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of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 12 June 2006

Lundi 12 juin 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 12 June 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 12 juin 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Last week, the Minister of Education announced that the government is making new investments in special education reforms. After five months of sitting on the so-called special education transformation report, the government finally found time to share it with the people of Ontario. It is unfortunate that once again they are throwing money out the door in an attempt to alleviate the guilt of not living up to their commitments.

I commend the hard work of the advisory panel and all their time and effort to provide this government with the advice to help students in Ontario with special needs. But sadly, the government has made very little in the way of true commitments. The minister was short on detail as to how the government plans to ensure that funds are in fact used to help children with special needs. Again, this minister has left parents in the dark.

There are countless examples of school boards being forced into siphoning special education funds to fill gaps in other parts of their budgets. What is needed is for this government to adequately fund the new programs and commitments they announce with such fanfare. But they continue to fall short. Today's announcement by the minister, spun as a giant step toward transforming the funding formula, just perpetuates the government's habit of new targeted funding commitments while ignoring the growing funding crisis in school boards across the province. We call on this minister to assume her leadership responsibility. Stop campaigning, get on with—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

EVENTS IN

PICKERING-AJAX-UXBRIDGE

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I rise today to have the opportunity to speak about a couple of events that took place this past weekend in my riding of Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge. First, I had the opportunity to attend yet again the Pickering Frenchman's Bay Festival—its 15th. The festival is held annually at Millennium Square on the Pickering waterfront, and it's organized by

a community group to bring awareness and celebration to the beautiful and historic nature of the area around Frenchman's Bay.

The festival is organized by a volunteer-driven community who are very grateful to its many sponsors. I want to take this opportunity, though, to thank some of the volunteers personally, the organizers in particular: Dave Johnson, Barbara Jones, Maggie Blanchard, Sylvain Trepanier, Linda Royhall, Joe Cagginiello, Paul Murphy and Lori Murphy. Their dedication to the annual festival continues to bring our local community together. I want to congratulate them on a job well done.

Secondly, I want to congratulate the town of Ajax on their Home Week celebration. This is the town's opportunity to thank the wonderful citizens of Ajax, as well as the supportive business communities, for all their efforts over the years. This year marks the 36th annual Home Week. I want to commend all the organizers and participants on a wonderful celebration of community. In particular, congratulations to Ajax Councillor Joe Dickson, the founding chairman; and this year's chair, Ajax Councillor Shaun Collier. Their hard work needs to be recognized. Next week, the whole town will be showing up for the gigantic fireworks display at Rotary Park on the lakefront to culminate the whole week's events.

AIR QUALITY

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): Today we all saw the Lakeview generating station towers in Mississauga demolished. On March 26, 2001, Elizabeth Witmer and the Ontario Progressive Conservative government announced a comprehensive plan to improve air quality in Ontario. This plan for cleaner air and healthier communities was announced after a thorough review of the coal-fired plants. The plan imposed strict emission limits and required the Lakeview generating station to cease burning coal by April 2005. Thanks to the work of former environment minister Elizabeth Witmer, MPP Kitchener-Waterloo, and the work of the previous government, I am pleased to see that Ontarians will be breathing easier. We all owe her a debt of thanks for her foresight.

In recent months, the Liberal government has backed off their proposed timelines for coal plant closures from 2007 to 2009, and now we find out that they've backed away yet again. The Liberal government has been breaking promises and revised promises on a regular basis. At least they are honouring the hard work of Elizabeth Witmer by keeping the promise she made.

In the GTA, next to cars, the Lakeview generating station was the greatest contributor to poor air quality. It was not an NDP government, it was not a Liberal government but a Progressive Conservative government that led to its closure. When we look back at the McGuinty government's accomplishments, all we see is a track record of hot air, empty rhetoric and the fact that most smog days in any given year in our history were under the McGuinty government. Some legacy to leave.

PETERBOROUGH ATTRACTIONS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I rise today to invite my colleagues, their families and friends to come to Peterborough this summer to enjoy the many activities being promoted by the Greater Peterborough Area Economic Development Corp. through Peterborough and Kawartha Tourism. Whether looking to go back in history and visit Lang Pioneer Village or attend the Art Gallery of Peterborough's summer events, you'll find attractions that appeal to young and old.

Our local farmers' market, located at the corner of Lansdowne and Roger Neilson Way, promotes locally grown produce, arts and crafts. Come and visit Kawartha Downs, the home of harness racing in our area, or try your luck at the Slots Casino. Why not relax on a Sunday afternoon while you're entertained by the Voices of Spring concerts, or walk down memory lane on Cruise Nights amongst the wide displays of classic automobiles.

The Havelock Jamboree attracts over 100,000 visitors to a part of my riding every year for a week, showing outstanding country entertainment from the United States and Canada. I'd be remiss not to mention the Festival of Lights, which is preparing to entertain visitors and residents of Peterborough with an outstanding list of talented acts. These concerts are presented without cost to those who wish to attend.

Peterborough comes alive during the summer, with tourists boating on the Trent-Severn waterway, experiencing summer theatre, golfing and camping, all promoted by our excellent tourism department.

I urge everyone to visit Peterborough and the Kawartha this season. I promise you that you won't be disappointed.

1340

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Over the last few days, the people of Ontario have been given a small glimpse of just how bad this government is when it comes to the energy situation. As early as tomorrow, we can expect to hear the government's response to the Ontario Power Authority's supply mix advice report. On December 9, 2005, the energy minister committed to responding to the report within 60 days; it has now been over 180 days. In a time of crisis, the McGuinty Liberals can't even meet their own commit-

ment to respond to a report whose outcome they had basically dictated.

You see, Dalton and Dwight told the Ontario Power Authority that they could not consider coal in the report because the Liberals were going to shut down the plants by 2007. Well, last week, the government had to accept that the jig was up. They can't shut them down as they promised. What would be laughable, if it wasn't so serious, is that we've been telling them this since day one.

What is truly sad is that Dwight Duncan's reaction to the news was that he was shocked. Where has he and the entire McGuinty gang been? All along, objective energy stakeholders have maintained that the promise was pure politics and was totally undoable. I guess McGuinty thought he could just stick to his messaging and hoodwink the people one more time. Shame on you, Dalton.

Ontarians need energy, and from their government they expect competence and integrity. In Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, all three are in short supply.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Two things: First of all, "hoodwink" is inappropriate language and the member knows it. Second, I thought we were supposed to use riding names or titles or something like that. This just went overboard with using the so-called familiar names, I thought. I usually don't say anything about these, but "hoodwink" is a little hard to take.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order: With all respect to the House leader, I think that if we look at statements made by members in the past, the member's statement is very consistent with the way that he positioned his remarks. I feel that this message from the member has just struck too close to home, and that's why he's objecting.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would ask the member if he would withdraw the offending word.

Mr. Yakabuski: Is it offending, Speaker? Is it a word that must be withdrawn? It's not allowed in this Legislature?

The Speaker: I'd ask you to withdraw the word.

Mr. Yakabuski: I withdraw.

HERBERT AND LUCILLE PRUE

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I rise today to celebrate two wonderful people. This week they will be celebrating 60 years of marriage together. I'm speaking of no one other than my own parents: my father, Herbert Norman Prue, and my mother, Lucille Marie Prue, nee Sullivan. They married 60 years ago this very Thursday, on June 15, 1946, at the Kew Beach United Church, right in my own riding of Beaches–East York.

