the greater Kingston area are worried. You know the area well. They're worried because a big cement company has plans to burn tires in their backyard. They don't want their environment polluted. They don't want to breathe in toxin-filled smoke. They don't want the poisons that this kind of burning will pump out of this kiln. They want the government to stand up for clean air and clean water by saying no to burning tires in Bath. Why haven't you said no, Acting Premier? Why do you refuse to say no to burning tires in Bath?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I am very pleased to have a chance to clearly stand up for clean air and clean water in this province. You should know, member opposite, and I will inform you, that one of my very first announcements as I became Minister of the Environment was to improve our air emission standards by regulation 419, the biggest move on this file in 25 years. We have some of the toughest air standards in all of North America and comparable with many jurisdictions in Europe.

I thank the groups that have raised concerns. The process that is under way right now with the examination is as a result of Lafarge bringing forward an application to replace some of its fuel with items that cannot be recycled. They've made that application. The ministry is examining the evidence and information that is before it. The director will be reviewing that material and the director will make a decision. But you should be very clear that I have made indication to the director that I expect, with all the proposals that come forward to my department, that they use the most up-to-date science, the newest and best emissions modelling data and our new tough air standards when they evaluate all projects, and that's what's going to happen with this facility in Bath.

Mr. Tabuns: Notwithstanding that, a coalition of local residents and environmental groups came to Queen's Park today with a warning: Burning tires will harm human health and the environment. They urged Ontario to avoid the mistakes of Quebec. Quebec allows a Lafarge cement kiln in Saint-Constant to burn tires, despite a 700% increase in the emission of cancer-causing dioxins and furans between 2000 and 2004. They want you to say no to burning tires in Bath. Will you say no to the burning of tires in Bath?

Hon. Ms. Broten: Perhaps the member opposite does not understand how this process works. The company has applied for a certificate of approval. That is in the director's hands. We have had 90 days of public comment period. I appreciate all the groups that have brought forward all of the evidence, and I say to them that we will examine the most up-to-date science, and the director, in examining that, will require that Lafarge demonstrate that its proposal meets all of our minister's requirements and that it abides by the laws of Ontario, including the Waste Diversion Act.

That's my commitment to the people of Bath. That's what Lafarge will have to live up to. We will make a decision in the Ministry of the Environment by way of the director in examining all of the facts, not the fiction.

Mr. Tabuns: Minister, you promised working families a tire recycling program so we could dispose of used tires safely and responsibly. Then last month, you turned around and shelved the development of a provincial program for recycling tires. Now we see the consequences. A company is lining up to become the first cement kiln operator to burn tires in the history of Ontario, and it's the people and the environment in the Kingston area who will pay the price for your inaction.

You've just said they're not burning things that can be recycled. Well, tires can be recycled. You know that. Instead of burning tires, why don't you come up with a plan to recycle tires like you have promised?

Hon. Ms. Broten: Again, my friend does not seem to understand that not all tires meet the requirements that allow them to be recycled, but those that can be recycled will be recycled in this province.

Some of the tires are not, in substance, capable of being recycled. That is the application made by Lafarge on which, let's be clear, no decision has been made. But I

want to inform you about what the science tells us. The science tells us that Lafarge's proposal will reduce both sulphur dioxide emissions and nitrogen oxide emissions from what they are currently consuming as fuel in this facility. That's the type of science that will be examined when a decision is made.

Again, to be clear, what have I said with respect to tires? I have directed my ministry to mitigate the potential adverse effects of existing stockpiles in the province and to discourage those stockpiles. I have told Waste Diversion Ontario to start first with two programs that I think meet the needs of Ontarians first, household hazardous waste and electronics, and then we will move on to other projects.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs. As we approach the Victoria Day holiday weekend, the situation at Caledonia has dragged on for 78 days. The situation has cost the OPP millions of dollars out of their budget, and the situation is taking valuable resources from the OPP when they are required in other services, particularly on a busy holiday weekend like this.

The citizens of Caledonia are extremely frustrated, as are the First Nations. Your government sat around for almost two months before you finally brought in David Peterson to act as a mediator. Now today in Murray Campbell's column in the *Globe and Mail* we learn that Mr. Peterson is making virtually no progress.

Minister, can you tell this House what your alternative plan is to end the dispute, and are you or the Premier at least going to visit the citizens of Caledonia and show them that you're interested in resolving this situation?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I would say to the member that all the pieces really are starting to fall into place with this proposal now. We are working with the community. David Peterson is making very good progress. As the member knows, we have passage around one of the barricades, and we continue to work with the First Nation community to get some further progress on that, because obviously we want to see all the barricades removed.

We're working with the community. In fact, David Peterson had a meeting this morning with municipal and business officials in the Caledonia community that was very positive. He thanked them for the patience they are bringing to this and their understanding, and we ask for calm and quiet through the weekend. We feel that we're very close to an ultimate solution to this.

1450

Mr. Dunlop: It's beginning to appear that as the McGuinty government sat around for two months, you simply thought the problem would go away. You don't have a plan, and it now seems that Mr. Peterson could actually be mediating until Christmas Eve.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Minister of Health, I can hear you but I can't hear the questioner. I want to hear the questioner.

Mr. Dunlop: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think we've seen a lot of leadership on this issue. However, Minister, we understand from a letter dated yesterday from yourself to the Six Nations Confederacy council that you are imposing an immediate moratorium, halting any development on the Douglas Creek Estates. Can you give us a few details on this moratorium? For example, are the citizens of Caledonia aware of the moratorium? Is the developer of Douglas Creek Estates aware of the moratorium? What is the length of the moratorium? And what is your plan if the Six Nations Confederacy council does not agree to the terms of the moratorium?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The public is aware of the moratorium. The First Nations community released the letter to the public yesterday. The idea of the moratorium is to allow us some time for the long-term group, made up of the federal representative, Barbara McDougall, and the provincial representative, Jane Stewart, to work out a final disposition of the Douglas Creek Estates lands. This way, putting in a moratorium that brings calm to the situation, gives us time to deal with the long-term development issues and the long-term land claim issues in that area. It is one of many initiatives that we've started in order to expedite this process. It is, from our side, a sign of good faith to seek a peaceful resolution to this.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): A question to the Minister of Education: Dalton McGuinty keeps declaring that he has fixed the problems in education, but every day we see new examples of schools struggling to meet the needs of our students. In Toronto, the school board has been reduced to seeking donations from charitable organizations like the United Way so they can avoid cuts. Trustees say they will soon be forced to close schools because your funding formula doesn't provide the money the kids need. When are you going to keep your promise, fix the funding formula and provide schools with the funds they need to stop the cutting?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues): I appreciate the question from the education critic in the NDP caucus. I will tell this member that in fact our government, over the last two years, has invested \$2 billion in the education system. And it hasn't just been poured in willy-nilly through grants to boards; we have been very specific about what we're requiring. We have set the bar very high on an educational quality standard. Finally we are talking about education from a quality perspective. It really is about the fact that kids graduate and not have 30% dropout rates, as was the case under their government. Likewise, test scores—how our kids are actually doing on literacy and numeracy while they're in those junior years—are key elements. Those are the

things we're interested in. We are funding the system. And I am proud to say that we are partnering with this particular school board. We know they need help and we will be there for them.

Mr. Marchese: The minister talks about quality, yet schools are struggling and students are suffering. In Windsor, where you're from, new Canadians who need English-as-a-second-language instruction aren't getting the help they need. The public board does not even provide ESL instruction to students in grades 1 through 3, and the Catholic board has seven teachers serving over 300 students. Boards say they don't have enough money to do better. Children who come to Canada have a right to learn English. When are you going to keep your promise, fix the Conservative funding formula and provide schools with the funds they need to stop the cutting?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I very much appreciate this question as well. As far as the Windsor school boards are concerned, I am extremely proud of the schools in my riding, because when you look at the qualitative results in my home town, our school boards, our schools, our teachers, our helpmates in the classroom are doing an excellent job. Let me say that right now.

Secondly, when it comes to how we will partner with our school boards, so that we will work with them—because they do need supports. They need supports from us, unlike the NDP government, which in 1993 cut funding to every single school board, despite the fact that those same needs for English as a second language were there.

I want to ask this member: With the level of new immigrants coming to Ontario's schools and the demand for English as a second language, how dare you cut those programs?

WATER QUALITY

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Six years ago this Victoria Day weekend, the people of Walkerton learned that something was terribly wrong with their tap water. For several days, the town's residents had unknowingly consumed tap water which was contaminated with the bacteria *E. coli*. The devastating consequences—seven dead, over 2,300 ill and hundreds still burdened with related illnesses today—must not be forgotten.

Our government came to office in October 2003 with a commitment to implement the recommendations of Commissioner O'Connor's inquiry into the Walkerton tragedy. I know that you, your predecessor and the Premier have each been clear that the devastating consequences of the Walkerton tragedy must not be forgotten and we must not waiver in our commitment to implement the recommendations.

