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Tuesday 6 June 2006

Mardi 6 juin 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 6 June 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 6 juin 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 29, 2006, on the motion for second reading of 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. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It's a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 117 this evening. I know that my colleague from Erie–Lincoln, on our side of the House, led off the debate and was quite adept at making our points. I'm going to try to build on those somewhat.

This is a finance bill, but with a significant energy component, being that it is rebates for hydro. Let me begin by saying that we're going to support this bill, not because we think it's a great bill or a great idea, but because this is the only avenue we have at this time to ensure, for those people who are being hurt by the McGuinty 55% hydro rate increases, that some piddly little amount of money gets back into their pockets to compensate them in a minimal way for the egregious way this government has been taking money out of their pockets since being elected in October 2003. So the only option we have is to ensure speedy passage of this bill. That's what is required so that these people can get some money back.

But let's just look at a few of the details of this bill so we can explain to the people of Ontario just how little it means to them. If you are a single person and you make up to \$20,000, you'll get a rebate. If you made \$19,099, your rebate would be \$1. I don't know exactly where they cut it off. It doesn't really say in here. It's a decreasing scale. It starts at \$14,000, and you get a rebate of \$60.

For every \$1,000 that you earn above that, it drops by \$10. So if you made \$19,000 as a single person, you would get a \$10 rebate under this bill. If you're a family, there's no distinction that I can see in this bill as to whether you're a family of two people in a household or 10. I know, coming from a family of 14 children—that's 16 people: two adults and 14 children—that this bill doesn't address that situation in any way, shape or form. But I know that when I was a kid, if you were the last one in line to get a bath on a Saturday night, that water could be pretty damn murky. Is it okay to say that? I don't know. It could be pretty dark.

1850

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): There was a lot of murk in there.

Mr. Yakabuski: There was a lot of murk in that water. Murky water is what we deal with here a lot, I can tell my friend from Niagara Centre. Murky water is what we deal with in this Legislature quite a bit, particularly since October 2003.

Mr. Kormos: Outright sludge, rather than water.

Mr. Yakabuski: Sludge. Yes, that's better. I was trying to be polite.

As I say, there's no distinction. So you're a family—we won't get to 14; that's a pretty big family today—with four children, a family of six; that's fairly common. We have four children. Now two have left home, but they come home for showers from time to time; you never know, on the weekend or something. A family of six: If your net income was \$34,000—bear in mind that this government has robbed that same family to the tune of about \$2,000 since taking office, in tax increases and increased fees etc—that family is going to be eligible for the grand total of \$10 from this government; at \$34,000 net income, \$10 to compensate them for the 55% hydro increases this government has foisted upon the people of Ontario since taking office in 2003.

Before I go much further, in the best spirit of the camaraderie of this Legislature, because I was away last week and I know this bill would have been the first bill brought forth by the once and again finance minister, the member from Vaughn–King–Aurora, Mr. Sorbara, I want to congratulate him on his reappointment to cabinet. I believe he's a very capable person, very intelligent, and I look forward to engaging with him here as the Minister of Finance over the next several months, but not for too long, not past October, 2007; I hope not.

Anyway, before I lose track, that's what they're getting, \$10 for a family of six—two adults, four children—

and \$10 is not enough for a movie ticket in Toronto, not just for the family, but just for one. So that's quite a deal.

The member from Erie–Lincoln talked about many things this government has done wrong. We don't have all night, so we can't touch on all of them, but I have to ask myself, and I'd like to ask you, would it not be more appropriate—the member for Simcoe–Grey mentioned this in his contribution to the debate—to simply give a tax break to these people? You're going to send out a rebate cheque? Hello? For \$10? This is just more ridiculous bureaucratic stumbling and bumbling on the part of this government. You're going to go through the rigmarole of calculating somebody's rebate cheque of \$10 and send it out? That's what's going to happen if you've got net income. There's nothing in this bill that stops that from happening.

If you're going to send out rebate cheques for \$10, that should say to the province of Ontario—if I was the government, which I'm not, but you should be standing up and saying, "I'm embarrassed that this is the best we could do in a piece of legislation here in Ontario." Let's get to work so we can send out \$10 rebate cheques? Good lord, what's it going to cost to send them out? Is it 50, 100? That's how government works in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Wow. Ladies and gentlemen out there in TV land, this is not a stunt. This is the truth or whatever that Liberal campaign ad would have been in the federal election. No, this is real: \$10 rebate cheques; \$5.50 or whatever to send them out. That's a real concern. More thought should have gone into that.

But why did they have to bring out something? Because they're compelled to do something for the people in this province who cannot pay the price of hydro under Dalton McGuinty's regime. They've got to do something. So this is what they decide to do, a rebate program, and they want to make sure that they get the credit for it.

I can tell you that people in my riding aren't going to be giving you much credit. They're not too happy about what you're doing to them and how you're putting your hand into their pockets so that they can't put food on the table in Renfrew county because of your tax increases.

Why has it come to this? It has come to this because of their absolutely failed and embarrassing energy policy. It started with Dalton McGuinty's promise. If I can find that here—if it takes me more than 10 seconds, I'll move on. This was Dalton McGuinty's promise in 2003. It was absolutely unequivocal. He didn't qualify it. He didn't say, "If we can," or "If we've got this or that." This is what he said: "The next plank in our platform is what we call Growing Strong Communities. That plank starts with our unequivocal commitment to shut down our filthy coal-fired power plants by 2007." That is the quote from Dalton McGuinty.

You see, now he knows and everybody else knows that he can't do it. But do you know what? One of two things is the case. Either he had no idea and completely had no understanding of what the reality was—but I have to believe that a man who had been here since 1990 must have had some idea of what was going on in energy and

what the realities are in Ontario with regard to building and approvals and everything else, or he absolutely knew he couldn't do it then and deliberately made this promise because he thought there'd be political mileage for him out of it.

If he did that, that is shameful, and I think the people of Ontario believe that he did, that Dalton McGuinty flat out knew what was going on and he simply lied to the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat. I'd like you to withdraw that.

Mr. Yakabuski: I withdraw that.

That's the problem I've got with this whole position that this government has taken on coal. It is so disingenuous. It puts me in a terrible position because I am told that I cannot stand here in the Legislature and tell a lie. But if I don't stand up and tell the people of Ontario that Dalton McGuinty was lying, then I'm lying myself, and that's the terrible—

The Acting Speaker: I'd ask you to withdraw again and not proceed with this line of debate.

Mr. Yakabuski: I withdraw it.

The Acting Speaker: Will the member take his seat? Just to clarify, I'm not going to tolerate it anymore, so don't test my patience.

Mr. Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Clearly understood, but it certainly is a difficult position to be in.

The people of Ontario are certainly asking themselves these questions: "What can we believe? Is there anything that the government is going to tell us now with regard to energy in the province of Ontario that we can actually believe?" Every credible third party is telling us unequivocally that this government cannot and will not follow through on its commitments. There is not a single person, if they're truly being honest with themselves, in government or out of government, who believes that they can follow through on their commitments.

1900

Those plants will be running long after the election of 2007 because this government has done nothing to further its energy plan, because it didn't have one. They had one plan. It is always the same plan: "What do we have to do to win the election?" That's the only plan they had. It was not about supplying Ontarians with an adequate, secure supply of electricity. It was about winning an election. They spun those stories any which way they wanted to try to accomplish that. Now we've got ourselves into a box, quite a box, here in the province of Ontario.

The Premier calls himself, has appointed himself, Minister of Research and Innovation, but he refuses to spend even five seconds researching the opportunities out there with regard to coal gasification or sequestering of carbon gas.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The merits of coal gasification aside, under standing order 23(b)(i)—it has nothing to do with energy rebates—I respectfully request that the member

for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke restrict his comments to the topic under discussion.

The Acting Speaker: I find the comments by the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to be within the context of debate on an energy bill. I will return to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to continue.

Mr. Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If that member interjects again, can you give me more time? He's known to do that and he's always off topic. This is very much about energy rebates and it is why we are forced to be dealing with this bill in this Legislature. The government's energy policy is what has dictated and determined that this bill is before this Legislature. What could be more topical I don't know. Anyway, back to the issue.