My father was 18 in 1939 when he was called away to war, like so many young people, and he came back five years later, in 1945. My mother was still waiting for him and they got married in 1946.

Of course, it was a very difficult time for a family. It was very difficult to find housing, and they lived in many places in and around Toronto, but they fashioned a good life. They had three sons, and today they are the proud grandparents of four grandchildren: Willow, Courtney, Stephanie and Gregory Prue. They're all in university or have finished university and are doing quite well.

In the last 25 years, they have lived in the Bancroft area, in the highlands of Hastings, and today they live in a little town called Cardiff, where they have many friends and neighbours who I'm sure are going to come out to celebrate with them.

I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank them and to wish them a happy 60th anniversary. I promise I'll be up to see them on Saturday.

PHILIPPINES INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): June 12, today, is a very special day in the history of the Philippines: independence day of the Philippines 108 years ago. This independence day was won by many sacrifices. Many colonial masters tried to subject the Philippines to slavery, but they did not succeed. Why? Because Filipinos passed on the torch of freedom from one generation to the next. We know that even today's generation, who are here with us today in the gallery, bear the battle scars of the fight for democracy. Anyone over 20 years old remembers what happened in the Philippines not too long ago. They are here today to celebrate this special anniversary and to try to help us as well. Even indigenous dictatorships tried to steal freedom from the Philippines, but they were not successful.

What do these Filipinos really want? They want to determine their own future and structure their own destiny. That's all they want. Even today, as we remember, they were in the forefront when Ontario battled SARS. The Filipino people were there at the very beginning in the forefront, in the firing line, when we were battling SARS.

Today is a special day, and I wish to congratulate them. With us today to help us celebrate this very special day are: Consul General Mosquera, Consul Banares, Mel Catre, Ricky Castellvi and many other Filipinos. Congratulations, Filipinos.

Mabuhay ang Filipinas.

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I'd like to take a moment to recognize the hard-working and innovative people of Ontario, the people who created 34,000 jobs in the month of May. That 34,000 jobs is the highest monthly gain in this province in almost four years, and it helped push the unemployment rate in Ontario down to 5.9%, the lowest rate in five years. This brings the total number of jobs created since that important and historic month of October, 2003, to 288,000. That is something that everyone in Ontario should be happy

about, and they are. Well, not everyone; everyone except the Tory caucus. The members opposite would prefer that people of this province thought that the Ontario economy was headed the wrong way.

In fact, in a press release issued on Thursday, the member for Halton claimed, "There are 76,000 fewer jobs in Ontario than one year ago." The member is dead wrong. He might not like it, but the Ontario economy is headed in the right direction. It might not suit the opposition, but Ontario's economy is doing very well. There's no question there are challenges ahead, but this province is very well positioned to handle those challenges.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe I mentioned that the 76,000 jobs were manufacturing jobs—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): That is not a point of order. Sit down. It is not a point of order.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I'd like to take a moment to comment on what I can only refer to as comic relief provided by the leader of the third party, Howard Hampton, last Thursday, and I'm not talking about the Spring Fling.

Last week, in a news release, the leader of the third party said that the NDP believes "in a good job for everyone—because a good job is the best way to make sure working women and men share Ontario's prosperity."

That's right. Howard Hampton was right when he said that. But he pursued policies that saw over a thousand jobs lost a month, and he's claiming that he's now all about good jobs for everyone. Howard Hampton, who watched as 14 paper mills closed, the unemployment rate averaged over 10% and 10% of the industrial jobs in Ontario were lost, is claiming that he thinks that everyone deserves a good job.

Given their poor record, the NDP is the last place this government should look to for advice on job creation. Fortunately for the leader of the third party, I'm going to set the record straight. In contrast to—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm going to need the member for Timmins-James Bay to come to order.

We'll put another 20 seconds on the clock.

1350

Mr. Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He wasn't bothering me a bit.

Fortunately for the leader of the third party, I'm going to set the record straight. In contrast to his sorry record, the McGuinty government is pursuing policies that are helping Ontario's economy grow. As just one example, consider the auto sector. Last week, we saw the official opening of the Hino Motors truck plant in Woodstock. This is the latest announcement in a series that has seen the McGuinty government leverage over \$7 billion in new auto sector investments in the last two years, and the results are showing 34,000 jobs created in May and 288,000 jobs since October 2003, because unlike the NDP the McGuinty government's commitment to a good job for everyone is more than just empty words.

J. MICHAEL FORRESTALL

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As you know, I am a member from the national capital region, which, by virtue of the fact that we house Parliament there, is every Canadian's second hometown. No Canadian called Ottawa his second hometown more than the Honourable J. Michael Forrestall, the longest-serving Progressive Conservative parliamentarian in all of Canada, who died last Thursday.

When I awoke Friday morning, he was more than a headline to me; he was a philosopher who taught me what it meant to be a Progressive Conservative. He was a mentor to me and he was like a father to my husband.

I know parliamentarians across Canada will be tributing him this week, and I just wanted to add my voice to that tribute.

REPORT, OFFICE OF THE INTEGRITY
COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the report of the Integrity Commissioner concerning his review of the expense claims under the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act, 2002, for the period April 1, 2005, to March 31, 2006.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 11, An Act to enact the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006, repeal the Provincial Parks Act and the Wilderness Areas Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

Mr. Delaney: I beg leave to present a report on members' use of portable technologies in the legislative precincts from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

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

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Delaney: Speaker, last October you wrote to me as Chair of the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly to ask that the committee review the use of technology in the Ontario legislative precinct.

The practices governing our use of portable technology, which includes cellphones, laptop and tablet computers, the ubiquitous Blackberry and other handheld devices, have evolved through a series of ad hoc rulings by various Speakers over the years.

The committee met numerous times and our subcommittee members consulted our respective caucuses. I would like to acknowledge the ongoing work by and the co-operation and goodwill of our subcommittee members: Ernie Hardeman of the PC caucus; Rosario Marchese and Gilles Bisson of the NDP caucus; and Mario Sergio of the Liberal caucus. As well, our committee clerk for most of that time, Doug Arnott, was invaluable with his patience and suggestions; and our researcher, Peter Sibenik, found every piece of data that we asked for and compiled and organized it for maximum clarity.

Following consultation with our caucuses, discussion of our needs as members, and consideration of the decorum and tradition of the Legislature, our subcommittee and full committee reconciled our conclusions with practices within other legislative precincts in the USA and the Commonwealth. Our conclusions and recommendations for Ontario were remarkably similar to other jurisdictions and are summarized in the report now in your hands.

In the view of the committee, there is much to be said for expanding the tools available to MPPs in the legislative precinct. They can assist us in both chamber and non-chamber responsibilities. Our technological tools can also assist us with the type of multitasking we already do from day to day. The tools themselves, such as laptop and tablet computers, are more powerful and compact and, in recent years, less obtrusive. Handheld computers and BlackBerries are already in common use everywhere, and we wanted to formally consider their use as well as extending that use to laptops and tablets. Other parliamentary jurisdictions have considered the same issues before this committee, and we feel that Ontario provincial legislators deserve the same consideration.