What progress has been made to date in implementing Commissioner O'Connor's recommendations, and what assurances can you provide to the people of Walkerton, and to all Ontarians, that the Walkerton tragedy will not be forgotten?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I want to say, on behalf of our government, that we will not forget what happened in Walkerton.

I had the privilege most recently of attending in Walkerton with my colleague Carol Mitchell, meeting with the mayor, concerned citizens of Walkerton and the Walkerton Clean Water Centre, and talking to some of those individuals for whom this tragedy was very, very personal. As each of us takes a look at what steps we need to take in this House to move our province forward in the protection of water, we cannot forget those seven people who died and we cannot forget 2,300 people who were ill.

I often think about the importance of protecting drinking water in our province as I'm making formula for my young baby boys, now seven months old, and how critical a source of drinking water is to the lives and healthiness of all of us.

We're absolutely committed to meeting the Walkerton recommendations. Sixty-five of 121 have been met—38 since we became the government. We have done things like hiring more water inspectors, putting in tough certification, requiring annual inspections and appointing a chief drinking water inspector. Twenty-two more recommendations will be met when we pass—and I do hope we will—the Clean Water Act in this House.

Those are the steps we are taking for the people of Walkerton.

Mrs. Sandals: Thank you for providing the people of Walkerton, and all Ontarians, with the reassurance that the devastating consequences of the Walkerton tragedy are not being forgotten.

You mentioned our government's proposed Clean Water Act, which we actually just gave second reading approval to earlier this afternoon. The people in my riding are very interested in finding some means of better protecting their drinking water. Most, if not all, draw their drinking water from groundwater sources, which can easily be contaminated by various human activities. Minister, could you please explain to me and my constituents how the Clean Water Act, if passed, would ensure that my constituents' groundwater is better protected from contamination?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I want to say that, absolutely, the Clean Water Act is the linchpin of our government's comprehensive strategy to ensure clean and protected safe drinking water in this province.

As we talk about the Clean Water Act, we should all remember Justice O'Connor's first recommendation: "Drinking water sources should be protected by developing watershed-based source protection plans," the first barrier in a multiple-barrier system. That's what the Clean Water Act is all about.

The proposed Clean Water Act will empower municipalities and conservation authorities to map out sources of drinking water, identify threats, take action on those threats, to reduce them and take preventative measures.

For the very first time, we'll have an understanding of the quality and quantity of drinking water in our prov-

ince. I would encourage all members of this House to support the government's Clean Water Act.

1500

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): My question is for the Acting Premier. The McGuinty government broke a key election promise not to raise taxes, by instituting the illegitimate health tax. This tax is unfair to seniors, who are now paying more and getting less because you rolled back the seniors' tax credit, you delisted health care services, and you have now stung them with \$450 more in taxes by the way of this health tax.

My question for the Acting Premier is this: Why is this Liberal government against our seniors who are on fixed incomes? Why did your entire caucus vote against my resolution this morning? Acting Premier, when will you listen to seniors across Ontario who are petitioning this Legislature and demanding that you eliminate this illegitimate health tax for Ontarians who are over the age of 65?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): We voted against her ill-conceived resolution because we will not cut health care services to seniors by \$2.5 billion.

Let me say to the member, those senior citizens want shorter wait times, and under this government, they're getting them. Those senior citizens don't want hospital closures like you did; they want hospital beds open. Those senior citizens want long-term care, good long-term care, something you took away from them.

We're investing \$2.5 billion in public health care to ensure that the senior citizens of this province, who worked so hard and so long, can continue to access the finest health care we have.

Your resolution was ill-conceived, ill-thought-out. We will not cut services to seniors by \$2.5 billion.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The member for Nepean–Carleton—order. Order.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Minister of Health Promotion, I don't need your help, okay?

The member for Nepean–Carleton, if you're going to ask a question, let the response come, okay? Supplementary, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): You know, that \$2.5 billion doesn't go to health care for our brave men and women in the military. But you continue to dip into their pockets, while they're serving this country around the world. You continue to dip into their pockets for that illegitimate, illegal, regressive, filthy health care tax.

I'm asking the minister now: Today, of all days, will you finally accept that fairness for our brave men and women is the order of the day, or will you continue to insult their efforts around the world and continue to charge them this tax? I'm asking you one more time,

please show fairness and exempt the men and women of our military—who are not eligible for health care from this province—and allow them to be exempt from this punitive health care tax. One more time—

The Acting Speaker: I think we have time for an answer to the questions. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Having a well-functioning health care system is, in fact, vital to our brave men and women who serve in the military and their families.

I further say that the RCMP need that health care system, too. I'm quite surprised that when the member opposite says that they don't benefit from it, he forgets that right in his own riding, at CFB Petawawa—that's in your riding—there's a family health team, paid for by the government of Ontario through this health premium.

Unlike the members opposite, we are investing in health care. Unlike the member opposite, whose government cut \$557 million from hospitals, we're investing in them. Unlike the member, whose government closed 7,000 hospital beds, we're opening hospital beds. Unlike that member's government, which fired 10,000 nurses, we're hiring nurses. So I say to the honourable member opposite, tell the people of Ontario where you're going to cut \$2.5 billion out of public health care, because you can't hide the truth from them anymore. Your record—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Member, take your seat. New question?

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Health. For a period of time yesterday, the city of Hamilton was without a single ambulance to respond to emergency calls. The critical shortage, as you probably know, lasted between 1:10 and 2:20 p.m., when the number of available vehicles ranged from zero to four for an entire city of almost half a million people.

On April 25, I alerted you to a growing crisis in our ambulance service. I wrote to you after the son of Tina Fougere had to wait an agonizing 34 minutes for an ambulance to respond to a grand mal seizure that he had in a school in Winona. Your ministry was supposed to investigate this, Minister. What has been the outcome of that investigation, and what are you doing to ensure that the residents of Winona and Hamilton won't find themselves without ambulance service again?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The emergency health services branch is investigating the circumstances related to the matter that the honourable member raises. Of course, it was already well known within the ministry.

Obviously, the honourable member asks the question, what are we doing with respect to this? The Premier demonstrated a good bit of leadership on the issue of ambulance funding through the very recent contribution of an additional \$50 million flowed by the Minister of Finance to address some of those challenges with respect to ambulance funding. We're on record as indicating that \$300 million will be invested over three years to enhance

the quality of the partnership as it relates to ambulance. We've also worked very vigorously through the hospital system, with initiatives being implemented to address the challenges with ambulance off-load delays, very often one of the challenges that leads to these symptoms.

We recognize that this is not an ideal circumstance. The challenges that are being faced in Hamilton are being addressed head-on through a review of what's gone down from the standpoint of protocols and through additional resources. I'm happy to take any suggestions the honourable member has about other steps we might take.

Ms. Horwath: Minister, as you probably know, fire and police responded very well to that emergency and on time, but the ambulance did not. It's not, unfortunately, an isolated case. The problem is acute in Winona, and it's spreading Hamilton-wide.

Tina's son, Nathan, is autistic. He suffered a six-minute seizure and then lapsed into a comatose state. But for some reason, the operators downgraded his condition to non-emergency status. All that Tina Fougere wants are some answers, and why her son was downgraded is the most important one. Why did the ministry mess up? What is it you're going to do about it, not only when you're going to answer her—so a time frame in terms of a response to this woman's questions—but when you're going to make sure that Hamilton is going to have an assured overall ambulance system that Hamiltonians can rely on for our growing city?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It would be far more helpful if the honourable member didn't pretend that—a significant element of this service includes that which is led by the people in Hamilton themselves. I acknowledge that the ministry has got a review under way to take a look at the circumstances that relate to Winona, but if there is a circumstance where ambulance times in Winona stand out as a particular challenge, then obviously the local municipality, the upper-tier municipality, as the provider of the service, has an obligation as well to make sure the service is functioning well.

We've provided increased funding since we came to office of more than \$1.5 million to ambulance service in Hamilton. I recognize, as the honourable member has indicated, that the circumstances have not been satisfactory. We agree. Accordingly, that's why we're reviewing the circumstances. Once that review is complete, we will work to be able to assure the family that we've looked at it and as to what corrective measures are being undertaken. I thank the honourable member for the question.

BORDER SECURITY

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): My question is for the Minister of Tourism. I've been following the proposed passport requirements for entering the United States very carefully, with all Ontarians, and people and businesses in Toronto are obviously very concerned about the implications this proposed legislation could have on tourism and prosperity in the city.

Obviously, tourism in Toronto as a whole has an impact on Don Valley West, but the Ontario Science Centre is located in my riding and is a real draw for people from across the country and across the border. The recent Body Works exhibit was a terrific example of the kind of innovative, educational exhibit that draws thousands of people to this city.