They've boxed themselves into this corner. The OPA report is due any day now, so the energy minister says, "Coming out soon, any day now." It was due on February 9. By June 9, I guess that would be 183 or 184 days and still no response. Given that the IESO is going to be releasing something that tells them clearly that you can't do this—you know, this so-called third-party independent agency, the OPA, appointed a Liberal-friendly fundraiser, to a \$500,000- or \$600,000-a-year job, or whatever it is, and then bonuses of \$200,000, to bring out a report. They're supposed to be independent, but the government says, "Uh, uh, uh. You can't talk about coal." Well, if we're not going to talk about coal when you're being told by the independent people that coal cannot be shut down in this province because you don't have replacements for it, then this whole OPA report has been a waste of time and a waste of money.

That's what we're getting with this government with regard to energy policy. So we're now going to respond to a report that does not talk about coal. The opportunities out there with regard to coal gasification and the sequestering of gas, as I began to speak to, are widely known. And the so-called Premier of innovation and research doesn't even want to look at it. He's closing the door without even looking at the opportunities there.

John Tory has been saying for two years that we have to talk about emissions. Well, last week, when the proverbial you know what hit the fan over their coal policy, the once, and now again, Minister of Energy started to talk: "We're focused on emissions." I'll tell you, the emissions that come off that side of the House, that's the problem that the people of Ontario are paying for: emissions of you know what. I can't say it, because you've already told me I can't, Mr. Speaker, but that's what is happening. The people continue to be victimized by this government when it comes to its very, very selective use of the truth, and here's what we've got out of that.

They sent out RFPs on these new gas plants so that they could move to replace coal. Well, they gave them to the lowest bidder, but those people weren't capable or competent. Do you know what happened to those RFPs? They signed the deal: "Yes, thank you very much." You know what? "Oh, sorry, we're bankrupt." "Oh, sorry, we

can't do it." "Oh, we thought we were going to be bringing in turbines from some of our bankrupt plants in the States," and this and that. You know what? It's not going to happen.

What does the government do instead? Hello. It signs a couple of one-off deals, 20-year power purchase agreements, and they're not even telling you how much that power is going to cost because they don't want the people out there to know what that power is going to cost them under this government's shady deals with producers when their backs are to the wall. They don't want people to know.

I asked the former Minister of Energy the question specifically: "Can you tell me what the price of the power agreements, the escalator clauses, the standby fees, etc. is going to be with regard to the Sithe plant here in Ontario? Do you know what the minister said? It was the Honourable Donna Cansfield then. "Yes, I'll get you that." It hasn't been forthcoming. And do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Hell will be frozen before I get it, because it ain't comin'. It ain't comin' because they don't want me to know and, ladies and gentlemen, they don't want you to know. They don't want you to know either.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: Oh, am I out of time? Oh, my goodness gracious. Sorry.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: In around 10 minutes' time, Howard Hampton, the member for Kenora–Rainy River is going to be speaking to this bill, and you're going to be interested in what he's got to say, because he's going to tell you, amongst other things, that this bill has absolutely nothing to do—absolutely nothing, zero, zip, nada—with the escalating electricity rates as a result of Dalton McGuinty's and the Liberals' privatization, profiteering agenda.

This has nothing do with compensating people for being hammered—hammered: young couples with their growing children, seniors barely able to hold on to their homes, small business people once again. Whether it's the folks over at Celi and Presti with their little meat store, their little deli kind of meat counter or whether it's places like Pupo's, a little bit bigger, these operators are getting the daylights kicked out of them with electricity prices, and quite frankly, in an area like the grocery market, the profit margin is so minuscule; it's pennies and fractions of pennies. If you're one of these small mom-and-pop ethnic delis, there's no way to sell enough prosciutto to compensate for the increased overhead with the increased electricity costs. Dalton McGuinty talks about small business. He should be waving goodbye to small business, because that's what he's doing to small business people.

The Minister of Health, with his crocodile tears and his purported concern for seniors—it's seniors who are being forced out of their own homes that they have bought and paid for at least once and probably twice if they sent kids to university. Howard Hampton is going to

tell you that this bill is a fraud on electricity consumers and residents of Ontario.

1910

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I look forward to a couple of minutes to make some comments in respect to the 20-odd minutes from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Mr. Speaker, and I'll endeavour not to put you in the position of having to call me to order during my limited amount of time.

I'm pleased with one aspect of the member's comments in his 20 minutes; that is, that the opposition will be supporting the legislation. We think it's important legislation to be able to provide those who are in great need in our province with some modest relief, albeit modest, on a one-time basis, and do it as expeditiously as we can; expeditiously being this fall, with the assistance of the Canada Revenue Agency to take care of that in an effective fashion and in a very cost-effective way to deliver those rebates.

I must say I much prefer that strategy, using existing resource bases, than receiving a cheque for \$200 with Mike Harris's picture on it. Maybe the picture wasn't on it; it was probably on the letter that was attached to the cheque, but we know what that was about at that point in time.

There probably aren't too many of us—I know I'm not one of them—with a family of 14. Six might not be overly unusual. I have four children as well. So the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and I probably share something in the context of our overall family size at the very least.

You must remember that this legislation will put \$100 million into the hands of some 1.5 million Ontarians who have needs in our community. It will also be putting some one half million dollars directly into the hands of our aboriginal peoples who have high needs as well in our communities.

I'm looking forward to continuing the debate, seeing the debate come to a conclusion as expeditiously as possible and moving this item along, if it's adopted by the Legislature, to allow those funds to flow to those families who need them most.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I'm pleased to add a couple of minutes of comments to the speech from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who has been doing just a fine job as the energy critic for the PC Party. He pointed out how inefficient this bill is.

In the case of the rebates that would be mailed out, the maximum amount you would receive would be \$120 per family and \$60 for an individual. But there's a sliding scale, so you may have a case where an individual will receive a \$10 cheque in the mail. This legislation is for one year. As the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke pointed out, there's been a 55% increase in residential electricity costs in Ontario since the McGuinty government took power. So this one-time rebate is not going to have a huge effect. I'm sure it will still be appreciated, but why not just give a credit on the electricity

bill versus the expensive and inefficient method of mailing out individual cheques, particularly where some will be for quite small amounts?

Also, what happens next year, when we have larger increases or more increases and it's necessary to help out those who can least afford to pay these fast-increasing bills? They're going to have to pass another bill, because this is one-time. Why didn't they pass a framework legislation that allows the same thing to happen next year and the year after and the year after, if necessary? It's looking very much like, in this low-supply, high-price policy that the government has taken on, it will be necessary next year again to be providing some sort of rebate for those who can least afford it.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I listened very intently to the speech of my colleague from the Conservative caucus, and I must say I agree with him on one part of this, and that is that this really is an attempt by the McGuinty government to cover up the promise that was made that electricity rates were going to be frozen through the year 2006. In fact, I remember the promise very specifically that a McGuinty government would freeze electricity rates through the year 2006.

The member is quite right: For somebody who is lucky, they've experienced their electricity rate going up by only 35%. For the unlucky, their hydro rate has gone up by 55%. So people get their hydro bill now and go, "My God," and this is getting back to the McGuinty government. So this mailing out of a cheque in an election year—and I expect people will get the cheque, I don't know, maybe six months before the next election, maybe nine months before the election—is one of those old techniques. I won't say it's an attempt to buy votes. I would just say it's an attempt by the McGuinty government to get people to forget that broken promise to freeze electricity rates through the year 2006. That's what's really going on here. This is one of those nefarious exercises where you mail out a cheque in an election year and hope to buy some favour with it.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his reply.

Mr. Yakabuski: Thank you to the members for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, Kenora–Rainy River, Niagara Centre, I think—I lost track, but all of those people.

I do want to remind the members opposite that this is going to go to a voice vote tonight. I don't want to alarm you. There is going to be a vote tonight and I want you all to be prepared for the vote. Because you see, yesterday the Liberal caucus had a little problem with the vote. They had a problem with the vote, or they're saying of it—

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: I'm not sure. The only thing we can go by with a vote in this Legislature is the raw results, and yesterday the Liberal caucus voted with the Progressive Conservatives and the NDP to support the opposition day motion that basically condemned the Premier for his handling of the crisis in Caledonia.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): Mishandling.