The committee recommends that 802.11x wireless protocol, or Wi-Fi for short, be installed in the east and west lobbies, the legislative dining room, the legislative library, the committee rooms and, at the request of each caucus, their caucus rooms. This will enable members and staff access to their caucus network and to its functions on their laptops at times and in places where they might otherwise not have time to work, but also to add something other than a stand-alone application on their laptop or tablet.

With regard to using laptops and tablets in the legislative chamber, the subcommittee and full committee considered this issue at length and recommend that the use of portable technology, which includes notebooks, laptops and tablet computers as well as the current de facto practices regarding handheld computers and BlackBerries, be permitted in the legislative chamber along with Wi-Fi access, subject to the following guidelines and restrictions:

MPPs cannot use obtrusive functions. In simple terms, the unit has to be silent and you can't use such peripherals as printers, scanners, headphones or microphones in the House.

MPPs cannot use any function that would contravene the standing orders, such as recording images or sound.

MPPs may not use their computers at times other than following orders of the day. Permitted time includes private members' time.

Your computer must not be in use—in short, must be covered or closed—when a recorded division is taking place, during the budget or throne speech, or when royal assent is—

The Speaker: Member for Mississauga West, you need to quickly summarize the report and then move adjournment.

Mr. Delaney: Finally, Mr. Speaker, the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly is willing to exercise its ongoing authority under standing order 106(f) to review any issues that may arise from the matters and recommendations in the report in your hands.

The committee thanks you for the opportunity to reflect on and recommend how members of provincial Parliament in Ontario can better serve the people of our province. We look forward to the implementation of these changes.

I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Agreed? Carried.

VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: You will be aware that whenever a member of the Legislature has the opportunity to have their family in the gallery, we stand up on a point of order and recognize that family. I just wanted to point out that that option or privilege is not available to our pages. So I wanted to point out that one of our great, illustrious pages, Gregory Borris, who is doing a wonderful job, has his family here. Ken and Joanne Borris from the great city of Woodstock are here to watch the effective work of Gregory as he looks after our needs here this afternoon.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I take a moment to remind members that we are blessed to have a number of Special Olympians who are going to be representing Ontario at the Canada Special Olympic games in Brandon, Manitoba. I'd invite all members—if you do have the time, I know they'd appreciate it—we're hosting a reception in room 228 at 5 o'clock this evening for Special Olympics.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I did not want to lose this opportunity to introduce a lot of students who are studying ESL. Their teacher, Norm, is here. I'm happy they're here to see and learn about the political process here at Queen's Park. Thank you for coming.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, June 12, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 166. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1401 to 1406.

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

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Balkissoon, Bas	Hardeman, Ernie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Barrett, Toby	Hoy, Pat	Racco, Mario G.
Bentley, Christopher	Klees, Frank	Ramal, Khalil
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Runciman, Robert W.
Brotten, Laurel C.	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Smitherman, George
Chudleigh, Ted	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Cordiano, Joseph	McMeekin, Ted	Tory, John
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	Wong, Tony C.
Duguid, Brad	O'Toole, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Zimmer, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Parsons, Ernie	
Elliott, Christine	Peters, Steve	

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

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Horwath, Andrea	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 70; the nays are 6.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I'd like to bring to the attention of the House two gentlemen in the Speaker's gallery. I have the mayor of the township of St.

Joseph, Jody Wildman, and Mr. Rick Hamilton, who is the deputy mayor of the city of Elliot Lake.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL GRADUATES

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Earlier today, it was my great privilege to join our Premier and the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration at a ceremony just a short distance from here, in the great hall of Hart House at the University of Toronto, one of our province's finest institutes of higher learning. The event taking place at Hart House was to recognize and celebrate the contributions foreign-trained doctors are making to Ontario's health care system.

As members of this assembly will know, our government has been extremely active in encouraging foreign-trained doctors, known as international medical graduates, or IMGs, to come to Ontario. We've worked hard to help them put their skills to use for the benefit of the people of Ontario, and our results are paying huge dividends.

More than 200 international medical graduates joined the Premier and others at this event today. The 200 IMGs who joined us represent almost one half of the 460 IMGs currently practising or completing their training. That's 460 more doctors serving Ontarians who are about to begin their practice in underserved communities.

Canada produces terrific home-grown medical talent. Our medical schools are among the finest in the world. But foreign-trained doctors are an important, indeed an essential, way to supplement our supply of doctors, particularly in areas where they are most needed.

That's why our government is investing record amounts of funding in IMGs, making Ontario the leader in Canada when it comes to providing support for their assessment and training. In 2005-06, we invested almost \$40 million for IMG training, assessment and support. That's a 64% increase in funding since we took office in 2003. It helps to provide ongoing support to more than 300 of these doctors.

Of course, we're not doing it alone. Ontario's medical schools and their faculties provide tremendous support for the preparation and training of these international medical graduates. IMG-Ontario and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario also play vital roles. Our thanks go out to all of them.

More evidence of the success we're having: In 2005, 39% of the medical licences we issued in Ontario went to IMGs. This 39% of licences makes up the single greatest portion of new licences issued, more than for Ontario graduates and more than double the number from 10 years ago.

The progress we're making with international medical graduates truly is good news. It's good news for these doctors, of course, who are finding it easier to practise their profession here in their new homeland, building a better life for themselves and their families. It's good news for our health care system, as great numbers of qualified doctors enter our system, bringing new energy and helping to alleviate shortages. Most of all, it's good news for patients.

One of the three key priorities is providing Ontarians with better access to nurses and doctors. A big part of making this happen is creating more nurses and doctors. By allowing more foreign-trained doctors, such as those who are in the gallery today, to work here, we are improving the lives of countless citizens in every part of our vast province. We're enormously grateful to these doctors, and events like this morning's celebration at Hart House help to us celebrate this remarkable progress that we're making.

I know that all members of the House will join me once again in thanking and celebrating these doctors who have brought their skills, their training, their compassion and, dare I say, their love alongside their expertise to our province for the benefit of our patients and our citizens.

EDUCATION FUNDING SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L'ÉDUCATION

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues): The McGuinty government has demonstrated throughout our mandate that we not only support our publicly funded education system but we stand for it.

Nous estimons que notre gouvernement et notre province ne peuvent réussir que si les élèves réussissent en premier lieu.

Today I'm pleased to say that students are continuing to benefit from the significant progress made in Ontario's publicly funded system. After years of cuts by the previous government, we're making the tough funding decisions needed to ensure we can invest in our students and schools once again. And we've been investing wisely.

Pour la troisième année consécutive, le gouvernement McGuinty augmente son investissement dans les écoles de l'Ontario financées par les deniers publics, afin de continuer à améliorer les résultats des deux millions d'élèves de la province.

For 2006-07, we're investing an additional \$600 million in education funding, bringing the total—

Applause.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'm glad the Minister of Finance is applauding with such gusto.

We're investing an additional \$600 million, bringing the total funding for our school boards to \$17.5 billion.

Today's increased investment will support key government targets for higher student achievement, including

seeing 75% of 12-year-olds achieving the provincial standard in reading, writing and math by 2008, as well as 85% of high school students graduating by 2010.