Minister, I understand that our government has been working tirelessly on this issue. Can you update the House on the status of the US passport proposal?

1510

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I certainly can, and I thank you for this important question. It was just yesterday that the good news came out of the United States Senate that in fact the Senate had voted to extend the date for implementation of the passport requirement back to June 1, 2009. Now, we haven't won the war but we've won an important battle.

Another important event taking place is the meeting of top-level North American representatives in Gimli, Manitoba, at the end of the month. Premier McGuinty will be joining other Canadian Premiers, ambassadors for Canada and the US and a number of representatives of both countries to discuss the border issues.

Today I spoke to Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont and to the office of Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska about their legislation that they brought through, what the prospects are of going through the House and what Ontario could do and Canadians could do to assist them in their efforts. You see, it is not a battle between Canada and the United States but between those of us along the border who understand the importance of this issue and some who may not understand the implications.

Ms. Wynne: It sounds like there are a lot of positive things happening. I've heard you say a number of times in this House that this proposal would have devastating impacts on the tourism industry, not only in Ontario but all across Canada and the United States.

There are those of us who have said that we're wasting our time fighting the provisions of the western hemisphere travel initiative, that we should abandon our efforts to delay the implementation of the passport requirements and simply comply with this ill-advised law. But our government obviously has refused to capitulate on this issue and has vigorously pursued it with allies on the subject.

Minister, what approach do you believe will be the most effective in delaying and altering the requirements found in the US legislation?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: We've consistently taken a proactive stance in this particular issue. I've always been optimistic that US officials will recognize that the interest in tourism and trade for both countries is the same and that requiring passports to enter the US or Canada was a big mistake. Despite the prophets of pessimism out there who said this was a done deal, that somehow we must roll over and play dead and comply

with this, Ontario has said we shouldn't do that, that in fact we should continue to make representations.

That's why, on behalf of Ontario last fall, I filed a submission with the United States Department of Homeland Security opposing the passport requirement, seeking a delay in implementation and proposing better alternatives. I've written some op-ed pieces that have been published in many publications in the US. We'll continue to work with our American allies and friends and all Canadians of goodwill in ensuring that we win this particular battle for the people of Ontario. We will stand up for Ontario.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): I have a question for the Minister of Finance. I understand that the McGuinty government remains paralyzed when it comes to addressing skyrocketing property assessments across Ontario. Because the minister is frozen in place, his only option is, it appears, to cancel upcoming assessments and try to sneak by the next election without offering any permanent solution for Ontario taxpayers. Is what the opposition hears true, Minister, that you're about to freeze assessments and try to sneak by taxpayers in 2007?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The question coming from that member is absolutely hilarious.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): Very rich.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It is rich. It's very rich. On eight separate occasions they introduced and passed legislation. Seven of those times they were correcting their own faults. They left the last piece, with all of its challenges.

The government of Ontario is currently responding to the Ombudsman's initial recommendations. We are in the process, both through MPAC and the recommendations specific to them, of ensuring that those changes are being implemented. With respect to the three recommendations that came to us, we're implementing there. We continue to consult and work with the people not only of this Legislature but of Ontario as we move forward into the future with respect to property tax assessment.

Mr. Hudak: The minister may find it hilarious but taxpayers certainly don't find skyrocketing property assessments hilarious. In fact, under the Dalton McGuinty government they've gone up an average of 30%. In fact some taxpayers, whether in Windsor, Fort Erie or Kenora, have seen theirs skyrocket in the triple-digit figures.

I think the minister well knows that property assessors are about to hit the field with a new round of property assessment increases under the McGuinty government. If the minister does not come up with some plan—the member beside him, Mike Colle, has a secret report you've never tabled. We have the Homestead Act before the Legislature. You actually cancelled property assessment averaging. So I say to the minister, are you going to

let the property assessors go out in the field for a new round of assessments or are you actually going to come up with some kind of answer?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The one thing we're going to do is fix the mess that that member and his colleagues left the government of Ontario. Mr. Colle's report was an excellent piece of work. It resulted in changes. It's resulted in a number of changes to a range of issues, including maple syrup operations, trailer parks and horse farmers. So none of this is secret. There's no conspiracy here.

Property taxpayers in Ontario can count on the McGuinty Liberals to deal with the challenges created by that member and his government with MPAC and with respect to how we conduct assessments. One thing we can say to those taxpayers is that we are going to get it right when we fix the problems created by the previous government. The people of Ontario deserve better than they got from that member. They're getting it from this government. We're fixing the MPAC system. We're working with them to ensure that all the people of Ontario are treated fairly and that their property tax assessments reflect current value assessment.

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): To the Minister of Health: Jack Ammendolia has advanced multiple sclerosis—a 47-year-old Welland man who is so sick that he can't move without help. When he does become ill, he needs to go to the hospital by ambulance to get the medically necessary treatment that's available there. On May 11, Mr. Ammendolia was troubled to learn that his ambulance service is being cut off unless he starts forking over \$208 per trip to the private patient transporter. Can you explain why this would happen and what we can do to make sure that Mr. Ammendolia gets the care he needs?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I must say to the honourable member that I appreciate the question. The circumstances are not familiar to me and I cannot explain them. I'm very keen to get the information from the honourable member so that I can make an inquiry. If the gentleman is—well, I can't explain it away. I'd be very interested in working alongside the honourable member to try and address these circumstances.

The underlying issue in Ontario with respect to ambulance co-pays, which have been longstanding, is that we have not adjusted those at all, and they are not the same as the figure that was quoted. So yes, I would benefit from additional information and endeavour to work with the honourable member to be of assistance to his constituent.

Mr. Kormos: It's an important issue, and my concern is not only for Mr. Ammendolia but for other people who might be in a similar position. Either he pays this money out of pocket, as explained to him, or he doesn't get the health care he needs, because his family can't help. He's got a catheter. It's impossible for them to transport him

safely. And \$208 is simply too much for someone with advanced MS and on a disability pension.

I again ask you to commit to inquiring into this matter and assisting in the resolution of it.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Obviously, I made the commitment already. On behalf of that gentleman and others who could be possibly affected by a similar interpretation of policy, I will endeavour to work with the honourable member to get to the bottom of it for the benefit of his constituents.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Last Tuesday, just getting off the plane in Ottawa, I caught the CFRA midnight news and I couldn't believe what I was hearing, especially coming from a former Minister of Transportation and an engineer, saying that the McGuinty government was being blamed for the delay in the widening of Highway 7 from Carleton Place to the 417. The member for Lanark said that our government should have acted sooner on this project since his former government, the Conservatives, made an announcement about the widening in 2003.

As we know, expansion of a highway is a major project. It does involve an environmental assessment, purchasing of land, design and engineering, and also consultation. Can you please explain what our government has done since the 2003 announcement to get where we are today? And also, Minister, make sure that the Lanark–Carleton member gets the message so he could go back on CFRA and inform the people properly.

1520

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for his question, and I also want to thank my PA, who is from Lanark–Carleton, because he informed me about the issue as well. I want to assure the House that we are moving ahead with the widening of Highway 7 from Highway 417 to Carleton Place. What happened on this project was that we actually got two bump-up requests for the environment process, so the environment minister approved those bump-up requests in 2004. Now we are moving ahead with that project. My colleague, Minister Watson, actually announced that widening project last year. It's a \$100-million project, and we are doing it in three stages. The first stage is about \$38 million and, actually, the construction is going on right now. The detailed design is under way for the remaining phases.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Supplementary? The Chair recognizes the member from Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I, too, have a question for the Minister of Transportation. On Tuesday, I had the great pleasure of joining you in my hometown of Oakville at the official launch of this year's highway construction season. As you know, the bridges and the

ramps at Bronte Creek and 16 Mile Creek are notorious for causing congestion along the QEW. I've heard from a number of constituents in Oakville, and they're extremely pleased with our government's commitment to expanding the QEW through Halton, finally. But they're concerned about the congestion that may be caused by the road work during this summer construction season.

Minister, could you explain to the people of Halton and the people of Oakville what the McGuinty government is doing to expand the highway network through my riding? As well, can you explain what your ministry can do to help mitigate the impact of construction work on commuting traffic?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: I want to thank the member from Oakville for his question. I also want to thank him for joining me this week for the announcement. Actually, he told us a couple of stories about the place where we made the announcement, as well. The QEW is being worked on. It's being expanded. We are going through the environmental assessment process right now to see if we can make HOV lanes on the QEW. We are also expanding—a \$63-million investment—the two key bridges on the QEW as well. The work that we want to do on the QEW is to make sure that there is another lane added on both sides so that the traffic congestion can be addressed.

With regard to the question of what we do to avoid congestion or inconvenience to people when we're doing the work: We do the work at nighttime and during off-peak hours. The municipalities are involved with this. We try to do it in stages, so that if one lane is closed, the other lane stays open during work hours. All those things are being done. Most of the construction can only take place during the summer, and that's what we try to do. We have embarked on a major construction project of \$1.4 billion.