Mr. Yakubuski: Mishandling of the crisis in Catalonia. I hope that whatever happens with this vote tonight, the Premier respects the will of this Legislature, because today, after yesterday's vote, he has clearly indicated that he does not respect the will of this Legislature. In spite of what he promised in 2003 and in spite of what he said in his throne speech about respecting the role of members of provincial Parliament and respecting the will of this Legislature, this Premier has scoffed at it. He called a vote in this Legislature a bit of "mischief." That's what we have sunk to from this government: a vote in this Legislature on a duly tabled motion called a bit of "mischief." Well, I hope that we are still above that in this Legislature, and when we vote on this tonight, let us honour the results and move forward.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Hampton: I'm pleased to be able to take part in this debate, because there is a lot that needs to be said about this meagre bill. I, of course, believing that we should reflect on the last three years, want to point out again that it was Dalton McGuinty who promised hydro consumers across Ontario back in 2002 that he would freeze electricity rates through the year 2006. Since that time, the McGuinty government has raised electricity rates not once, not twice, but in fact three times. The latest increase was a 15% increase—15% just this spring.

As I said a few minutes ago, if you're a lucky person your overall hydro rate has only increased by 35%, but most people out there, most folks in Ontario who live in an apartment or a home, have in fact experienced a rate increase under the McGuinty government of 55%—a hydro rate increase of 55% during the time that Dalton McGuinty said he was going to freeze electricity rates. That's quite a gap, for someone to walk up to you and say, "I'm going to freeze your hydro rates for the next four years," and then immediately turn around after the election and increase your hydro rate by 55% in three years.

1920

That is bad enough. It's bad enough that hydro rates have gone from 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour, which is what they were in the fall of 2003, to 6.7 cents per kilowatt hour for those unlucky consumers today. That is quite a hike. And I would say, minimum wage hasn't increased by 55%. I don't see many people out there whose pay has increased by 55%. I can tell you that Ontario disability support plan benefits sure as heck haven't increased by 55%, and Ontario Works hasn't increased by 55%. So a whole lot of people, a whole lot of fixed-income, low-income and modest-income people in this province are really being hit hard by Dalton McGuinty's broken promise.

But it is in fact more serious than that, because it's not just a question of the hydro rate, what you pay per kilowatt hour, that has been increased, but as well, the McGuinty government has granted authority to increase the transmission rate. The transmission rates have been

increased significantly, and the distribution rate has increased significantly. And as we all know, when you increase those things, the GST and the PST that are on the bill increase accordingly. So the experience of most ordinary folks across Ontario, if they look over the last three years, is that their hydro bill has almost doubled. When you add up all of those increases—the rate increase for electricity consumed, the rate increase for transmission, the rate increase for distribution—and then you tack on the GST and the PST, what most people in this province have experienced is that they hold up their hydro bill now, they compare it to the hydro bill they had, say, in 2002 or 2003, and it has almost doubled.

For a lot of folks that's pretty serious stuff. You're trying to live on minimum wage and you've got to pay that kind of increase. For many people, you choose between, "Do I pay the hydro bill or do I put food on the table?" That's what it's come down to.

The McGuinty government is trying to advertise this as some sort of really compassionate action on their part. I want people to look at the numbers. Here is the reality of this so-called electricity tax credit. By the way, the tax credit isn't based upon your electricity consumption. If you're an unfortunate soul who happens to live in an apartment that's electrically heated or an older home that's electrically heated, your electricity bill has gone up more than double. It's probably up there in the triple range. But no matter; your electricity costs have gone up. This so-called credit has nothing to do with your electricity consumption. You could be someone who is really hurting, and that's not going to be reflected in this credit, because this credit has nothing to do with your hydro bill. This credit is simply going to be based on your income. That's where people ought to look at the numbers.

This credit will be \$60, a one-time cheque of \$60 for somebody who has an income of \$14,000 a year or lower. What does \$14,000 a year work out to? Assume somebody is working 40 hours a week for 50 weeks. That's 2,000 hours. For somebody working 50 weeks a year at 40 hours a week, that's \$7 an hour. So if your income is \$7 an hour, the McGuinty government, in their generosity and in their compassion, is going to send you a \$60 cheque. You know what? That won't even pay for one month's increase in the hydro bill for most people. It won't even pay for one month's increase, never mind twelve months of increase in the hydro bill. What's the minimum wage today in Ontario? The minimum wage is \$7.75. The McGuinty government is saying that their compensation figure is even lower than the minimum wage. But get this: Once your income gets to \$20,000 a year, a little bit over minimum wage, then they wipe out the credit. So as soon as your income is just a little bit over minimum wage, you don't get a cheque. Boy, that's compassion. That's real compassion.

Let's take a couple of two, because my experience is when somebody is working a low-pay job, both husband and wife have to work to make ends meet, so let's just assume that both are working. The credit for two people working phases out at \$35,000 a year. By my cal-

culatation—he's working, she's working, let's say they're both working 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year. So they're both working 2,000 hours during the year. The McGuinty government is going phase out the credit for that family where he's working and she's working. They're going to phase out the credit as soon as you're making \$8.75 an hour. So as soon as he's making \$8.75 an hour and she's making \$8.75 an hour, the McGuinty government says, "Oh, you're making too much money. We're going to take that credit away from you." Let me tell you, that's compassion. That is really deep compassion. That's really feeling for somebody who's struggling on a low income and trying to choose between paying the rent, putting food on table and paying the hydro bill. This is such great compassion, I'm just overwhelmed by it.

Now, as usual, you have to keep your eye on the ball, and you have to keep your eye on the other side of the equation. Let me tell you, the other side of the equation looks like this: While people who are struggling just to put food on the table are going to get one measly \$60 cheque from the McGuinty government—and as soon as they're making just a little bit over the minimum wage, they're going to get no cheque—on the other side of the equation, the McGuinty government has hired more hydro executives than ever before seen in the history of the province, and they are being paid salaries and bonuses that are embarrassing.

I just want to give a quick comparison. If you go to Quebec, Hydro-Québec is a big corporation. Hydro-Québec is the generator, the transmitter and the distributor of electricity in Quebec—a big operation, very big, worth billions of dollars a year. Do you know that the head of Hydro-Québec gets paid less than \$500,000 a year? And that person runs the whole show. Similarly, BC Hydro—big operation. They do the generation in the province, the transmission, the distribution. They run a very big operation. The head of BC Hydro gets paid less than \$500,000 a year, and that person runs the whole operation. Manitoba Hydro, again, a big operation. They do the generation, the transmission, the distribution for the whole province. The head of Manitoba Hydro gets paid less than \$500,000 a year.

Well, do you know what the McGuinty government has done? They have created a multi-headed hydro-electricity monster in this province, so now you've got Ontario Power Generation, you've got Hydro One, you've got the Ontario Power Authority, you've got the Independent Electricity System Operator, you've got the Electricity Financing Corp., you've got the electrical standards and safety organization, and then they're going to add something else. They're going to add the so-called metering entity. You know what? Just about every one of the people who heads these organizations is up there in the million-dollar range.

1930

Let me give you an example: Tom Parkinson at Hydro One. At the same time that the McGuinty government is going to mail out this \$60 cheque to really low-income people—and as soon as people make a little bit over the

minimum wage, they're going to wipe out that cheque altogether—at the same time that that's the attitude of the McGuinty government to people who are struggling to pay the hydro bill, Tom Parkinson at Hydro One gets a salary of over a billion dollars a year, and this year they gave him a \$500,000 bonus. Imagine that.

Interjection: Is that a million or a billion?

Mr. Hampton: A million. You're making a million and we're going to give you a \$500,000 bonus. But get this: They also subsidize his mortgage. God, I think if you're making a million and a half a year, you can afford to pay your own mortgage. Obviously, the McGuinty government feels that they have not compensated him enough.

It doesn't end there. The top guy at Ontario Power Generation is close to a million dollars a year. Dalton McGuinty's former fundraiser, Jan Carr, who suddenly and mysteriously became the head of the Ontario Power Authority, he's up there in the close-to-\$800,000 range. Then you go to the IESO, the Independent Electricity System Operator; same thing. You go over to the electricity financing operation; pretty much the same thing. You go over to the Electronic Safety Authority; pretty much the same thing.

You say to yourself, "My God, all these guys are getting rich off the hydro bill." You've got all kinds of people across Ontario who skimp on the food bill and the clothing bill to pay the hydro bill so that Dalton McGuinty can pay all of his well-connected fat friends.