Specific funding to support these priorities includes:

- \$95 million for 1,200 more primary teachers, so our youngest students benefit from more individual attention;
- an additional \$71 million for 980 specialist teachers at the elementary level in areas such as music, phys ed and the arts—this is great news;
- an additional \$19 million for 300 more student success teachers to help struggling high school students;
- \$10 million more in additional support for French-language boards; and
- \$500 million for repairs and renovations in our schools.

I was very pleased today to attend Church Street Junior Public School in the great riding of the Minister of Health. I visited with a grade 5 class today who talked to me and taught me about monarch butterflies. What a wonderful class, led by a magnificent teacher, who could roll the whole story of the flight, the development, the growth and the birth of monarch butterflies into their curriculum. What a tremendous class, under the leadership of Principal Judy Gillis.

Major achievements in student performance were made in the 2005-06 school year that reflect the significant impact of this government's education investments. In 2004-05, an average of 62% of Ontario students met or exceeded provincial standards in reading, writing and math, up from the average of 54% who achieved that level in 2002-03. This is a remarkable improvement. High school graduation rates also rose to 71%, up from 68%.

These achievements demonstrate that this government's targeted education investments and strategies are working, producing positive outcomes for our students. Our commitment to invest in an outstanding public education system remains unwavering. And today I am reforming the education funding formula to increase transparency and accountability. We have heard so much about the formula, dating back to 1998; it really was time.

Les changements annoncés aujourd'hui signifient que les Ontariennes et les Ontariens sauront exactement comment l'investissement du gouvernement sera bénéfique directement aux élèves.

That transparency is very important. The new funding model will also provide targeted funding towards principals, vice-principals, secretaries and school supplies for every school across the province, no matter how small. We're moving a significant part of our formula from an enrolment-based formula to a school-based formula, and this is a key to the formula change. For the first time in almost a decade, it will target funding for teachers' salaries that reflect actual costs.

In addition, there will be \$200 million more in 2006-07 outside the grants for student needs that will target improved literacy and math levels, French-language programs, professional development for teachers

and principals, student success initiatives, parent engagement and safe and healthy schools.

I think it's fair to say that we have made great progress in the system. We will continue to do so by delivering the necessary resources to help all Ontario's publicly funded schools help our students reach their full potential.

ONTARIO WINE WEEK

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I'd like to inform the members that today marks the beginning of Ontario Wine Week—an idea, by the way, from my colleague the member from Essex. A number of events will be held here in Toronto and throughout wine country this week to recognize and celebrate the importance of our wine industry and the people who work so hard to make it so successful.

This industry is a vital economic driver here in Ontario. It was just last month that KPMG released a study commissioned by the Wine Council of Ontario. It indicates that the Ontario wine industry supports more than 5,600 jobs and generates nearly \$300 million in additional economic value for the province.

1420

Back in 1990, the concept of winery tourism was a new one. Today, it's a booming industry, as we all know, with 750,000 tourists visiting Ontario's wine region each year. The Wine Council of Ontario has established a very popular interactive guide to Ontario's wine route. It provides maps, event listings and a guide to attractions to help people plan their trip to wine country. The Wine Council also develops an events guide each year, with wineries offering special activities during the summer months. And the industry has expanded the grape and wine festival and added new spring and winter events to celebrate excellence in the industry.

With summer fast approaching, I think most Ontarians are planning their holidays. If you are looking to get away for a few days, what could be better than a trip to wine country? It is a truly wonderful experience that combines some of Ontario's most beautiful regions and some of the world's very best wines. Ontario's many wineries offer amazing tours of their vineyards, insight on how these fantastic wines are produced and a warm and hospitable staff always happy to make you feel right at home. Each area of wine country—whether it's Prince Edward county, the Niagara Peninsula or Lake Erie and Pelee Island—offers its own unique experiences, natural beauty and excellent wines. Visit the Wine Council of Ontario's website at www.winesofontario.org for all the information you need to plan your trip.

If you just don't have the time to get away, you can still experience a little bit of wine country by asking about Ontario wines at your local LCBO. With friendly staff, the LCBO is knowledgeable and can recommend some fine Ontario wine selections.

As the minister responsible for the VQA legislation and wine strategy, it's my pleasure to work with our award-winning industry.

Our government has an interest in ensuring Ontario's grape and wine sector continues to prosper. Back in 2004—I think the Legislature will remember—we made a commitment to support the wine industry, focusing on VQA wines, with a \$10-million commitment over five years. In June 2005—last year—the VQA Ontario board approved the addition of 12 sub-appellations within the Niagara Peninsula's grape-growing region. These sub-appellations are areas that are unique because of their soil, climate and topography. Each area gives its grapes a special character. Consumers are becoming more aware of this, and the sub-appellation is a good idea. We amended a regulation under the Vintners Quality Alliance Act to identify the sub-appellations and give official status to these regions.

In September of last year, we introduced a package of initiatives to address, as you recall, the 2005 grape short crop, including a regulation change to the Wine Content and Labelling Act. The package had a number of benefits for our grape and wine industry, including, importantly, a three-year pricing agreement for grapes and clarity for the consumer in terms of signage at the LCBO, resulting in a new shelving strategy introduced in April 2006.

Most recently, in the budget, the government announced an additional commitment of \$5 million to the sector for 2006, including \$3 million for Ontario's small- and medium-sized producers of VQA wines, \$1 million for advanced research into hardier grape varieties and \$1 million for further marketing support. These are just a few of the ongoing government initiatives that show we are on the side of Ontario businesses, particularly our small wineries and entrepreneurs.

With the support of the Legislature, the wine industry is continuing to take steps to build upon what is truly a made-in-Ontario success story.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In response to the statement by the Minister of Education, we join her in commending the students in Ontario for their improved results in reading, writing and mathematics. Of course, what the minister didn't do was credit the previous government with putting in place the standardized testing that allows us to know how our students are doing. What she also didn't—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. The Attorney General will come to order.

Mr. Klees: As I say, what she failed to do was to credit the previous government with putting in place standardized testing in this province—standardized testing that the honourable member voted against, as a matter of fact, when she was in opposition. The only way that we have of knowing how our students are doing, and the fact that they are doing so well, is not so much a credit to what this government has done but to the standardized curriculum and the standards that the previous government had put in place. So let's give credit where credit is due.

The Minister of Education's announcement today not only falls short of addressing the funding costs of school boards across the province; they are actually making it worse. The problem with this government is that they continue to make new announcements without the appropriate funding to support them. Once again, this minister today has failed to address the problems of the funding formula, that they are not up to where the commitments are that this government has made: four-year contracts and new announcements made by the previous Minister of Education without adequate funding. Now we have \$600 million announced today, but in addition to that, additional targeted programs that will further drag school boards across this province into a deficit.

What we would ask this minister to do is to leave the campaign trail and begin the responsible job of managing as the Minister of Education. If she thinks this is a giant step forward, we don't want to see her next step.

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL GRADUATES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I was pleased today to spend my lunch with some of the people from my community who are part of the international medical graduate program: Dr. Sharieff, Dr. Pandit and Dr. Rahil.

Again I would have to say that the Minister of Health was remiss. He did not acknowledge that it was our government which, after the McKendry and George report, identified the fact that there was a shortage of doctors. We put in place measures which expanded the assessment program, the training program and the placement program. Many of the international medical graduates today are there as a result of the expansion of the initiatives that we put in place. I'm very pleased that this government has continued to build on those initiatives and that we continue to make sure that IMGs can be fast-tracked into practice.