COLLINGWOOD GENERAL AND MARINE HOSPITAL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Simcoe–Grey.

Applause.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): It always worries me when the government House leader claps for me.

My question is to the Minister of Health. I know the minister is aware of a rather serious situation that's developing at the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital. For the first time in my memory, the hospital issued a release this week indicating to the public and to patients that the emergency room may have to close due to a physician shortage. So I simply ask you, Minister: What are you doing to help the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital in this difficult time?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Do you know what? I have to say to the honourable member: You had the chance to do something and you didn't. The reality is that if you had acted on the fact that medical schools were constrained by the NDP instead of sitting on your duffs for four years, there

would be 280 additional doctors, some of them being available to communities just like Collingwood even today. You know very well that it takes a lot longer to produce a doctor than it does a pizza, so maybe you should have thought about the circumstances when you saw that the size of medical schools were constrained. I hate to put it directly to the honourable member, but he had the power and he slept through it, and now Collingwood is paying the price. That's just the simple reality. We're expanding medical schools by 23% in response to the reality, but lost time is something I can't get back. That's on the honourable member's docket.

However, we recognize the challenges in Collingwood. It's a community well known to me. I talked last night to the chief executive officer and to a board member. We're willing to support the hospital in any way we can in order to address this, and we suggested also that, under the auspices of the local health integration network, the hospitals in Simcoe county may be part of the solution by being able to work co-operatively. But the ministry is actively supporting Collingwood General and Marine Hospital in order to address this circumstance.

Mr. Wilson: I asked the question in good faith, and the minister's arrogance and bullying does absolutely nothing to help future patients. It does absolutely nothing to attract doctors to this province or to this particular hospital. In fact, that health minister is probably doing more, with his arrogance and his treatment of professionals and his treatment of people in this Legislature, to discourage doctors from coming to this province.

That's a horrible answer from you. I even told you ahead of time that I was going to ask you the question, because it's a serious matter, and you didn't give me any answer or any comfort at all that you're actually doing anything about this crisis.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: He's given no comfort to the people of his community by failing to act in a leadership way when he had the reins of power and he was the Minister of Health in this province. He doesn't like it. It cuts a little too close to the truth for the honourable member, but it is the reality. We're bringing a community health centre to that community.

On point, I did say in my earlier answer, which the honourable member can see if he chooses to review Hansard, that we're working closely with the hospital—I spoke to the hospital CEO and to a board member last night—and we're also looking to the local health integration network to work together with all the hospitals there to address the underlying circumstances.

The honourable member doesn't like it, but the facts of the matter cannot be detached from the circumstances. This honourable member's inaction as a Minister of Health is a big part of the problem we have with doctor shortages in the province of Ontario. Our government has increased medical school spaces by 23% because we recognize that Collingwood needs to have an emergency room that's operating at all times. I've been there in the middle of the night, I know its importance, and we're

working with Collingwood General and Marine to assist them in this endeavour.

VISITOR

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We have with us today Tony Lupusella, a former member of the Legislature from Davenport.

PETITIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have several hundred signatures on a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas children with autism who have reached the age of six years are no longer being discharged from their preschool autism program; and

“Whereas there are approximately 700 preschool children with autism across Ontario who are required to wait indefinitely for placement in the program, and there are also countless school-age children on the same wait list that are not receiving the support they require in the school system; and

“Whereas these children should be getting the best special education possible in the form of applied behavioural analysis (ABA) within the school system; and

“Whereas this situation has an impact on the families, extended families and friends of all of these children; and

“Whereas, as stated on the website for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, ‘IBI can make a significant difference in the life of a child with autism. Its objective is to decrease the frequency of challenging behaviours, build social skills and promote language development’;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fund the treatment of IBI for all preschool children awaiting services and fund a school-based special education program in the form of ABA.”

This petition has my signature of support.

RENT REGULATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, presented to me by Mr. Sonny Sansone, of 10 Gordonridge, and signed by several others. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is concerned about tenants in Ontario and wants to have a fair relationship between landlords and tenants; and

“Whereas the cost of living continues to rise, and income of many people, especially pensioners and low-income workers, remains comparatively low; and

“Whereas landlords currently have more rights than tenants, giving them the ability to raise rent fees as they wish, causing tenants to fear rent increases they can’t afford;

“We, therefore, the undersigned, petition to cap rents in Ontario, giving more rights to tenants; and

“Further, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass into law the Residential Tenancies Act, Bill 109, as soon as possible.”

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

1530

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

“Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

“Whereas the private member’s bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver’s licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006.”

I support this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member for Oshawa.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

Mr. Ouellette: “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”—

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: What is the point of order in petitions?

Mr. Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, I’m shouting here for the fourth time on a point of order. You know the rules, Mr.

Speaker, and you cannot be biased. It starts with the Conservative Party, then it goes to the NDP and then it goes to the Liberals—

The Acting Speaker: That’s not a point of order. Take your seat now or you’ll be removed from this chamber.

The member from Oshawa.

Mr. Ouellette: I’ll start over.

“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 affix my name in support.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member from Davenport,

Mr. Ruprecht: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought it was fairly clear that petitions are done on a rotating basis, and consequently—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: If you want to read your petition, fine. I didn’t see you.

Mr. Ruprecht: I challenge the Chair on this issue.

The Acting Speaker: You can’t challenge the Chair. If you want to read a petition, do so. I didn’t see you.

Mr. Ruprecht: Mr. Speaker, can you tell me, when can I challenge the Chair on this, then?

The Acting Speaker: You can’t.

Are there other petitions? The Chair recognizes the member from Whitby–Ajax.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from Ballycliffe Lodge.

“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).”

As I’m in support of this petition, I’m pleased to affix my signature.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition addressed to the assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the people of Ontario expect the government of Canada to honour existing agreements with the government of Ontario;

“Whereas provinces and territories negotiated agreements with the federal government to ensure Canadians would have access to early learning and child care programs that are high-quality, affordable, universally inclusive and developmental;

“Whereas parents in Ontario have demonstrated a high demand for greater access to high-quality early learning and child care programs;

“Whereas Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada would provide Ontario families with at least 25,000 new high-quality, regulated child care spaces in the first three years;

“Whereas Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement represents a \$1.9-billion investment over five years in high-quality early learning and child care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in calling on the government of Canada to honour Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement, for the sake of the thousands of Ontario families who would benefit from it.”

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): That was wonderful; thank you.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): “We Demand Leadership in Land Dispute

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government was notified of this land issue over a year ago; and

“Whereas the standoff has been ongoing since February 28, 2006; and

“Whereas there has been no leadership from senior levels of government;

“We, the undersigned, demand that the McGuinty Liberals start showing some real, consistent and timely leadership in dealing with the current standoff in Caledonia.”

IDENTITY THEFT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair once again recognizes the member from Davenport.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Once again, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for recognizing me the second time. I appreciate that. I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services. It reads as follows:

“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;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed unanimously on November 30, 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 (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information, such as SIN and loan account numbers.

“(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer.

“(3) The consumer reporting agency shall only report credit-inquiry records resulting from actual applications for credit or increase of credit, except in a report given to the consumer.

“(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate.”

I’m delighted to sign this petition, since I agree with it 100%.

LESLIE M. FROST CENTRE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I'm going to hand this to page Connor.

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GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair again recognizes the member from Davenport.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, this must be a great day, and I thank you for recognizing me the third time today. That's wonderful.

I have a petition which reads as follows:

“To the Parliament of Ontario, the minister of infrastructure services and the Minister of Transportation:

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

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

“Whereas this bridge (underpass) will be: (1) too narrow for the planned TTC right-of-way, since it will leave only one lane for traffic; (2) it is not safe for pedestrians (it's about 50 metres long). It's dark and slopes on both east and west sides creating high banks for 300 metres; and (3) it creates a divide, a no man's land, between Old Weston Road and Keele Street. (This was acceptable when the area consisted entirely of slaughterhouses, but now the area has 900 new homes);

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that GO Transit extend the tunnel beyond St. Clair Avenue West so that trains will pass under St. Clair Avenue West, thus eliminating this eyesore of a bridge with its high banks and blank walls. Instead it will create a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape with easy traffic flow.”

Who could possibly disagree with this petition?

LONG-TERM CARE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Further petitions. The Chair recognizes the member from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm in a contest with the member from Davenport.

“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).”

This was brought to me by many long-term-care residents in the riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

The Acting Speaker: The time for petitions is over.

The Chair recognizes the deputy House leader.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Before I get to the orders of the day, I'd like to rise, pursuant to standing order 55, and give the Legislature the business of the House for next week. Well, it's actually two weeks, but—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): There is none next week.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I'm reminded by the member from Halton that there is none next week. He's very sharp.