It's amazing—like Mr. Parkinson. You know what his claim to fame was last year? His claim to fame was that he used the company helicopter to fly back and forth from his office to his cottage. Do you know what I think that merits? I think that merits a docking of the pay, not a \$500,000 bonus payment. His other claim to fame? When Ontario's electricity system, especially the transmission system, was very fragile, what did he do? He locked out the engineers whose job it is to plan and to coordinate the transmission system and improvements to the transmission system. At a time when people were having brownouts, when the Independent Electricity System Operator was having to reduce voltage because the transmission system couldn't handle everything, Tom Parkinson had the hydro engineers out on the sidewalk, locked out. And for that he got a \$500,000 bonus.

I say to people across the province, you need to see the whole picture here. This one-time \$60 cheque isn't going to compensate anyone for the incredible increase in their hydro bill that they see. It isn't going to allow anyone out there to pay even the one month's increase in the hydro bill, never mind the 12 months' increase in the hydro bill. For somebody who makes a little bit over the minimum wage and maybe gets a \$10 cheque in the mail, that's almost an insult.

I'll tell you, when you get that \$10 cheque in the mail from the McGuinty government, folks, think about Tom Parkinson, whose claim to fame is that he takes the Hydro One helicopter back and forth from his cottage up there in Muskoka to the office; Mr. Parkinson, who, with

his \$1.5-million-a-year pay-packet, can't afford to pay his own mortgage. He has to have a subsidized mortgage. You think about that guy. You think about Jan Carr, who used to do fundraising for Dalton McGuinty on Bay Street, who is now there at the Ontario Power Authority drawing down his \$800,000 a year, and you're paying for it on your hydro bill. We're all paying for it under the hydro bill.

Just to give you an idea of how outrageous this has become, do you know where all the 10 highest-paid hydroelectricity executives in the country are? They're all here in Ontario. They're the people who are getting rich off the hydro bill. They're the people who are getting rich off that 55% increase in hydro rates and that doubling of the hydro bill that people are paying.

So part of this \$60 cheque is really trying to massage people a little bit, trying to get them to feel good about this, to feel good that they're paying for Tom Parkinson's helicopter rides back and forth to his cottage in the company helicopter, to feel good that Jan Carr used to go up and down Bay Street flogging for money for Dalton McGuinty and now he's getting an \$800,000-a-year pay-off from Dalton McGuinty. That's what this little cheque in the mail is all about.

Let's get right down to it. We're now into the election year. We're basically a year and a few months away from the next election. When this cheque comes out, when people finally get this cheque in the mail, we'll be in the election year. We'll be maybe seven months, maybe eight months away from the election. That's what's really going on here. This is the old, "We broke our promise; we hit people over the head with hydro bill increases; we took advantage of them and of their wallets; at the same time, with the \$500,000 bonuses, we paid off our friends like Tom Parkinson," and now the McGuinty government thinks they'll send out this little cheque in the mail in the six or seven months before the election and massage all that and hide it.

Nothing else useful is happening here. Sending somebody a \$40 cheque in the mail or even a \$60 cheque, when their hydro bill increases, measured over the year, come to \$700 or \$800, is no help. It is almost an insult. It is almost rubbing salt in the wounds. I can just imagine somebody having to choose every month between, "Do I pay for the food? Do I put clothing on my kids' back? Do I pay the rent or do I pay the hydro bill?" Getting a \$40 or \$50 cheque in the mail from the McGuinty government is not going to do much at all. It is very much like rubbing salt in the open wound.

So I say to the government, if you really want to do something, compensate people for even half of the pain you've caused them. If you could come halfway toward helping lower and modest and fixed income people pay the hydro bill every month, that would be doing something, but this is really a rather cynical exercise.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to join the debate on the low-income electricity relief. In my constituency and I think throughout the province, people

expect a provincial government that's prepared to do certain things, and some things are very important to them. Some of those things, obviously, are hospitals, schools, universities, clean drinking water, but one of the things that's most important and has been extremely important to the Ontario economy over the years has been a safe and affordable supply of electricity, of energy.

To hear some of the comments that are being made after seeing some of the shell games that were played in the past with hydro bills—previous governments didn't have the courage to put the true costs of electricity on the hydro bill and instead hid them in debt, instead drove young children who hadn't even started to pay taxes—they decided they were going to add it to the provincial deficit and have them pay for it in the future. They didn't have the courage to step forward and give the facts to Ontario citizens. You look at what the previous government did. Mike Harris simply couldn't run a hydro system. Blackout Ernie proved—he was in the southern states, I think. All the lights were out in Ontario. I don't know if it was Phoenix, Arizona; somewhere. I don't know where it was.

Appointing friends, family, Tory staff to Hydro One; the amalgamation of the city of Toronto; selling the 407—if I've ever seen Ontario taxpayers short-changed, it was on the sale of that highway. And the downloading to municipalities is something I could just add to that.

We are moving to a reliable and affordable supply of electricity that is priced realistically. The opposition party is obviously very pro-coal. We know what coal is doing to this environment and it's something we'd like to see stopped.

Speaker, thank you very much for the time.

1940

Mr. Yakabuski: It's amazing; I listened to the member from Oakville and it bore no resemblance to the wonderful address by the leader of the third party, the member for Kenora–Rainy River. So I'm not sure what I'm responding to.

But I'll tell you one thing: I am very concerned. This is what we get from the Liberals. They're talking about back in whenever, but they don't want to talk about what Ontario faces in the future. Shamefully, he called the former Premier of this province Blackout Ernie. Well, we all know he had nothing to do with that. It was a terrible, cascading series of events. But I can tell you, we will have blackouts in this province under this regime if they follow through on their policies. Thankfully, we know that they won't follow through on their policies, because they haven't done a single thing that they said they'd do so far. So it is wonderful that we know we can't trust them and they don't tell—do what they say they're going to do. I almost slipped there.

That's the good thing about it: This government will do something other than what they're telling us they're going to do. They're back and forth on this coal thing. Should coal be shut down or should it not be shut down? The shameful thing is, they talk about coal being dirty, but the Minister of Energy did mislead the people of

Ontario when he said to the press that they have installed—

The Acting Speaker: I would ask you to withdraw that.

Mr. Yakabuski: I withdraw that, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Energy said in a scrum—

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: For the third time he has done something that is clearly and absolutely unparliamentary. Twice he was warned by the Speaker. If honour or integrity are to mean anything in this House, then there has to be a consequence for breaching the rules—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for drawing that to my attention, but I don't find that to be a point order. I'll return to the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke to conclude.

Mr. Yakabuski: The Minister of Energy said in the press, when he was trying to defend what this government has done, that they've installed scrubbers and SCRs—mitigation equipment on our coal-burning units. Well, since this government has been elected, they have not done anything, yet they've entered into a suit against American companies in the States for failing to do exactly that. How disingenuous is that—

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Niagara Centre.

Mr. Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

Mr. Hampton is going to have a chance, of course, to give a two-minute response in just about two to four minutes' time. I apologize to folks who are watching, because at 8 o'clock prime time television kicks in. I don't know what's available to you tonight—reruns of the Sopranos or what have you.

Mr. Yakabuski: No, Hockeyville—Barry's Bay, 8 o'clock.

Mr. Kormos: There you go: Barry's Bay, 8 o'clock.

Mr. Hampton talked about the indignity of getting the \$10 cheque. People are going to be outraged. The paint is going to peel in home after home. I can imagine some of the endorsements that are going to be made on those cheques before they sign their name: "Dalton, put this where the moon don't shine—Jane Doe," and give it to the teller at the bank; "Dalton, you scammed us again"; "Dalton, I've been taken to the cleaners before but never so ruthlessly", signed, "John Doe." Give it to the teller and get your 10 bucks.

Quite frankly, what an innovative, clever way for people to send a message back to the government. Again, I'm not advocating anything vulgar, profane or obscene, but there are some very pithy two-word exclamations that I am sure people are contemplating, even as we discuss this: pithy, old, ancient, very Anglo-Saxon, very versatile words in the English language—verb, noun, adjective; one of those incredibly versatile words. But I can see people getting the ink marker now with those two words, four letters and three letters—four letters up, three letters down—and then "John Doe," and give it to the teller and

cash the cheque. I'm going to have a chance to speak to this. I'm looking forward to it.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I'm pleased to stand and add a few comments to the debate here regarding Bill 117.