However, I think we also need to be cognizant of the fact that we have a worldwide shortage today of health professionals, whether it's doctors or nurses, and it's important that we continue to invest and expand our own programs in our province in order that we can educate more doctors and more nurses in order that we can respond to the needs of our population.

ONTARIO WINE WEEK

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I congratulate my colleague from Essex on bringing forward his private member's bill for Ontario Wine Week and I thank the minister for the opportunity to respond.

We should, though, at the same time that we're celebrating Ontario's outstanding award-winning wines, recognize that Ontario VQA wine sales are actually in decline relative to the increase in foreign brands at the LCBO. The market share of VQA wines is shrinking at the LCBO under the McGuinty government. Who can

forget the “French Rabbit” campaign: between half a million to a million dollars promoting foreign wine in a box, instead of VQA wine, in an attempt to bribe LCBO employees with trinkets like barbecue sets to sell foreign wine instead of Ontario VQA product? I hope the minister will look into that to make sure that does not happen in the future, and I thank LCBO employees for their very positive comments about the opposition bringing this forward.

Lastly, we do have another private member’s bill before the Legislature: the Ontario VQA Wine Stores Act. It has received support from members of all three parties, and I do ask the government to put that for a third and final reading vote so we can open up more market access for our VQA wineries.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): New Democrats are pleased to join in the acknowledgment of Ontario’s great and growing and excelling wine industry. It’s across Ontario. It’s Pelee Island, Lake Erie North Shore and some excellent wines coming out of Prince Edward county. In fact, the winery By Chadsey’s Cairns, owned by Richard Johnston, produces some excellent vintages. Of course, down in Niagara where I come from—and I’ve been to enough events with enough members of this assembly to tell people that not only are members of this chamber advocates of Ontario wine, but they’re great consumers of it.

1430

One of the observations that has to be made is that some of the greatest wines in Ontario are being produced by some of the smallest wineries. These small production wineries have incredible difficulty getting shelvage in traditional LCBO stores, and I say that it’s time for this government to acknowledge that it’s those small vintners, those small wineries with excellent product that deserve a unique venue of their own. It could be done effectively, I say to you and New Democrats say clearly to people in Ontario, by a partnership between the Ministry of Tourism and LCBO in the establishment of LCBO boutique stores across Ontario, especially at tourist destinations and in wine country.

These LCBO-Ministry of Tourism boutique stores would be restricted to stocking wines produced by the smaller wineries, with a limit to the gallonage they produce on an annual basis. This would comply with all of the international trade agreements; would be consistent with all of our commitments to other jurisdictions; and would give those small vintners an opportunity to market their product, expose their product to the Ontario, Canadian and international markets; and, indeed, would fulfill the mandate of the LCBO. It would ensure public ownership, responsible control of the sale and that these small vintners get their share of exposure in Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): To the Minister of Education, as the critic for the NDP on educational matters, I struggle hard to try to find a way to

applaud any initiative that the Liberals introduce, but it’s hopeless. I went today to the local school in George’s riding just to check the announcement out, and all we get is a repeat of the announcement I’ve heard already about \$95 million, 1,200 more primary teachers. I keep on asking this minister, could you prove it? Could you prove that you’ve actually hired them? They cannot show any evidence because there is none. They want to say, “We are spending \$71 million for 980 new specialist teachers.” Prove it. Where are they? They cannot show any evidence for it.

They talk about \$500 million for repairs and renovations; it doesn’t exist. These are numbers they create; they do not exist in reality. They’re simply announced. Today, the minister says—get a hold of this—“We’re changing the funding formula, so that it accurately reflects the cost of salaries,” rather than saying, “To get rid of that gap, we are going to put in \$500 million that boards are waiting for in order to not steal from other areas to pay for other things.” She didn’t come out and say quite accurately or clearly, “This is what we’re going to do.” They’re going to change the funding formula and get rid of the 8.3% gap. It’s going to be magical. It will just happen.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): That’s horse spit.

Mr. Marchese: Yeah, horse something. It just won’t happen because the money is not there. It has not been announced.

What is she going to do? She actually goes on to say, “We’re going to realign funding”—every time they don’t know what to do, they invent these words like “realign funding”—“from two grants,” meaning they’re going to give for the teachers’ gap by taking from the learning opportunities grant. That’s the grant of which this minister and Gerard Kennedy used to say, “You’ve got a problem in a school board? You can just go to the learning opportunities grant. You’ve got another problem in northern Ontario? Just go to the learning opportunities grant.”

Now this minter says, “For the 8.3% gap, you can take from that learning opportunity grant and just apply it to the teachers.” What’s going to happen to the other programs that we’re funding from that program? We’re just going to invent a number and we’re going to say, “The gap is gone.” The gap is with us. The money is not here and it will never be here. It’s just a big fabrication by this minister.

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL GRADUATES

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): With respect to the Minister of Health, I tell you, when you help a little bit, it means foreign-trained professionals are going to be able to practise. Imagine if this minister helped a little more. More foreign-trained doctors would be able to practise in this country. So I say to you, George Smitherman, put in a little more, so more can practise.

DEFERRED VOTES

STRONGER CITY OF TORONTO
FOR A STRONGER ONTARIO ACT, 2006LOI DE 2006 CRÉANT
UN TORONTO PLUS FORT
POUR UN ONTARIO PLUS FORT

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading 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 / Projet de loi 53, Loi révisant les lois de 1997 Nos 1 et 2 sur la cité de Toronto, modifiant certaines lois d'intérêt public en ce qui concerne les pouvoirs municipaux et abrogeant certaines lois d'intérêt privé se rapportant à la cité de Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We have a deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 53. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1435 to 1440.

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

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Prue, Michael
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Horwath, Andrea	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hoy, Pat	Racco, Mario G.
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldeep	Ramal, Khalil
Broten, Laurel C.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Mauro, Bill	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Colle, Mike	McGuinty, Dalton	Tabuns, Peter
Cordiano, Joseph	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Peters, Steve	
Duncan, Dwight	Phillips, Gerry	

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

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Tascona, Joseph N.
Dunlop, Garfield	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tory, John
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 58; the nays are 20.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

ORAL QUESTIONS

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. The media reports from this weekend in Caledonia suggested that an OPP officer stated off camera that they had been instructed not to engage in violent commotion or activity between those occupying the land, other external groups such as the media, local community members and Ontarians traveling through the area. Can you confirm whether or not this is the case, and will you also confirm that no element whatsoever of that instruction has come from your government with respect to how they carry out their duties to protect the public?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I can in fact confirm that. I am not aware of what instructions any particular police officer may have been referencing, but certainly we have not provided instructions of any kind to the Ontario Provincial Police vis-à-vis Caledonia.

May I take this opportunity as well to extend my sympathies to all those affected by last Friday's violence? I know I will be joined—I say this with confidence—by every single member of this Legislature when we condemn those activities of those individuals. I can say as well that we have been negotiating in goodwill and in good faith, but this now makes it very difficult for us to have a basis for continuing discussions, and I will speak to that further in the supplementaries.