On Monday, May 29, in the afternoon, to be confirmed; in the evening, third reading of Bill 78, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Student Performance), 2006.

On Tuesday, May 30, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 107, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act.

On Wednesday, May 31, in the afternoon, an opposition day standing in the name of Mr. Hampton; in the evening, to be confirmed.

On Thursday, June 1, 2006, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 52, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18).

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SECURITIES TRANSFER ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 SUR LE TRANSFERT DES VALEURS MOBILIÈRES

Mr. Phillips moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 41, An Act to create a comprehensive system of rules for the transfer of securities that is consistent with such rules across North America and to make consequential amendments to various Acts / *Projet de loi 41, Loi instituant un régime global de règles régissant le transfert des valeurs mobilières qui cadre avec celui qui s'applique dans ce domaine en Amérique du Nord et apportant des modifications corrélatives à diverses lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I'm pleased to begin third reading debate on Bill 41. I want to begin by thanking all members of the Legislature who have participated in the development of this bill. I want to particularly thank the committee who dealt with it, I thought expeditiously and with a good amount of attention.

This is a complex but very important bill. It's part of a broader series of things that the Legislature has directed us to do. Some people would say, "Why is the capital market important to me? Why are the stock markets important to me?" Well, for a couple of reasons. One is that virtually everyone now is an investor in the market. If you are into CPP, the Canada pension plan, your RRSP or almost any pension plan, then you personally are investing in the capital markets. The protection of investors is extremely important. That is, if any of us are invested in the market, we want to be certain that we have good protection for our investments. So this issue is extremely important to all of us.

By way of background, I think the members of the Legislature will recall that we, the Legislature, require what's called a five-year review of our Securities Act by legislation. That was conducted by someone named Purdy Crawford with a panel of people. They made their report to the Legislature. Then, as you will recall, an all-party legislative committee reviewed those recommendations and reported. I might say that all three parties unanimously supported the recommendations of the committee. For the public, sometimes you see the conflict that exists around here, but often, as we do our work, when it's in the interest of the public for all parties to support it, you'll see that. In this case there was unanimous support for the recommendations.

There was a series of recommendations in the report, and the third recommendation was for the government to proceed with the Securities Transfer Act. What the committee said was:

"Those witnesses who addressed this issue"—that is, the Securities Transfer Act—"were unanimous in their support for the Crawford report recommendation. They

made a compelling case that Ontario law in this area has fallen behind the US and European jurisdictions and needs to be modernized.

"The standing committee sees this as an opportunity for Ontario, not only to improve the investment environment for Ontario investors, but also to play a leading role in establishing uniform legislation across Canada."

So their all-party recommendation to the Legislature was that the government should introduce securities transfer legislation modelled on revised article 8 of the Uniform Commercial Code in the US.

That's what we have done. In some respects under the direction of an all-party committee, we have introduced this legislation that accomplishes those two things. One is to provide a contemporary securities transfer, but the other is to provide leadership to the other jurisdictions in the country. I'm pleased to say, by the way, that Alberta now has passed second reading of essentially this bill, and other jurisdictions are now in the process of proceeding with it. We've done what the committee recommended we do.

If I can provide a layperson's explanation of the bill, because it is relatively complex, the current laws around security transfers assume a paper-based environment; that is, when you buy a stock, you will get that stock delivered to you and you will hold that stock. As everyone appreciates, that no longer exists; that simply would bog down the marketplace. We would become competitively disadvantaged, the investors would not have a good environment to invest in and we'd find that investors would be looking elsewhere.

What has happened is that the market has found ways to trade electronically, but it has been cumbersome and expensive. What this act does is it brings us up to date. It recognizes the reality of electronic transfers and updates our laws so that we can conduct business much more efficiently.

Why is that in our interests? It's in all of our interests because we rely on a good level of income in our retirement, for example; our businesses looking to raise capital have to do that in a competitive environment if we want our businesses to compete globally.

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I think all of us appreciate that we are in a global trading economy. As a matter of fact, I often say to my community that nobody in the world relies on exports like Ontario does; nobody has a higher percentage of their gross domestic product in international exports than Ontario does. We are very much a successful global trading environment, and certainly our financial institutions are, but we've got to make sure we keep our laws and regulations up to date. That's what this act does.

I am told by those who have analysed the need for this that the potential savings for our capital markets and our investor community is between \$100 million and \$140 million a year. Those are Canada-wide annual savings, but they're significant. If you believe, as I do, that ultimately the investor benefits from that, that that can be a return to investors rather than a cost, this is significant.

It's also significant in terms of continuing to implement the recommendations that were laid out for us by the standing committee.

I would acknowledge that we have two or three more pieces of work from the committee. My colleagues Mr. Tascona and Mr. Prue both have often pointed that out, that we still need to deal with, and we are working very hard on, finding a way to move to a common securities regulator. And as we said, as we're working on that, we continue to look at finding a way to deal with the separation of the adjudicative function from the regulatory function at the securities commission. But the fact that we haven't dealt with those two should not stop us from continuing to pick off the recommendations one at a time.

By the way, just to remind ourselves, because I don't think this Legislature has taken as much credit as it should, we did two other things that maybe Mr. Kormos isn't even quite aware of. In the budget, we provided the Legislature with the tools to review the Ontario Securities Commission, to refer it to a committee. The second thing we did was pass what's called civil liability for secondary markets, now available as of the end of December 2005. It is quite an important protection for investors. We're the first jurisdiction in Canada to offer that. It means that for stocks that are traded after the initial offering, that regime is now available.

I'm about to wrap up my remarks by saying that I appreciate the work in the Legislature by all parties in this area of modernizing our environment for investors and for securities. The committee made those recommendations to the Legislature, and we are systematically moving through those. This is one of the big ones. Finally, I'd say that this is also the first phase of three phases in dealing with updating our commercial laws. We will be proceeding with the next phase over the next few months and the third phase over the next perhaps year and a half.

I look forward to the debate here. As I say, it's a complex bill, but in some respects simple in that it essentially updates the way our markets can trade, moving from a paper-based trading environment to an electronic environment, with significant cost savings as a result, which I believe the investor ultimately will benefit from. It fulfills one of the key recommendations that came out of that all-party committee, calling for us to move forward on this legislation.

With that, I look forward to the debate this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette): Questions and comments? Further debate?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm certainly pleased to join in the debate. I think the Minister of Government Services has correctly stated that this is a useful piece of legislation for the transfer of securities, no doubt, not only in Ontario but throughout this country and the United States. It's essentially parallel to what the legislation is in the United States.

During the hearings we did have on this bill, it was quite interesting in terms of the amendments. I was a

little disappointed that the amendments came in when they did and that the minister didn't make me aware of those. But there were a lot of amendments, and I think it came out of the legislation that's coming through in Alberta to sort of tighten up the language. I think they did a good job with respect to doing that, with respect to the language in the bill, to make it much more consistent. The last thing you need, even though it's legislation that is similar or even almost identical in terms of purpose, is to have different types of language in terms of the interpretation. It can lead to a lot of problems, especially in a country that has different jurisdictions and a final court of appeal, in terms of the Supreme Court of Canada dealing with this. From what I understand from ministry staff, this is not a piece of legislation that's been subject to a lot of litigation, which is also a positive aspect of the bill.

Bearing in mind that it is a fairly complicated piece of legislation in terms of drafting, the purpose is essentially to change it from a paper-based to an electronic-based system with respect to security transfer.

The minister is correct: We've had concerns with respect to bringing the Ontario Securities Commission into the modern age with respect to how it operates—the member from Niagara Centre—to deal with the Enrons and to deal with the different types of corporate methods that have taken advantage of shareholders, taken advantage of employees with respect to their pension plans—measures that have to be taken seriously in this country because they have been taken seriously across the border with respect to a very vigilant and aggressive, prosecution-based effort that is totally separated from the regulation arm of the securities commission in the United States separating those two functions, the regulation of the industry as opposed to the prosecution of the people who decide to break the laws.

I think there's a fundamental change that we need to see in this country. There are some real problems with respect to some of the activities that have occurred with respect to not only pension plans but also dealing with stock options and taking some much-needed funds equity out of the company to a small number of individuals.

I think it's clear that with this particular bill we're moving forward in that direction. Certainly the minister is correct. I raised it in the hearings with respect to reform. I think we do need reform in the Ontario Business Corporations Act to bring it more in line in terms of how one should operate.

If you read the Ontario Gazette, you almost wonder why people even incorporate. You go through the Ontario Gazette and you'll have pages upon pages, volumes upon volumes of companies that have been set up which never do anything, and because of the laws of this province, they're dissolved because there's nothing that has happened. You've got to wonder why people are doing these things with respect to setting up what we call dummy corporations and doing nothing with that particular corporate vehicle.