Simply, what this bill does is provide relief to lower-income families. When all is said and done, there are people out there—I can think of people in my riding of Scarborough Southwest, especially some of the seniors, some of the people who are widows or widowers—living by themselves. They're living on a pension or they're living on their spouse's pension. What we're trying to do with this bill is to provide some kind of relief to help them, to give them some assistance with their income. So \$60 for a single tenant or homeowner whose net income for 2005 does not exceed \$14,000—I know that to some of us that seems like nothing. To some of us it's basically a little bit of money. But these people that I speak to, some of the seniors that I speak to, live on \$14,000 or \$13,000 a year, and if we can help them by providing some kind of relief on their energy bill, then we're doing it. At least we're starting to provide some kind of relief.

This government is the first in many, many years to raise the minimum wage. We've raised the minimum wage. We've assisted those most in need of assistance. The previous government did not do that, and we've continued to try to assist those who are most in need, because if we can't help those, then we can't help other groups, such as those who are better off or those who are in other positions in our society.

So I'm pleased to be able to say to Mrs. Smith or Mr. Jones who lives by herself or himself somewhere in Ontario or somewhere in Scarborough Southwest that we're helping you; we're giving you some kind of rebate. It may not be the largest amount of money, but it is a significant amount to them. I'm happy to stand here today and support this bill.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the leader of the New Democratic Party for his two-minute response.

Mr. Hampton: I thank the members on all sides for their input. The fact remains, and I know the government is embarrassed by this, that someone with an income of \$7 an hour, working 2,000 hours a year—in other words, 50 weeks a year—which works out to \$14,000 a year, is only going to get a cheque of \$60. So for somebody working for less than the minimum wage—I thought that was illegal, but obviously in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario that's not illegal—the most the McGuinty government can spare is \$60.

Mr. Kormos: That's a buck twenty a week, Howie.

Mr. Hampton: As my colleague from Niagara Centre points out, that won't buy you a cup of coffee a week.

I just want people at home, when that \$10 cheque arrives in the mail or that \$20 cheque arrives in the mail, to be aware that the McGuinty government is sending a \$500,000 cheque to Mr. Parkinson at Hydro One, and that's just his bonus cheque. That's not his regular cheque; that's his bonus cheque. And just remember that

after Mr. Parkinson, the McGuinty government has a whole bunch of other folks at the gravy train with million-dollar salaries who are getting paid off the hydro bill, and those with \$1.1-million and \$800,000 salaries getting paid off the hydro bill.

This exercise is nothing but the attempt by the McGuinty government to mail out a cheque six or seven or eight months before the next election.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

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Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): The \$60 or \$120 has been mentioned a lot tonight: \$60 for a single owner or tenant who makes \$14,000 or \$120 for a family that makes \$23,000. That takes out of the treasury about \$100 million. This is an important contribution that's targeted to those who need this adjustment as rates of all energy increase. These are important dollars. On an average bill, I think for a small home, we're probably talking \$1,000. That's what it is in Orléans, so we're talking somewhere around 10% or one month on the year. I think that's important.

In Orléans, we have Hydro One that services part of our city and Hydro Ottawa that services the other 40,000 clients of Hydro One within the city of Ottawa. This was a holdover from the time that the transition board, when they were bringing together the 13 or 14 municipalities into one city, failed to give us one utility in Ottawa. So we have two utilities, and two utilities in Ottawa–Orléans. About 20,000 of our clients are with Hydro One and they pay about \$100 more than Hydro Ottawa's. You say that \$100 is not very important, but it is very important.

There's a petition going around now in the Hydro One part of the city that says they want to be brought into Hydro Ottawa. It's based on that \$100 discrepancy between the two hydros, because really Hydro One provides good service, as does Hydro Ottawa. We had difficulties with Hydro One. They put in \$500,000 in the Orléans area in the Bilberry Creek transmission station to make sure that the power was good. So we're happy with Hydro One and with Hydro Ottawa, but it's that \$100 difference that is the real subject of people saying, "Well, it's one city, one service, we should be getting."

I don't think we can underestimate the value of \$100 million targeted to people who really need the assistance as we move forward. These are significant credits that are targeted to low-income people. Research has shown that they use an inordinate amount of electricity as their method of heating, so this is important.

The emergency energy fund is also part of our government's program. I think it's up to \$4.2 billion. That's for people who get into circumstances where they can't pay that hydro bill, and that has been a very popular program.

We had talk about coal earlier. Coal plants certainly have to be gone. When we see that China is building two coal plants per month, that's 24 new coal plants per year. There are 1,000 on the drawing board within this planet Earth. We have 50 in our airshed just south of us, and most of them are going to be based on just the old coal.

It's adjustments being made for big business, and we're not going to see a reduction.

At least in Ontario we've taken the leadership to show that 5,800 deaths a year in the province from poor air quality are important. We've done the studies to show that air quality is extremely important. If you look at the economics, the people who die, the people who have to be rushed to hospital with asthma attacks etc., if you take all that into consideration, we're going in the right direction, and we're going to show the leadership, hopefully to an enlightened leadership to the south and an enlightened leadership in China and India, as they proceed to modernize and what they think is modernizing. But it puts us on a collision course with planet Earth and the quality of air that we breathe. A thousand new coal plants on this planet: I think anyone who envisions that is not looking to having children, doesn't feel that there are going to be grandchildren, and we're certainly not planning for the future.

I was very disappointed in the withdrawal from Kyoto, or at least it appears that we're withdrawing, as a country, from Kyoto. I think it's extremely important that we continue along the lines that were set and that we conserve and show leadership to this world.

So these dollars are important. They're important as we start paying for electricity. When we go and gas up at the service station, we pay the real price of gas. When we heat with oil, we pay the real price for oil. When we heat with gas, again, we pay the real price for gas. Why is it that historically we've run up \$40 billion? That's \$10,000 per family of debt, and that became stranded debt under successive Tory and NDP governments over many years. I think we have taken the right way. There is no point in trying to charge the price of electricity to our children and our grandchildren. We have to face the music and pay the price that's there. The deal with Manitoba was cancelled, where we could have got low-cost energy from hydro. Eight years of no more generation, actually a reduction in generation, and we're paying for that.

We have an infrastructure deficit, a fiscal deficit, an education deficit and a health care deficit. We have to start building, and that's what the program for hydro is that we're coming forward with. If you let your infrastructure go, you're going to pay. We're putting it on a pay-as-you-go system. There's an adjustment for the people who really need that adjustment. It's \$100 million that is very well targeted. I think it's the best direction to go for our province. I think we're doing the right thing with this.

Again, if we're going to do something meaningful and get rid of coal, which we're going to do—we're going to be the leaders; we're going to show to the rest of the world. We're going to have to show them that airshed—over 50%, I believe, of the particulate in our air comes from the south. We're going to have to show them in that court case that has been launched, with the co-operation of many states. We're going to have to show that that's where we have to go in the future. We have to go thinking that we are going to have children, we're going to have grandchildren, that we're going to have air quality

that's going to support the life in 50 or 60 years. I have a grandchild coming in September. That child will live to 2070 or 2080, probably. We see what is projected for air quality if we do not change it—what a change we're going to have in this planet Earth.

The leadership on the coal can't be questioned. It's costing money to move forward, but if we look at the health care costs and we look at those premature deaths, we look at our future. It is the only sane way to go.

So I'm very pleased to stand up here tonight saying that we're going on a paid policy for electricity. We're going to give this \$100 million worth of relief for the people who need it, and we are moving forward.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: I expect I'll have an opportunity to speak to the bill in relatively short order. It is going to be a delight for folks across Ontario, some of the poorest people in the province, the lowest-income earners, the people suffering the most, to see the creative responses that they have to this scam. Again, I'm just so enthusiastic about the manner in which folks will use the back of those cheques as a place to make a political statement, as a place to express their anger for a government that treats them with outright disdain. One time only—once only. And oh, so conveniently before the next election—one time only.

Now, the problem is that the McGuinty government is showing how disdainful it is of those lowest-income people in the province by actually assuming that somehow they should be grateful to the point of being all teary-eyed: "Oh, look honey, here's the cheque for \$10." Right? "Oh, by God, now we can buy that jug of milk. We won't be able to buy one next week, because the cheque's one time only. We don't get one of these every week; we only get it once a year." I can just see it now: "Honey, the cheque's in." The excitement as trembling hands open the envelope, and it ends up being for \$12.75. But those same trembling hands will be firm with when they endorse the back of that cheque, because they'll cash it, if only to ensure that they use the endorsement as a means of sending a very clear message to McGuinty and the Liberals as a preface to October 2007.