Mr. Tory: Again to the Premier, Caledonia has undergone more than 100 days of hardship for a conflict you and your government were informed about more than a year ago. Last week and this weekend, the incidents that you spoke about were things that I think shocked people. They saw a newspaper reporter for the Kitchener Record assaulted and robbed as someone held him by the throat and other people rifled through his vehicle. They saw an elderly man having a heart attack after he and his wife had their car stomped on and surrounded. They saw the two CH cameramen, of course, who were assaulted by a group of individuals.

Last week in the House, the Minister of Community Safety referred to an understanding that existed about where the police go or don't go. Who is that understanding with, and what involvement has anyone from your government had, including any public servants, in terms of discussions of that kind of understanding? Who is it with, and who has been involved in discussing it? Has anyone in your government—public servant, politician or otherwise—been involved in discussing such an understanding?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, and I'm not sure I could have been any more clear in my answer to the first question, we have not provided any kind of instruction to the Ontario Provincial Police.

Let me say that we have been negotiating with the First Nations community in good faith. We have estab-

lished an expedited land claims settlement process. We've invited to that table the federal government. We are working as quickly as we can. We have put in place a moratorium on the development lands in question. But I can say that a condition of our being at the table was that public safety would not be compromised. In fact, last Friday it was without a doubt compromised.

I've asked the minister responsible for aboriginal issues to speak with the leadership of the First Nations community involved to relay that we are no longer prepared to continue negotiations until two important conditions are met: First of all, the barricades must come down, and they must stay down; and secondly, we are asking the leadership to co-operate in any way with the Ontario Provincial Police so that they might apprehend the individuals involved.

Mr. Tory: I'd like to ask the Premier two questions that arise in part out of that answer. The first question would be, now that the situation is the way it is, might you commit to holding at the appropriate time an independent investigation into what has gone on here so that all of these different understandings and instructions that seem to be floating around from somewhere and all the things that are going on that involve a breakdown of the rule of law can be independently investigated? I think people would take some comfort from knowing that at the appropriate time this will be looked into by someone independent so we'll all know how it went on, why it happened and that it won't happen again.

Secondly, what time limit have you placed on this business of saying that the barricades must come down and that the rule of law must be respected? When have you said this is going to come into effect? It's a new statement on your part. I commend you for it. When, specifically, is it going to come into effect?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Our government just conveyed this information to the First Nations leadership involved. The leader of the official opposition may know that this morning we issued a joint release, together with the federal government, demanding that the barricades in fact come down. Beyond that, we've also requested that the First Nations leadership co-operate with the Ontario Provincial Police when it comes to the apprehension of the individuals involved.

I can say—and I know I say this on behalf of the people of Ontario—that we will not brook any disagreement with respect to which law applies when it comes to alleged criminal activity. There is one law for all Ontarians and all Canadians when it comes to criminal misconduct, and that's the criminal law of Canada. That's why we're asking the leadership involved in the First Nations community to co-operate with the Ontario Provincial Police in order to ensure that the individuals involved might be apprehended.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Tory: I could ask a very simple question: Where have you been? You said in your answer a moment ago that when the moratorium was placed on the develop-

ment of the land and when the negotiations were set up and one of the barricades was brought down—I believe I'm right that you said a condition of that deal was that public safety would be respected and the law would be respected. I think you—your government—said that some time ago. Now you're here today saying in no uncertain terms, "Take it from me. We're going to make sure that is the case."

1450

So I think it is reasonable to ask you, when? You entered into a deal three or four weeks ago, at which time the first barricade did come down, but all of the incidents we're talking about have happened since then. So I'm asking you again, by what date are you expecting that people will comply with these conditions that were in the old deal so that we can know that the rule of law is going to be restored in Caledonia? When is it going to happen?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition may know that we have been in discussion with the federal government in these matters. That's why we issued the joint release today. We said that it's a matter that is very urgent. We are not going to engage in brinkmanship. We are going to continue to act responsibly. We will do so in co-operation with the federal government, and we've deemed the matter urgent.

Mr. Tory: One of the things that has not yet happened is a visit by you to Caledonia, simply to meet with people face to face and really see what's going on there and listen to some of the people who live there and who I think have a combination of frustration, heartache and anger over a lot of these kinds of things.

I would ask you, if it isn't convenient or appropriate for you to go there, would you as premier of this province consider—as part of the dialogue that has to go on and the personal conveyance of the message you've talked about today to all of the stakeholders involved—calling these people in, showing this kind of leadership, to have them into your office to deal with them directly in conveying the message you have conveyed to this House today and make sure there is no misunderstanding, I would suggest with a date by which this is going to happen? Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think the leader of the official opposition knows that Mr. Levac, a member of the government, is on a community liaison table. He may know as well that Minister Cordiano has had an opportunity to meet with the community. But he will not know that Minister Ramsay met with the First Nations leadership this morning and conveyed this directly. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that we have very good channels of communications with the leadership and with the community and we will keep those open on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Tory: I'm delighted to hear that the minister finally has had a meeting with those individuals. I would suggest to you, respectfully, that there are other people in that community, because I have talked to them, who would welcome the opportunity to have a meeting as well, both to convey some thoughts they have on this

matter and to be given the same message that you talked about conveying to the First Nations people, because everyone needs to understand that the rule of law is going to prevail. So I would ask you if you would consider asking the minister to do that.

Secondly, I would ask you one more time, as a constructive means of indicating that people will have their chance to be heard and to be listened to by somebody independent going forward, will you commit to having an independent investigation of this matter, this series of matters, including the land claims process and how we can make it better? Will your government commit to do that as a means of trying to further defuse the tension that exists today in Caledonia? Why won't you agree to that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: No, I will not agree to that. I cannot understand how embarking upon yet another process at some point in the future will help us address the matter that is before us today.

In addition to the ongoing communication efforts and the table that has been put in place to expedite the land settlement claims process, we have also helped the local community with a \$500,000 emergency assistance package for local businesses. We have delivered \$50,000 to the local council to hire additional communications support. We've delivered \$50,000 to help develop a marketing and economic recovery plan. Last week, we delivered a further \$160,000 to local council to implement that plan. We are presently in discussions with the developer involved to see if we might find a way to offset some of their costs. We are working as hard as we can, bringing as much as we can possibly bear, to ensure that we resolve this matter as quickly as possible.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. On May 5, 2003, you promised to close coal-fired power plants by 2007, "Come hell or high water," to quote you. One year ago, Premier, you broke that promise and now, today, you're breaking your coal promise again. My question is this: Why are you breaking your coal promise again? Was it hell, was it high water or was this just another McGuinty promise that you never intended to keep and never had a plan to keep? Which is it, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): Last year, we determined a timeline for closing down plants based on information provided by the Independent Electricity System Operator, an independent body that manages the reliability of our power system. Unfortunately, those estimates have been revised upward this year as a result of the circumstances we faced last year, although let me stress that this report does not change our objective: The coal plants must be closed.

We want to ensure that we won't compromise reliability in the light of these new estimates. We want to ensure that the power stays on. And we want to make

sure as we do this that we clean up our atmosphere. We're committed to a cleaner environment, a cleaner airshed, and we will continue to press ahead to remove coal-fired generation as quickly as possible, recognizing system reliability, which the Premier and I have always said is the first priority.