It sort of begs the question of how we operate in this province with respect to corporate entities and how people use the corporate entity in a fashion that they don't realize, that it's not their personal piggy bank. There are some bylaws, there are some rules that they have to respect because, even though they are the majority shareholder, there are some rules that have to be followed. That just doesn't seem to be in place in this province in terms of how that is occurring. We need to bring in a better method of enforcement under the Ontario Business Corporations Act because that's a part of where we're going to go with respect to dealing with officers, directors and shareholders of the corporation to bring it into the modern age.

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It's quite obvious, because people used to incorporate because they felt that they would be immune from legal action and you wouldn't be able to go after their personal assets when you're dealing with a corporate entity. But that corporate veil has been pierced in so many different ways because of corporate malfeasance, corporate fraud against individuals trying to use that corporation against other individuals. I think the changes are necessary, combined with respect to security that you want to see under the Personal Property Security Act. We need to deal with that also to bring it into not only real-time, but also to deal with the type of assets that are out there in the different financing arrangements and leasing arrangements. You really need to have some kind of security for the individual that is taking the risk in lending and also for the individual who is purchasing that particular personal property.

I really don't have much to add to this particular bill. We're not sitting next week and I'll be very active in my riding. There are a number of issues that I'm dealing with, like GO Transit. I talked to the Minister of Transportation today about GO Transit in terms of meeting with his people to deal with that particular issue, and also about bringing in a passport office to the city of Barrie to deal with the issues surrounding closer-to-home access to that particular passport option for our area.

That's all I want to say. I've been very pleased to work with the minister. He's been very professional, as has his staff, in dealing with this particular bill. I look forward to his next bill, whenever that may come.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm pleased to speak to Bill 41 on behalf of the New Democrats here at Queen's Park. Our critic in this area, Michael Prue, was eager to have worked on the committee with other members of this Legislature in that five-year review process that the minister speaks of and that resulted in this small step forward, Bill 41, which we support. I expect that it'll go to a vote today so that it can then be, in due course, in this case, reasonably promptly proclaimed into law.

As I say, it's a step in the right direction. Everybody acknowledges and everybody agrees; we're of one voice when we speak for the need for yet more important

recommendations from the securities review committee that are still to be implemented. These include—and the minister has made reference to some of them—the need to separate the adjudicative function of the Ontario Securities Commission from its other functions; the need for a task force to review the role of self-regulatory organizations, including whether the trade association and regulatory functions of SRO, self-regulating organizations, should be separate; and the need to work with the securities commission to establish a workable mechanism that would allow investors to pursue restitution in a timely and affordable manner and that the government report on its progress with respect to this work within a fixed time frame. I'm going to speak further about that in a few minutes.

The minister, of course, talked about people owning stocks of one sort or another. While he's right that many people do, let's be fair and understand that the poorest folks in Ontario don't. The concept of owning a stock is pretty foreign to most of them. But most middle-class people, middle-class income earners, certainly members of this Legislative Assembly, own equities. Rich folks own equities. If they don't own them, they steal them, and I'm going to talk about that in a few minutes as well.

For instance, I recall the historic moment in this Legislature—because I know that most of the members own stocks directly or indirectly because of the nature of the MPP's defined contribution pension plan. I remember the day we voted on it here in the Legislative Assembly. It was an historic moment because of course that was back in, what, 1996, long before defined benefit pension plans began collapsing throughout the world. It was the leadership of Premier Mike Harris—Mr. Berardinetti might be interested to know this history and to understand why he's now a member of a defined contribution pension plan. You'll remember it, too, Speaker, I'm sure, with great pride, as you voted with your caucus to abolish the defined benefit pension plan that MPPs had. You were leading-edge. This was vanguard. This was leading-edge stuff.

Here it is 10 years later, and we're seeing the corporate world collapse defined benefit pension plans left and right and replace them with these innovative, clever—they were, Mr. Berardinetti. You should have heard the speech-making that took place here in this chamber in 1996, this leading-edge sort of financial philosophy, defined contribution pension plan, which is what MPPs belong to now and which is what increasing numbers of workers are forced to belong to because their employers are simply pulling their defined benefit pension plan.

I just saw in the United States a couple of months ago Verizon, the telecommunications company, announcing that they were going to collapse—not collapse, terminate, no more contributions. Of course, you have to give notice, so it was within a year or two years—all contributions to the defined benefit plan.

I remember the minister himself was here. I'm sure he was, because he was a member of the Legislative Assembly. We all voted for the defined contribution pen-

sion plan. I, quite frankly, remain proud of how I voted on that day 10 years ago, of the innovativeness of all of us. We were so clever, weren't we, Minister? The innovativeness of all of us in simply dismantling—I had a private member's bill. I recall this. I had a private member's bill that did but this to the historic defined benefit pension plan. It made it necessary to be at least the age of 55 before you could begin to collect. I thought that was a most modest proposal; I did. But nobody seemed to latch on to that proposal. People weren't about to jump on that bandwagon, because the criticism, of course, was the perception—and it was a real one—that people as young as—who was the fellow from out Windsor way? Remo Mancini. Remo Mancini was collecting an MPP's pension at a relatively tender age. He was probably no older than Mr. Berardinetti is now. Every time I mention that, Mr. Mancini's office calls mine and says, "Why do you keep doing that to me? Why do you keep telling people about that?" I say, "Well, because it's a historical fact. Of course, if I'm not telling the truth, say so and correct me." So Mr. Remo Mancini's office keeps calling mine every time I raise his name in the Legislature as an illustration of what drew public attention to those defined benefit pension plans, which were, of course, replaced so cleverly by defined contribution pension plans.

So I say to Mr. Berardinetti, the member for Scarborough Southwest, who is joining the minister as a seatmate for the purpose of this debate, that's why you have a defined contribution pension plan. That's why you own stock. Now, mind you, the last week hasn't been particularly kind to you, but you've got a lot of time. You have a whole lot of time.

When I learned that I was going to be speaking to this bill, I thought about the important role that the Ontario Securities Commission has, and reference has been made to it, and that is: to protect investors from outright thievery. I recall the line from the song by Woody Guthrie: "Some will rob you with a six-gun, and some with a fountain pen." That's from the song *Pretty Boy Floyd*. He probably wrote that back in the 1930s or 1940s. "Some will rob you with a six-gun, and some with a fountain pen."

Of course, in the context of securities—John Roth is from Nortel. Remember him? John Roth, CEO of Nortel, who in 2001 had a base salary of \$1,250,000 a year, climbed to \$1,500,000 a year midway through 2001. He retired as Nortel's president and CEO on November 1, 2001, and since then, he had been on a year-long leave of absence, during which he drew his entire salary. In 2000, he earned \$6.7 million in cash: \$1,104,000 and change in base salary, a bonus of \$5.6 million, and miscellaneous pocket change of \$33,199. He became the president and CEO of Nortel in 1997. While he was president, he got rewarded. John Roth got rewarded. John Roth just laughed all the way to the bank, with those huge salaries and bonuses, because it was during his tenure in the role of CEO and president of Nortel that the stock dropped from 105 bucks a share to \$6 a share. It's even lower

now. I know that some people were buying Nortel at 50 bucks on the way down because brokers were still peddling it. He reduced—and this is just by the time he retired; of course it's much lower now—the number of workers from 72,800 people to 52,600 by the time he retired. He took away people's jobs. Some men rob you with a six-gun, some with a fountain pen.

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I'm convinced there are other jurisdictions in the world where Roth would be in jail right now. He stripped that company bare. He destroyed families. People lost their homes, their livelihoods, their careers. Roth persistently misstated the state of affairs in that company, which of course bumped up the value of the stock and, again, was one of the factors that brokers were still peddling it to senior citizens when it was at 50 bucks, on the way down from its peak of \$105. And they were—I've got constituents. Because Roth was such a con. He was talking to the brokers and he was misstating the state of affairs for Nortel.

Meanwhile, of course, guys like him profit because they sell high. Martha Stewart—she's small fry. She's nothing. Yet she did time. What's going on here? How come a guy like Roth has pocketed millions while other people's lives are destroyed? You know that Woody Guthrie song, *Pretty Boy Floyd*? I heard him sing it on records. I never heard him sing it because, of course, he died, I think, in 1967. But I heard Ramblin' Jack Elliott sing it lots of times. The first time would be around 1968-69 at the Riverboat on Yorkville Avenue here.

When I was thinking about John Roth, and how much money he stole from working women and men, how many jobs he took away, how many homes he took away, as I say, I felt compelled, and I continue to feel compelled to read the lyrics of Woody Guthrie's great song, *Pretty Boy Floyd*, into Hansard. It's behooven that we do that now. The song is a great song. If you have a chance to pick it up on a Guthrie album, do, but as I say, Ramblin' Jack Elliott still does it as he travels around. Others, of course, have done it. It's a great story:

If you'll gather 'round me, children,
A story I will tell
'Bout *Pretty Boy Floyd*, an outlaw,
Oklahoma knew him well.