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Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): I'm very happy to join in the debate on Bill 117, the implementation of the Ontario home electricity relief program. I see this as a good strategy by this government. To be honest with you, I see it helping the low-income people in my riding, especially the seniors who are retired, probably living alone and have fixed incomes and they have to deal with the increase in electricity prices. This will definitely add to all the other programs that we, as a government, have implemented over time to assist seniors. I'll tell you, we've actually dealt with the property tax credit and we've increased that rebate by 25% over the last two years. That adds significantly to seniors who are on fixed income to help to pay their bills.

I listened to some of the members who spoke before me, how strongly they're against what this government is

doing, how adamantly they're against this \$60 and \$120. To them, it will do nothing for those people who will receive it. It's interesting to note how much they don't want this. I'm just sort of confused. Are they going to stand up and vote against it? Would they like a recorded vote on this particular bill?

The other thing is, there are complaints that we're using this as an election ploy. I would love to be with some of those members when they go door to door in the election and tell their seniors that they voted against it, they voted against giving their constituents a refund. It'll be interesting to see how this whole bill is voted on, because I think it's good for the low-income people. I think it's good for what the government is doing and I'm here to support it.

Mr. Runciman: I think the previous speaker raised a good point in terms of the incorporation of the word "relief" in the title for this legislation. Certainly the hard-pressed residents of this province need some relief. They've seen, on average, a 55% increase in hydro-electric bills in this province since the Liberal government took office, this despite one of the many promises that they've broken to maintain a hydro rate freeze for a period of time. That was just one of the 50—I think at the last count 50 or 55—of the 231 promises they made to the electorate to get elected that they have broken in their almost three years in office.

The impact of these rates and the promises that they've made, which they know in all honesty they cannot keep with respect to coal generation, is the impact on the economic well-being and the future of this province. We're hearing stories that later this week the C.D. Howe Institute will release a report with some very concerning news with respect to the economic future of this province, referencing a whole range of issues, including the levels of taxation on business and investment in this province but also highlighting the very serious concerns about the whole issue of energy supply, dependability of supply and affordability and what that impact is going to be in attracting new investment to this province, maintaining what we have now at this point in terms of the question of being able to compete with some of our manufacturing sectors, being such significant consumers of power in terms of the generation of their own products. I think this is a major concern which this government has failed to address, one of many they have failed to address.

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise again. I think people in Ontario realize that they have some choices. It's interesting to hear some of the options that are being provided by the various parties tonight. We remember the days, and it's not too long ago, when we had schools closing, we had hospitals closing, we had an electricity system where we were starting to get to the point where we couldn't rely on it. It was something I don't think people in Ontario really wanted.

Interjection: It was a mess.

Mr. Flynn: It was a mess. It was chaos that was going nowhere.

What we've been able to do is to turn the system around. We've been able to implement a system now that's affordable and reliable, and people are realizing that they will begin paying the true cost of electricity. When you talk to the average Ontarian, they agree that that is a good thing, as long as the supply is reliable, as long as it's affordable. They don't want it added to the provincial debt, like the previous government did. They don't want people to play games; they want people to be honest and up front. They want to have a hydro bill that they know is actually the true cost of electricity. That's what we're doing here. We know that by doing that, it may have some impact on some of the low-income families in this province.

As a government, what we're proposing tonight is that we set aside \$100 million in the provincial budget and use that \$100 million to assist 1.5 million Ontarians in paying their hydro bills. If some party here can find something wrong with that, if some party here can find a reason to vote against that, I'd be very interested in hearing that in the rest of the debate.

We're doing the right things. We're securing the economic future of this province by securing the hydro system, and we're assisting those who are most in need so that when the time comes to pay the hydro bill, there will be some assistance that did not exist under the Conservative Party, did not exist under the NDP, but will exist under the Liberals.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Ottawa—Orléans has two minutes to reply.

Mr. McNeely: I wish to thank the speakers from Leeds—Grenville, Oakville and Scarborough—Rouge River, I believe. I think the speaker from Oakville said it very well, because it is \$100 million. It is a significant contribution to assisting those who need it. It's well targeted. It's being done through the Income Tax Act, to make sure that it's done economically and that it's going to target the right people. That's what the research has shown. It's \$100 million for 1.5 million Ontarians. It's important as we move ahead to pay-as-you-go electricity rates in this province for the first time.

I think we're going in the right direction in this province. We recognize the importance of the environment in this province. We're going in the right direction. It's costing dollars, but in the long run, if you look at health care costs, if you look at the costs in suffering with the number of smog days on the rise—I think there's a smog conference in Toronto this week. I think two of our ministers are going to be there. I don't think the news is going to be good for the future, because we are so dependent on the airshed that comes from the Ohio Valley to the south. That's where we have to show that leadership. We have to move ahead with clean electricity and try to help those who are in most need. That's what this bill is all about. It's to help in that transition. There will be 1.5 million individuals or families who will be helped through this. It's the best way to go. It's the right

way to go. I'm very pleased to be part of this government leading the way.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Kormos: I'm not sure, but I think this debate may well be wrapping up this evening.

This bill has the mean-spiritedness of the jerk who leaves a two-penny tip on the table for the waiter. This bill has the disdain and the arrogance of the fellow who will flip a panhandler a nickel and say, "Here. Don't spend it all in one place." This bill should be called the Charlie Harnick bill, or, if you'd prefer, the Rob Ford bill. Take your pick—Harnick, Ford—we know what they've got in common, and I can tell you this: Harnick's not a heavy drinker.

2010

The bill has nothing to do with households' exorbitant electricity rates. What did it climb, 50%, 55% since the Liberals took power—three years' time. I don't doubt the sincerity of my friend over here, but to suggest that somehow electricity rates in modest homes are less than a thousand bucks a year—I may have misheard you. You see, he's quite right. It's some of the lowest-income people who are in apartment units that have electric baseboard heat. The reason why is because it's cheap to install, but it's expensive to maintain and to operate. Rich folks don't have electric baseboard heaters. If they do, they don't care because they're rich, right? They'll pay whatever it takes to pay for the electricity. But they've got apartments in houses that are heated with a nice steam boiler, or you get one of those Trane high-efficiency gas furnaces. That's not inexpensive, but it's a far more economical way to heat than electricity is.

I dare say that folks who are living in some of those leaky apartments—because if you're living in an apartment building that isn't quite well maintained, it's leaky too. Heating those with electric heat, using an electric stove and if they're in a house or an apartment that has an electric clothes dryer in it, I dare say—and I'm not sure; all I know is what I pay for electricity down where I come from in my old house. I know what my neighbours pay in their old houses and I know what folks pay who come into our constituency office, especially the ones who have had their electricity cut off because they can't afford it; they simply couldn't put the money together.

I checked section 8 of the Income Tax Act because the reference is to what constitutes income for the purpose of taxation as in section 8 of the Income Tax Act. What's remarkable is that I'm convinced that all of those folks on ODSP and social assistance aren't going to see a penny under this legislation. There's a whole whack of them out there, aren't there? They're suffering; we know that. This government, with the noblesse, again, and the disdain of a jerk who'll flip a nickel into a panhandler's cup and say, "Don't spend it all in one place"—oh yes, ODSP recipients enjoyed a 3% increase. They're literally further behind, even with that 3% increase, than they were three years ago when the Liberals first got elected, if you assume a modest 1.8% or 2% increase in the annual cost of living.

The sad reality is there a lot of folks out there with incomes in the ranges being contemplated by this bill. The bill has nothing to do with electricity costs. The bill ignores the family that makes \$30,000 but has three or four kids and maybe one of the grandparents living with them. You see, it doesn't allow for that variation, for the fact that that family is suffering financially a heck of a lot worse than a mere two-person family is.

I suppose it's the crassness of it. It is impossible to avoid the inevitable conclusion that this one-time-only—and "Oh, by the way, by gosh, by golly, we're going to have to mail you the cheque because it's after income tax time for the year 2005 income tax returns to be filed in 2006. Son of a gun, if we're not going to have to mail you the cheque."

I don't know who the pinheads were in the brain trust who recommended this proposal as some sort of life ring for a government that's suffering in the polls. I don't know for the life of me who it was that did it, but I do know that it's probably going to backfire, that it's going to be more likely to aggravate Bud Wildman, former MPP and leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party, who inappropriately demonstrates his presence in the visitors' gallery. Howdy, Bud.