Mr. Hampton: I'm surprised that the Premier wouldn't answer for his own "hell or high water" promise.

A March opinion poll asked people, "Who do you trust?" Politicians scored dead last, 14% below insurance salesmen and used car salesmen. Why? One big reason is because the McGuinty government has transformed breaking promises into a high art form. As a result, people feel betrayed and hurt.

My question to the Premier is this: After all of Dalton McGuinty's broken promises, why should the people of Ontario believe anything the McGuinty government says about hydroelectricity?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We've begun the most ambitious cleanup of our hydroelectricity system in the history of this province. I will remind the member opposite that when we came to office, the amount of power was going down. We had a system that was failing us. We moved quickly to bring on clean, renewable power, something that member opposite voted against. We moved quickly on conservation, something that member voted against. And when they were in power, they cancelled all of our conservation programs.

We remain committed to closing the coal plants, something that member says he won't do, and we disagree with that. We are committed to that and we are moving forward. We moved forward by closing Lakeview. I remind the members opposite that the transmission changes to close that station hadn't been made by the previous government when we came to power.

We're moving to clean up our electricity system, to clean up our environment and to do that prudently, ensuring that Ontarians have a safe, reliable system of power, something they've lacked as a result of the lack of foresight of the party the member speaks for and the Conservative Party—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: I'm surprised again that the Premier wouldn't answer for his own promise. After all, it was Dalton McGuinty who promised, come hell or high water, that he would close all of the coal-fired plants by 2007. He broke that promise a year ago when he said, "Oh, not until 2009," and now he breaks it again by saying, "Oh, can't do it in 2009."

Premier, now that your promise and your credibility have gone up in smoke, what's your new timetable for closing the coal plants—2010, 2012? Or is it the same target that Ernie Eves set, 2015? Which is it?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The McGuinty government remains committed to closing the coal plants, something that member won't do. When that member is in the north he says, "Keep them open," and when he's in the south

he says, "Close them down." He said on Friday that it will take at least seven years.

We are committed to closing the coal plants in a responsible fashion that ensures the reliability of our power system. We've already reduced the amount of coal-fired generation by 17%. The amount of emissions associated with coal is down between 24% and 32%, depending on which type.

It is a challenge to close those plants. It's never been done anywhere in the world. But we remain determined and resolved more than ever to achieve that commitment, to clean up our environment and ensure a better quality of life and a better airshed for all the people of Ontario.

1500

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Hampton: My question is for the Premier. Premier, one would have thought you would have thought about this promise a bit before making it in 2003. But your greatest failure, the reason why coal plants are still belching out pollution and why we're about to see the McGuinty \$40-billion nuclear mega scheme is because of your government's failure to move forward on energy efficiency and conservation.

California has reduced electricity consumption by 12,000 megawatts—the equivalent of three Darlington-sized nuclear power plants—through energy efficiency and conservation. California invests 30 times what your government invests in energy efficiency. Manitoba invests 33 times. Quebec invests 15 times what your government invests in energy efficiency and conservation.

My question is this: Why is the McGuinty government's electricity scheme "Go big and go nuclear," without even giving energy efficiency and conservation a real try?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think the leader of the NDP would have understood by now the electricity circumstances in Ontario. We inherited a situation where, during the course of the last decade, demand went up 8.5% and capacity fell by 6.5%. So we've been working very actively. We brought 3,000 megawatts of new generation online. We have 10,000 more megawatts in the pipeline. We believe that we have a plan in place at present which will take us to 2014. We can manage demand up to that point in time, but beyond that, there's going to be a challenge for us.

The member opposite would suggest that the way for us to meet the 10,000-megawatt gap that will grow by 2025 is only through conservation and only through tapping into new renewable sources. We think that is unrealistic. We think that is irresponsible. We think that we have to build new generation in Ontario, and we are determined to do that and to get that done. The member opposite may see things differently, but we intend to move ahead with a plan that will meet our needs through to 2025.

Mr. Hampton: Some environmental groups held a press conference today and they presented a chart. What it shows is how much a province like Manitoba invests in energy efficiency and how little the McGuinty govern-

ment invests in energy efficiency. Here's the McGuinty government down here; you can hardly see them. Here's Manitoba.

Energy efficiency can do a lot for Ontario. For example, why aren't we providing people with financial incentives, like California did with their famous 20-20 plan? They reduce people's electricity costs by 20% if they agree to reduce consumption by 20%. It worked there. Why aren't we toughening up the building code, which, again, has had a huge impact there? Why hasn't the McGuinty government insisted on the highest level of energy efficiency for appliances? All these things make a huge difference.

Tell us again, Premier, why is the McGuinty electricity policy "Go nuclear, go big," without even really giving energy efficiency and conservation a real try?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I can't agree with the leader of the NDP's presentation of our policy. He likes to talk about California, but he's not prepared to recognize that California is a little bit different from Ontario in a couple of regards. First of all, they don't enjoy a winter climate. Secondly, their electricity rates are dramatically higher than ours.

If the member opposite is saying that's the best way to motivate Ontarians and to incent business when it comes to developing a warmer embrace of conservation, then he should just say, as he's in fact said in the past, that we need to dramatically increase electricity prices in Ontario. I don't know why he'd say that, because on other days he's in this House telling us about the challenge that higher electricity rates are presenting to industry in northern Ontario. He can't have it both ways. The fact of the matter is, we have in place an aggressive conservation program, but even in spite of that, that alone will never be enough to get the job done. We're going to have to—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Well, I think I've heard it all now. The Premier, who has increased electricity rates by 55% over three years after promising to freeze them, is now going to lecture other people on electricity rates.

This is about energy efficiency. About the only thing you've done on energy efficiency is hold some photo ops and some superficial ads on television. Someone living in Manitoba can apply for and receive a \$5,000 low-interest loan to install insulation, energy-efficient windows and energy-efficient appliances. But in Ontario, there is no such scheme under the McGuinty government—no scheme for demand response, no toughening up of the building code, no toughening up of energy efficiency requirements for appliances.

My question remains the same: Why is the McGuinty government so fascinated with "Go nuclear, go big," when your own record on energy efficiency and conservation is frankly embarrassing?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I disagree with the leader of the NDP's perspective on this very important debate. Again, experts are telling us that by 2025 we are going to experience a 10,000-megawatt gap. That's the

difference between how much capacity we're going to have and how much demand there's actually going to be.

The leader of the NDP is apparently suggesting that we are never, ever again going to have to build new generation in Ontario, that we can meet all our needs long into the future simply by harnessing renewables and through conservation. I wish I lived in that world, but I don't; I live in this one. We have a responsibility on this side of the House to ensure that Ontarians—either through their homes, their schools, their hospitals or in our industry—have an adequate, reliable supply of clean, affordable electricity. We are seized with that responsibility and we look forward to putting out a plan that gets us to 2025.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): To the Premier: In today's Hamilton Spectator, the mayor of Caledonia says that OPP officers are embarrassed because they're not allowed to invoke the rule of law. Your Minister of Community Safety is also quoted in the paper as saying that OPP intervention in the Caledonia crisis would make the situation worse. This is the minister responsible for the OPP publicly saying, "Don't intervene; don't confront lawbreakers and lawlessness"—in other words, "Don't do your job." Premier, would you agree that your minister's public comments could be construed as providing direction to the OPP?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): No, I would not. I have every confidence that the Ontario Provincial Police will do whatever they think is appropriate, given their mandate, their responsibilities and their determination to protect public safety. I know they are monitoring the situation very closely and they will do what they feel is appropriate.