It was in the town of Shawnee,
A Saturday afternoon,
His wife beside him in his wagon
As into town they rode.

There a deputy sheriff approached him
In a manner rather rude,
Vulgar words of anger,
An' his wife she overheard.

Pretty Boy grabbed a log chain,
And the deputy grabbed his gun;
In the fight that followed
He laid that deputy down.

Then he took to the trees and timber
To live a life of shame;
Every crime in Oklahoma
Was added to his name.

But a many a starving farmer
The same old story told
How the outlaw paid their mortgage
And saved their little homes.

Others tell you 'bout a stranger
That come to beg a meal,
Underneath his napkin
Left a thousand dollar bill.

It was in Oklahoma City,
It was on a Christmas Day,
There was a whole car load of groceries
Come with a note to say:

Well, you say that I'm an outlaw,
You say that I'm a thief.
Here's a Christmas dinner
For the families on relief.

Yes, as through this world I've wandered
I've seen lots of funny men;
Some will rob you with a six-gun,
And some with a fountain pen.

And as through your life you travel,
Yes, as through your life you roam,
You won't never see an outlaw
Drive a family from their home.

It's a great song, isn't it? Great story. It dates back to the dust bowl days, to the Depression in Oklahoma. But the problem is there are still the John Roths robbing people with fountain pens in the year 2006, just like songwriter-singers like Woody Guthrie were singing and writing and telling folks about in 1936. That's what the securities legislation should be designed to protect.

As a matter of fact, Woody Guthrie was born in Okemah, Oklahoma. A couple of summers ago, I was driving through Okemah, Oklahoma, and you can actually—it's not preserved because it's all grown over, but the homestead of his family from around 1912 or so is there. Of course, you've got to be a real fan, Mr. Berardinetti, to climb through the brush and find the foundation of the old Guthrie homestead.

It's remarkable how little has changed in 70 or 80 years from when Woody Guthrie wrote and sang that song until today. John Roth took many a person's home away from him with his manipulation, his distortion and his outright thievery. "Some will rob you with a six-gun, and some with a fountain pen."

Conrad Moffat Black: There's a guy who should be sitting on a bunk in a jail cell and who may well be, in due course, because of the charges laid against him in the

United States. "Tubby" Black, huh? You remember what was said about him with respect to Hollinger, the public holding company controlled by him—not owned by him, controlled by him. Conrad Black was treating that company as his own personal piggy bank. Barbara Amiel was walking around with the Prada bags and the Versace stuff from down on Fifth Avenue in New York City, the Bentley and Rolls-Royce limousines, paid for with money stolen by Black from Hollinger, with all the Prada and Versace and Louis Vuitton, I'm sure. Price was no object. Somebody just told me that Conrad Moffat Black, a thief if there ever was one, was brazen enough, bold enough to be at some Bill Clinton fundraiser event/black-tie dinner down in New York City.

Conrad Black has such disdain for Canada. He relinquished his Canadian citizenship, as you know, because—oh, the things he had to say about Canada. Mind you, that was after he stole the pension funds from Dominion Stores, huh, and the raid he did on Massey Ferguson—was it Massey Ferguson, Speaker?

With a fountain pen, Conrad Black took away more homes, more people's pensions and more people's futures than any outlaw ever did with a six-gun. It's a 70-year-old song, maybe 80 years old, but still, the Pretty Boy Floyd lyrics are as telling today as they were back then, aren't they?

Conrad Black: His arrogance about Canada and his disdain for Canada were just tremendous. He regards Canada with disgust, and in fact relinquished his Canadian citizenship, which is going to put him, because he's up on Bridle Path turf—I don't want to disappoint and upset his neighbours, but yes, you've got a thief living next door. He's up on Bridle Path turf. The problem is, he's charged now and awaiting trial, but if he gets convicted, he's no longer a Canadian citizen and our border security should, and I hope will, be stopping him should he try to get back to that palatial mansion on the Bridle Path, saying, "Conrad Black, we don't allow criminals, jailbirds, into this country."

Boy, do I ever wish he could serve his time at Millhaven. I know some inmates there who would just love to see Conrad Black in the lineup of new inmates checking in, being measured for their jumpsuits. There might even be a couple of them whose mothers or grandmothers had their pensions stolen when he raided the pension fund at Dominion Stores. Think about that, Mr. Berardinetti. That's called "doing hard time."

Laughter.

Mr. Kormos: You think it's funny, huh? Mr. Black won't be laughing; he'll be crying big crocodile tears.

These are the robber barons of this century. Conrad Black described his Canadian citizenship as an "impediment to my progress in another, more amenable jurisdiction." Wow. He talked about dismantling medicare. His lieutenant and closest confidante, David Radler, has already pleaded guilty to charges of mail fraud in the United States, and apparently is expected to testify—he's ratted out on Black. His British peerage, which was thwarted by the Canadian government, was so important

to him that he relinquished his Canadian citizenship—a thoroughly despicable guy.

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If we ever get around to prosecuting Roth, Roth and Black could share a jail cell. What do you think, Speaker? They could take turns sweeping up and mopping up, and they could share the upper bunk and the lower bunk. “No, Conrad, you take the upper bunk tonight. I’ll take the lower bunk,” John Roth says. But it shouldn’t just be short terms; it should be lengthy, substantial terms that these people should be sentenced to.

“Black and Radler abused their control of a public company and treated it as their personal piggy bank,” SEC enforcement director Stephen Cutler said in an SEC statement.”

Of course, you see, the SEC is the American regulatory body that appears to have some far more stringent standards. Look at the guys Lay et al from Enron. Now, a couple of them may be able to buy their way into the country club prisons, the Martha Stewart resort prisons, but maybe if the American people are lucky, a couple might just end up in Attica, although part of me says that’s highly unlikely, because just like poor people don’t own stock, rich people who do time don’t end up in Attica. I’ve never been inside Attica. Have you ever been past it, Speaker, driving through New York state? It’s a pretty mean, tough place.

I think, quite frankly, a prisoner exchange, should Conrad Black end up doing some time—they should do a multicultural experience, a multi-economic, socio-economic-level experience. Show Conrad Black how the other part of America, the poor people, do time when they get busted and sent to jail, maybe on a drug trafficking charge or on the three-strikes-and-you’re-out type of stuff—some kid who manages to steal a couple of cars and rob a corner store, who’s all cranked up on crack cocaine and what have you, but who suffers from that American three-strikes-and-you’re-out, at 19, 20, 21 years old, because that kid’s poor. He can’t afford all the high-priced lawyers; he can’t afford to buy his way into a country club prison. So we should do a little exchange for Conrad Black with the poor kid. Let Conrad Black do five years in Attica and let the poor kid do three in the country club resort, with all the swindlers and the white-collar thieves. It’s just an idea. I think it might have some beneficial experience; it might even have some rehabilitative quality for Conrad Black. And for the life of me, why Barbara hasn’t been indicted as well is beyond understanding.

I’ve managed to get a Woody Guthrie song on to Hansard; I’ve been wanting to do that for a good chunk of time. I’ve managed to share some of my most intimate feelings about John Roth and Conrad Black with the members of this chamber—not that I haven’t done it before, but it’s been a while since I’ve done it. It was a subject matter that made it entirely relevant and in order, in my view.

Remember Bill 14, coming up in September? It does a modest amendment to the Limitations Act. Unfortun-

ately, it doesn’t address that area of the Limitations Act that really cries out for addressing, and the minister and his committee may well take this into consideration as they’re pursuing further legislation dealing with securities regulation. James Daw, as I recall, is the guy who’s written about it from time to time—at least once, maybe twice. The little investors against whom the Limitations Act operates so punitively so that they can’t litigate to get some of the money back that was stolen from them from guys like Conrad Black or John Roth of Nortel—Bill 14 doesn’t open up that part of the Limitations Act, so of course any amendments to Bill 14 that deal with the issue raised by James Daw on behalf of those investors is not going to be in order, for surely it should be, could be and hopefully will be within the scope of this committee to examine that sort of stuff as well.

Oh, and I wanted to talk about MPPs’ pension plans for a good chunk of time too, and let the newer members understand how proud they should be of their defined contribution pension plan, because their colleagues of all three political parties voted unanimously for it. They did. Every single person in this Legislature of every single political stripe voted for the defined contribution pension plan.

So I say to Mr. Peterson, you can thank your colleagues for a defined contribution pension plan and for being so leading edge and progressive and enlightened in their day, for taking you at rocket speed into the next century, because the rest of the working world’s had to do catch-up. Their defined benefit pension plans are only collapsing now. Your defined benefit pension plan was voluntarily surrendered by your Liberal colleagues here in the chamber—smart people every one of them, thoughtful people. In fact, Mario Sergio from York West supported the defined contribution pension plan—leading edge.