I tell you, this is going to be the pebble inside your shoe, the itch down the middle of your back that you just can't reach. This is going to be more aggravating than a hot, hot, hot, humid southern Ontario day. This is going to tick off people more than any swarm of black flies from northern Ontario ever did. This is going to get people just snapping and barking and spitting nails, because when they get the cheque, it's going to remind them of the 55% increase in electricity rates since Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals got elected. They're going to reflect on the fact that there is an effort on the part of this government to buy them and to buy their vote for 20 bucks, or maybe for only 10.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Thirty dollars? Wow.

Mr. Kormos: Mr. Bradley says, "Thirty dollars? Wow," and I can just hear the "Wow, honey" in households across Ontario when you've got a family where husband and wife, both parties, are working hard, working at a minimum wage job, still for less than \$8 an hour. I can just see, like Mr. Bradley says, "Honey, wow. Look, a cheque for \$10." I can just hear it now.

Oh, yeah, that's big. Here are people who have been scraping. Here are people who have been sacrificing. Here are people who have been doing without. Here are people who aren't able to make ends meet on a monthly basis. Here are people whose lives have been rolled back into not just an earlier generation but two generations earlier, whose lifestyles are more reminiscent of the dirty thirties than they are of the 21st century. Here are people who just for the life of them are going to see the glossy ads by the provincial government—oh, look at this one, Runciman—glossy ads, glossy two-pagers in high-priced, high-circulation magazines. They're going to look at

those and say, "That ad alone has got to cost a couple of hundred thousand dollars."

Interjection.

Mr. Kormos: "A hundred million dollars," some Liberal backbencher says; \$1.2 billion for the banks and the insurance companies. "A hundred million dollars," you say, for the poorest folks in this province, the hardest-working, lowest-income earners, yet you've got \$1.2 billion in new tax cuts for the banks and the insurance companies, the same banks that are reporting yet once again record-high profits, and the same banks that nickel and dime you to death, the same banks that impose new fee after new fee after new fee and charge you every time you walk in, every time you walk out. They charge you for keeping your money in their bank. These are the same banks earning huge multi-billion dollar profits, who make it by charging you for keeping your money in their bank.

Then you've got the insurance companies. Oh, yeah, cry me a river. They've got the wheelbarrows full of dough, full of your bucks, because the rip-offs haven't stopped and this government's in—\$100 million for the poorest people in this province, and \$1.2 billion for banks and insurance companies? That's Dalton McGuinty's sense of fairness? That's Dalton McGuinty's sense of justice? Don't forget, the tax cut for the banks is forever, and this is one time only.

So as I say, I am looking forward to the minister or whoever it is going to be that day standing up and saying, "By the way, the cheques went out," because I want to encourage people to use the back of those cheques, when they endorse them, to send a message to the government. It could be a little drawing perhaps of the old cartoon, union paper after union paper, of just the screw being turned. It could be something more basic and fundamental, perhaps even bordering on vulgar, expressing your understanding of what the Liberals and Dalton McGuinty are doing to you with your electricity rates, with your gasoline prices, when the bill has nothing to do with compensating people for the cost of electricity. It's one time only; the cheque is in the mail.

2020

Once again, I'm just reminded—Mr. Bradley knows this story—about the world's three greatest lies: "The cheque is in the mail," "Your money cheerfully refunded," and, "Hi. I'm from the government and I'm here to help you." Here we are again: "The cheque is in the mail," and you've got the government going to exploit that. There's going to be a photo op: There are going to be backbenchers with their pompoms doing the cheer-leading and there's going to be a happy couple—you have to wind them all up to get them to look happy—and there will be a photo op of handing them the cheque, but they'll be blinking in semaphore, "We've been tortured. They made us look happy."

This is a shameless thing. Which backbenchers in the government caucus got up and said, "No, guys, you've got it wrong: \$100 million to the banks and insurance companies; \$1.2 billion for the poorest people in

Ontario"? Which one of you argued that point? Which Liberal backbencher stood up in caucus and said to the Premier, "No, Premier, you've got it wrong. This must be a typographical error. You take \$100 million and give that to the banks and the insurance companies; the \$1.2 billion you use to give to the poorest people in the province"? Who said that? Not one of them. Did anybody even make the argument theoretically? Not one of them. Good grief. What a shameful performance. I would have at least expected to have been told about the debate that took place; I would have at least expected to see one or two from your ranks who would have championed the plight of the poorest people in this province, including those minimum-wage workers still earning less than \$8 an hour in 2006, never mind hospitality workers—\$6.75 an hour; that's what it is, isn't it? You're the kind of guys who leave a two-penny tip.

I want people, if and when they get those cheques, on top of the endorsement of their names, to say what they really feel in their hearts about Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals. I want you to exercise your freedom of speech, as long as it ain't contrary to the Criminal Code—I don't want you to threaten anybody physically—but I want you to be very open about the screwing that you know you're getting from Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals at Queen's Park. I want you to express your view about how it is that not a single government backbencher stood up in the Liberal caucus and argued for low-income people, saying, "No. Give the \$1.2 billion to low-income people, and the \$100 million that you say you're spending on this self-promoting campaign—give that to banks and insurance companies." Some \$1.2 billion for the banks and insurance companies. Then we've got Tom Parkinson with \$1.5 million in annual salaries, plus he's earned his wings in the course of being top honcho there. He's halfway to getting his helicopter pilot's licence.

What a bunch of gutless wonders, the Liberal backbenchers—not one of them speaking up for the poorest people in the province; not one of them saying, "Give the \$1.2 billion to poor folks and the \$100 million to the banks and insurance companies." As I say, income, under section 8 of the Income Tax Act—it strikes me that not a single person on social assistance or ODSP is going to be eligible under oh-so-modest a proposal but oh-so-blatant an effort to buy people's votes and oh-so-expensive a photo op.

Think about this: That \$100 million—I'll take people's word for it for the moment—is going to be a taxpayer-funded photo op that's going to be flogged to death. One time only; if the government were serious about relief for the lowest-income earners, they would start addressing the need to do catch-up with ODSP. If the government were serious about the lowest-income people, they would talk about a minimum living wage rather than a mere minimum wage, because \$7.75 isn't a minimum living wage, is it? Not at all. Yet there are a heck of a lot of people supporting themselves on it. If you can't do it with one job, you can do it with two jobs or with two and a half or three jobs.

A whole lot of women, a whole lot of women who are mothers, are working those two, two-and-a-half jobs. I know who they are and I know where they're working those jobs. In the summertime, thank goodness, hopefully there are enough tourists in Niagara Falls that they can get their summer job as room-cleaning ladies in the hotels in Niagara Falls or the motels along the motel strip. They do those first thing, and then they move on to their afternoon job at a Wal-Mart or a Burger King or a 7-11 kind of store. Then, if on the weekend they can do things like some informal babysitting or some laundry for some other people or maybe do some housecleaning for other people, they do that—amazing people. When they get that \$10 cheque, they're going to be fit to be tied. They'll take it, but they're going to be fit to be tied. They're going to be bouncing off the walls. "Did you check the mailbox today? Is the cheque for \$10 in there?"

This is cruel, it's abusive, it's disdainful and it's not particularly honest either—is it?—because it's called an electricity rebate but it has nothing to do with electricity. The amount of rebate has nothing to do with how much electricity a particular household uses. Instead, it's an opportunity to put a cheque in the mail and have a photo op here at Queen's Park, and maybe even find some happy couple to—Cash-for-Life style, lottery-winner style—accept that cheque with a big grin, knowing full well that once that cheque is gone, there ain't no more coming.

And things aren't getting any better; they're not. These people are hurting, whether it's those low-income people or seniors. How many times seniors can't afford to live in their own homes, can't afford to live out their final years. I've observed it over and over again. When I was a kid, people worried about not living long enough. Let's just talk to seniors in our constituency offices or in our ridings who, rather than worrying about not living long enough, are worried about living too long because there simply isn't enough income left, especially after one of the spouses dies. This is cynical stuff.

The Acting Speaker: I too would like to recognize and welcome the former member for Algoma, Bud Wildman, who is with us in the visitors' gallery. It's good to have you back.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise again. Certainly not much has changed since I rose the last time. We have some options before us tonight. Each of the parties will vote the way that it thinks it should vote, based on the bill, but Ontarians have to think back to what we've been through in the past decade. We've seen schools closed. We've seen hospitals closed, hospital beds closed all over the province. Since 2003, we've seen schools built under the McGuinty government. We've seen hospitals built under the McGuinty government, a hospital being built that the Conservatives couldn't build in a million years in my own town of Oakville. It's being built in 2009. So instead of closing things, we've become a government that's able to build things. We're able to build the econ-

omy. That's something that I think people have to come to grips with.