Mr. Peterson, if you want him to explain to you why you have a defined contribution pension plan instead of some gold-plated defined benefit pension plan, you sit down with Mr. Sergio, and Mr. Sergio from York West I’m sure will be pleased to sit down with you. Take him down to Sutton Place, the unionized little bar down the road here, and buy him a glass of soda water and explain to him, Mr. Sergio, why you supported the defined contribution pension plan that Mr. Peterson is now a member of, that Ms. Mossop is a member of, that Mr. Milloy is a member of, that Ms. Wynne is a member of.

I’m sure they will find ways to express their gratitude towards you. I’m sure that once they reflect on the matter, and after you’ve explained to them why you did it, Mr. Duguid would say, “No, Mr. Sergio, it’s my time to buy a round of drinks.” He will be so grateful upon learning about why you voted for a defined contribution pension plan for him and why you surrendered the prospect of a defined benefit pension plan for him and, I suppose, his wife and kids as well.

Interjection.

Mr. Kormos: I'm not going to draw the Speaker into this, Mr. Berardinetti, now that you're in Hansard. It's fine. People know where you were this afternoon.

Newly elected Conservative members, newly elected Liberal members or newly elected New Democrats should check the record, 1996, and I've talked about that defined contribution pension plan—I don't want to hear any MPPs coming to me saying, "We don't have a pension plan." Of course you've got a pension plan. As a matter of fact, remember the envelope you got just the other day that said, "Open immediately. Important pension plan information"? Well, you got the letter, didn't you? It said, "Important pension plan information." If you didn't belong to a pension plan, Mr. Sergio, how can you get a letter saying, "Important pension plan information," addressed to you?

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): Are you talking to me?

Mr. Kormos: Yes. I'm sure you got the same letter I got. It's called a defined contribution pension plan. You were just ahead of your time.

I don't want to hear any nonsense from any members about, "Oh, Kormos, we need our pension plan back." No, you've got one.

Mr. Sergio: Come on, Peter.

Mr. Kormos: The government contributes money to your defined contribution pension plan every month. It's the pension plan you voted for, Mr. Sergio. It's the pension plan that you, as a thoughtful, intelligent person, agreed was the right way to go.

I was here. It's true. Mr. Sergio in 1996 said, "By gosh, by golly, we're going to move with this defined contribution pension plan."

Mr. Sergio: Come on.

Mr. Kormos: So Mr. Sergio has a pension plan that the government makes a contribution to, as his employer, every month. Mr. Peterson has a pension plan that the government contributes to every month. Mr. Berardinetti has one. Ms. Sandals got one.

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I say, God bless every month, because I get that pension contribution every month too. What is it—5% of my salary? Is that what it comes to annually? So 5% is contributed. Well, most of the working world increasingly is on defined contribution pension plans. You're just with the mainstream now. The world has finally caught up with you. So I salute you, members, for your creative—oh, you have more control over it, right, your defined contribution pension plan? The last week has been troublesome but, as Linda Leatherdale says, what goes up must come down. I'm a fan of Linda Leatherdale. I got her into the comments this afternoon. It's true; I like Ms. Leatherdale. She and I have done a lot of work together, a lot of stuff on a number of different issues, including the ever-increasing auto insurance rates, even today as we speak, in 2006 the auto insurance premium rates.

But between you and me, Speaker—pretend they're not here—I find it incredible how I can get Mr. Sergio

sputtering and muttering about pension plans when I'm giving him a compliment. I'm telling him I respect his intelligent, thoughtful decision to vote in favour of defined contribution pension plans.

My leader and colleague, Howard Hampton, is here. He was here in 1996.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I remember. I remember the vote.

Mr. Kormos: Liberals, Conservatives and New Democrats voted in favour of defined contribution pension plans to the final person. They thought it was the best thing since buttered popcorn. They thought they had died and gone to heaven. Nobody turned down the 5% of their salary every year that was contributed to that pension plan, did they, Mr. Hampton?

Mr. Hampton: That's right.

Mr. Kormos: Not a one. They have been able to invest it and watch it grow in an equity market that I'm sure has been very profitable for you, Mr. Sergio. I'm sure it has been very lucrative for you. Of course, you've got the high-priced counsel and advisers, paid for by the taxpayer, who counsel you and advise you on your investments. That's paid for by the taxpayers. It's all part of the package.

So, MPPs aren't doing that shabbily after all, are they? Mind you, compared to John Baird and David Christopherson, we're poor country cousins. I have no hesitation in telling you that. A junket for a provincial legislator, unless he or she is part of that inner circle, means a day trip to Timmins. But when you're with the federal Parliament, you're talking about spreading your wings and travelling, aren't you? Salary? Ha—mere chicken feed here compared to federal members. It is. A federal backbencher, with the new proposal, is going to be making more than the Premier, I think. Federal MP backbenchers, the lowest people on the totem pole, the members of the losers' club whose own leaders don't know their names, make more money than provincial cabinet ministers. And they've got the Air Canada passes so they fly free with their spouse of choice. Well, you know: girlfriend, boyfriend, mistress, whatever. They've got the Air Canada pass. I'm not sure—maybe somebody correct me—because all the time when I get on a plane and get stashed in the back, the plane to Kingston or Ottawa, I'm up there and I feel like I'm in a go-kart, you know, with my knees up around my neck, sitting in a seat that's 10 sizes too small, but the federal members always sit in the business section. So I don't know what's going on. They insist it's only business, like business class. There is no first class in those little planes. But they're sitting in there in the leather seats with the armrests, where even as people of substance—because of course they all think they're people of substance, and many of them are people of substance.

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

Mr. Kormos: That's right, the girth. They're sitting there, they're planted in these seats. I haven't got an armchair in my house that's that wide. You've got these big, fat guys sitting there, and of course they don't drink

the cheap red wine out of those plastic cups. No, that airline attendant is serving the bubbly in the crystal glass.

But we MPPs get herded through there, and sometimes I've sort of stopped at the door and tried to—but no, they get a couple of the stronger airline attendant people and they just sort of pick up and push me through. And I end up in the back, because I'm only an MPP.

If you were a federal member—you ask John Baird. You ask him what life is like now. No more back of the airplane. No more counting pennies when your paycheque comes, and no more defined contribution pension plan either. The feds will have none of that nonsense. Defined benefit plans: That's the way to go. Everything is gold-plated for the federal guys—everything.

I have regard for provincial members who, back in 1996, showed frugality by abandoning the defined benefit pension plan. For those who just came in, you won't know, but I had a private member's bill that would amend the defined benefit pension plan to merely make it necessary to be 55 before you could collect. You guys didn't think that was good enough. You didn't. No, Mike Harris and the Tories—and the Liberals and New Democrats went along for the ride—said, “No. Let's just abolish the whole thing.”

So friends, you should be proud of yourselves, because your newly elected members are proud of you. Your colleagues who have been elected since then hold you in the highest of regard every time they reflect on the pension plans and the salaries here at Queen's Park. They do. They think about you at night. When the American Express bill comes in and it's larger than they thought it was going to be, and they look at their bank balance, they think about you a whole lot, and I'm sure they are thoughts of gratitude and affection. They're endearing thoughts. They write imaginary letters to you.

Mr. Hampton: Not when the hydro bill comes.

Mr. Kormos: That's right. As Howard says, when the hydro bill comes and the kids have been leaving the windows open even though it's only winter, right? Because kids do that sort of thing; they don't think about that stuff. Your colleagues are saying, “Jeez, I got the hydro bill. It's gone sky-high.” Tory colleagues reflect upon the sound—oh yes, the oh-so sound and enviable Tory

privatization agenda, and their Liberal successors are inclined to do the same with respect to the sky-high electricity rates of their regime.

Thank you kindly, Speaker, for your attention. I look forward to working with all of you as you continue to enjoy the avant-garde status of being members of the defined contribution pension plan.

I understand now why the government eliminated the retirement age, because it's about working until you die. Welcome to the real world, friends. If it's good enough for the woman in the Sheraton Centre, flipping mattresses and cleaning toilets, because she's got to work until she dies, it's good enough for you. So your affinity with the working class, your desire to act in solidarity with them, your elimination of the retirement age is so dearly appreciated by so many workers, I'm sure, like that woman in the Sheraton Centre flipping mattresses and cleaning toilets. She wants you to share her relations. She wants you to share her future.

Thank you kindly, Speaker. We'll be voting for this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate? Any response from the minister?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The minister has moved third reading of Bill 41, An Act to create a comprehensive system of rules for the transfer of securities that is consistent with such rules across North America and to make consequential amendments to various Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that this motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Orders of the day?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: The deputy House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House does now stand adjourned until Monday, May 29, at 1:30 p.m. of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1641.

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