2030

You heard terms like "gutless wonder," and I was wondering if there wasn't a bit of sucking and blowing going on. Some of the speeches I've heard tonight have had one foot planted firmly on each side of the fence. If it's such a bad bill, if it's an awful bill, maybe you shouldn't be supporting it. Maybe you don't agree that \$100 million should be going to some of the most vulnerable people in the province to help deal with rising electricity rates as a result of our being honest with the people of Ontario and saying, "This is the true cost of electricity."

If you're going to have a strong economy, if you're going to grow the economy and be able to provide social services, one thing any business person will tell you is that you need a strong and affordable energy supply, which is exactly what the McGuinty government is bringing. You can't run deficits of \$5.6 billion. You can't play games with the hydro bills, as was done under the previous government. You've got to be up front. If, as a result of being up front, you need to assist some of the most vulnerable, I say that's what we should be supporting tonight.

Mr. Runciman: The words "Liberal" and "honesty" simply don't go together, and we know that from the experience of this government.

I want to compliment the member from Niagara Centre for his contribution here this evening. He's an unrelenting advocate for the less fortunate in our society. He has over many years in this place made a real contribution on their behalf.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I can see this in his pamphlet.

Mr. Runciman: Well, it wouldn't be the first time an NDPer has used my endorsement in an election pamphlet, much to my chagrin. But with Mr. Kormos, that's an exception; I don't mind.

We talk about promises and courage, and as we heard the member from Oakville mention, "We had the courage to raise your prices through the roof," with a 55% increase in less than three years. They didn't have the courage in the election campaign to be, shall we say, honest with the parents of autistic children. Mr. McGuinty wrote them a very clear letter making a very clear promise, no question, and has failed to keep that very specific promise. What about promises to the disabled, what about promises to seniors, and certainly, in terms of tax increases?

We now have this government with the gall to sue American companies that are producing electricity. We're buying it from them in enormous quantities and at very high prices. They are suing them for the fact they are not controlling emissions to the degree the Ontario government apparently feels they should, while at the same time they have not spent one red nickel to reduce emissions from coal generation facilities in the province of Ontario. That's the reality. Now they have said they're going to close these plants by 2007. They've changed that to

2009. This is all a game. They're playing the electorate for fools again. They want to get past the election. The Ontario people are not going to fall for it once more.

Mr. Arthurs: I just want to come back to the essence of what the bill is about. It is about providing \$100 million of taxpayer money and returning those dollars to members of the communities in the province of Ontario who have considerable needs. This is intended to provide some relieve on the hydro front. Ultimately, we're going to start paying the real cost of hydro in this province. We're not there yet, but we will be at some point, and down the road, people will appreciate the fact that they are really paying the cost. They're not going to hang this cost on their grandchildren.

But in the interim, we need to provide relief for those who are the most vulnerable in our communities. We need to pay attention to the human and social deficits that we have in the province. This is only one modest part of that. We have addressed in a small way ODSP and Ontario Works as one other component. We know that there are those who have needs in the community, and we're going to try to address those in a fashion that meets a variety of needs along the way.

In addition to this legislation, soon the Minister of Community and Social Services will be introducing changes to legislation that allows for the doubling of the emergency relief fund from \$2 million to \$4 million. That will meet the crisis needs in a better way than is being done today. About \$500,000 of that will go to our aboriginal communities, again those who tend to have even higher needs potentially than other parts of our community.

The objective here is to take \$100 million and put it back into the community in the hands of those who have the greatest need. The amounts may not be large, but the quantum is.

Mr. Yakabuski: I am pleased to respond to the address by the member from Niagara Centre. It's always interesting to listen to the member from Niagara Centre, always entertaining but always insightful and, of course, today was no exception.

If I could have just a slight degree of latitude to speak about a matter of national importance, those out there getting hydro rebates are the kinds of people who vote in the Kraft Hockeyville. Tonight, airing across the land, from Atlantic to Pacific, from the Arctic Circle to the US border, is the Kraft Hockeyville presentation. Tonight, you're going to have the opportunity to listen to those wonderful communities across this country vying for the title of Hockeyville.

My community of Barry's Bay is one of those communities. I know the member for Peterborough will be supporting his community; I know that the member from Atikokan will be supporting his community. The member for Huron-Bruce will be supporting Wingham, and the member for Grey-Bruce-Owen Sound will be supporting Hanover, and there could be others in this Legislature.

We want people to get out and support Hockeyville—1-888-459-2006. Of course, I stand here tonight and say

Barry's Bay is Hockeyville. I have every confidence, and at the end of the day that's in fact what Canada will say, that Barry's Bay is Hockeyville. I want you to vote for Barry's Bay but, most importantly, I want you to get out and vote. Get to your phone: 1-888-459-2006, Hockeyville.

Canada's all about hockey. The Edmonton Oilers are going to come back and win that Stanley Cup, and we're going to have Hockeyville on June 11.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member from Niagara Centre.

Mr. Kormos: New Democrats are eager to see this bill go to committee for even a modest period of time because we have amendments that we want to propose.

I want to tell you, this is, I suppose, as Liberal a Liberal bill as you're ever going to find. One of the nice things about being a Liberal, as we've witnessed so many times, is you don't always have to be a Liberal. Think about it. You want to be over here, you want to be over here, you want to be over here, you want to sort of zig-zag, you want to Ping-Pong.

The other neat thing about being a Liberal is that you can promise anything you want in the course of pursuing people's votes, like anything and everything. You can promise IBI autism treatment for kids over the age of six. You can promise that you'll maintain a cap on electricity. You can promise there will be no new taxes. You can promise that you'll maintain the integrity of a public health care system. You can promise that you're going to address the needs of the lowest-income people in the province. You can promise that you're going to keep jobs in the province of Ontario. You can promise that you're going to regulate the price of gasoline for folks who need it for their cars, trucks and tractors. If you're a Liberal,

you can promise anything, and you will, and you will keep not one of them.

Liberals actually criticize each other. I asked about the goings-on in a caucus meeting when I suspected that at a Liberal cabinet meeting people are outraged when it's realized that, "Holy, moly, we almost kept a promise. We can't have that happen." It's the sharp one at the cabinet table who realized, "Whoa. Wait a minute, guys. Whoa, we can't pursue that policy; we might be keeping a promise." That's not the Liberal thing to do.

So here's this silly bill, this phony bill, this sad bill that's one-time-only, \$100 million for the poorest people, \$1.2 billion for banks and insurance companies—

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? Are there any other members who wish to participate in this debate?

Mr. Sorbara has moved second reading of Bill 117, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for an Ontario home electricity payment. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: We ask that the bill go to the finance and economic affairs committee.

The Acting Speaker: The bill is accordingly referred to the finance and economic affairs committee.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move adjournment of the House.

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

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 2041.

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Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L) Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre de l'Éducation, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Prince Edward–Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L) Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Sarnia–Lambton	Di Cocco, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (L) Minister of Culture / ministre de la Culture	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Sault Ste. Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Cordiano, Hon. / L'hon. Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse	Parkdale–High Park	Vacant
Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)		
Scarborough–Agincourt	Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L) Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux		
Scarborough–Rouge River	Balkissoon, Bas (L)		
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)		
Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St. Catharines	Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L) Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, government House leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 6 June 2006

SECOND READINGS

Income Tax Amendment Act (Ontario Home Electricity Relief), 2006, Bill 117, Mr. Sorbara	
Mr. Yakabuski.....	4377, 4380, 4383, 4390
Mr. Kormos.....	4379, 4384, 4386, 4387, 4391
Mr. Arthurs.....	4380, 4390
Mr. Miller.....	4380
Mr. Hampton.....	4380, 4381, 4384
Mr. Flynn.....	4383, 4386, 4389
Mr. Berardinetti.....	4384
Mr. McNeely.....	4385, 4387
Mr. Balkissoon.....	4386
Mr. Runciman.....	4386, 4390
Agreed to.....	4391

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mardi 6 juin 2006

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2006 modifiant la Loi de l'impôt sur le revenu (aide au titre des factures d'électricité résidentielle de l'Ontario), projet de loi 117, M. Duncan	
Adoptée.....	4391