Mr. Runciman: I don't think there's any doubt that the Liberal Party's rhetoric over the years has impacted the decision-making of the OPP. As the president of the OPPA said last week, "political pressure and optics" have the OPP "bending their own rules" and jeopardizing officer safety.

After 104 days of occupation and numerous incidents of violence, property damage and enormous economic loss, you say your patience is running out. Given your minister's public comments advising the OPP to continue to ignore the rule of law and not confront lawbreakers, other than breaking off negotiations, what does your patience running out mean to the good people of Caledonia: meaningful action or another cross-country tour?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: On the one hand, the member opposite is accusing us of somehow either directly or indirectly lending direction to the OPP. On the other hand, he's saying that we're supposed to end up with some kind of meaningful action. I don't know how he defines "meaningful action," but I can say that what we have agreed to, together with the federal government, is

that we issued a statement this morning calling for the barricades to come down on an urgent basis. Beyond that, our government has requested of the leadership of the First Nations community that they co-operate in every way possible to ensure the apprehension of the individuals who are alleged to have perpetrated misdeeds last Friday.

1510

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): For the Premier: Going nuclear without even trying energy efficiency and conservation is like doing brain surgery for a headache. Part of the reason people are worried about your \$40-billion nuclear mega scheme is because of nuclear power's history of bloated cost overruns; for example: Darlington, a \$10-billion cost overrun; Pickering A, unit 4 refurbishment, an \$800-million cost overrun; even the Pickering A, unit 1 refurbishment, a \$100-million cost overrun. Why should people in Ontario pour \$40 billion down your nuclear mega scheme when the results of the last investment in nuclear power still leave us with bloated debt?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): First of all, with respect to energy efficiency and conservation, California and Manitoba began in 1993 with a plan on conservation. What did the government of the day in Ontario do? They cancelled all conservation plans through the old Ontario Hydro. It takes an enormous change of culture to effect it. We've invested \$1.5 billion in directives at conservation which are coming online.

With respect to the future of nuclear power and nuclear generation in this province and the cost thereof, there is one government in Ontario's history that has brought a nuclear project in on time and on budget, and it was the McGuinty Liberal government and the refurb of Pickering A, unit 1. We will manage the system responsibly and reliably to protect the interests of all Ontarians going forward.

Mr. Hampton: The minister says that you brought in Pickering A, unit 1, on budget. Even your chief nuclear expert says that it was \$100 million over estimated cost.

But working families are also worried about nuclear waste, about how the McGuinty government's nuclear mega scheme will create tonnes of new additional toxic radioactive waste, which will have to be stored for thousands of years, yet there is no clear plan for how nuclear waste will be stored. It's like buying a big, expensive house and then saying to your children and your grandchildren, "You pay the mortgage."

How do you justify creating more nuclear waste for our children and grandchildren to look after? How is that fair to them?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The member opposite really plays fast and loose with the numbers. First of all, he suggests that the cost of any nuclear program will be \$40 billion. He just picked that number out of the air. He refers to

tonnes and tonnes of nuclear waste. The amount of nuclear waste that we've generated in the last 40 years doesn't approach a tonne.

The member may not be aware of this. Nuclear waste management disposal is a matter of federal jurisdiction. It's being looked at by the federal government. We will manage it safely and responsibly, the way we have for 40 years, based on the recommendations of the regulator.

Finally, we will manage it the way the Americans, the British, the French and many other nations do: responsibly and under the guidance and direction of an independent regulator. Moving forward, that will help ensure a reliable, affordable system of generation for this province in the years to come.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL
FISCAL POLICIES
POLIQUES FISCALES
FÉDÉRALES-PROVINCIALES

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): My question is to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. There's a debate across the country, particularly among politicians and the media, but also Ontarians and other constituents across the country are talking about how to reform the federal equalization program and the nature of the fiscal imbalance. There are two studies that have been completed this year that make recommendations on how to reform equalization. Could you let us know what Ontario's position is on these recommendations and how these proposed changes might affect some of our constituents?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Je remercie la députée pour la question. The starting point for Ontario's position is something that every member of this House knows: that Ontarians are strong Canadians and are supportive of Canadians across the country.

Canada's Constitution says that Canadians in different parts of the country should have access to reasonably comparable levels of public service at reasonably comparable levels of taxation. Ontarians have always supported this principle. We're proud of our historic and continued commitment, in financial and moral terms, to ensuring that all Canadians have access to quality public services. However, Canadians living in Ontario currently put \$4.9 billion into the equalization program. That contribution has grown by more than 30% over the last four years and is scheduled to grow at 3.5% a year into the future regardless of what happens to the economy.

There are some who suggest we could address this imbalance by making the equalization program larger. There is simply no evidence to suggest that the existing equalization program is insufficient to meet the principle outlined in the Constitution.

Ontario would rather see a solution to the fiscal imbalance that benefits all Canadians equally, including the 39% of Canadians who live in Ontario.

Ms. Wynne: I think everyone in this House would support that position.

There is speculation, Minister, that the Premiers will meet with the Prime Minister later this year to discuss the fiscal imbalance and equalization. Could you outline what Ontario's position will be in those discussions? I've noticed that there are representatives from the city of Toronto who have spoken out on this issue. What stake do Ontario municipalities have in this issue, Madam Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: Ontario wants the discussion to focus on a solution that benefits all Canadians across the country, not only half of the Canadians. The federal government could achieve a fair solution by either increasing federal transfers to all Canadians or providing tax room for the provinces to increase their revenues.

Il est évident qu'une autre augmentation au programme de péréquation pourrait aider quelques provinces, mais elle sera trop coûteuse pour l'Ontario.

Some other provinces' economies are growing faster than Ontario's. Some provinces that receive equalization now have lower tax rates. Some have greater overall fiscal capacity than Ontario. It doesn't make sense to increase equalization at this point in time, and we do need a solution that benefits all Canadians.

Just last week, Premier McGuinty hosted a meeting of mayors from throughout the province to discuss the fiscal imbalance and how it affects Ontario's municipalities. We are pleased at the response, and that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario formally endorsed Ontario's position in calling on the federal government to address the fiscal imbalance in a way that benefits all Canadians.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): My question is to the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs. Over the last several nights in Caledonia people have been giving me eyewitness accounts and rumours about the violence on Friday. Also, there are rumours in Caledonia and Six Nations that say that David Peterson has been fired.

Minister, this morning you called for an end to the blockades, not David Peterson. Has Mr. Peterson been fired or is he just missing in action like the rest of your government?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): No, David Peterson has not been fired. He still remains the provincial lead though, as I'm sure the member has observed, for many of the issues that only the main table can deal with, because the federal government is at that main table, that is where most of the discussions are taking place right now. That's why he has seen more of an emphasis to the main table, with Barbara MacDougall representing the federal government and Jane Stewart representing the provincial government.

Mr. Barrett: Minister, these rumours are just further proof of the total breakdown in communication in

Caledonia and Six Nations. To his credit, Mr. Peterson has been at the barricades. He was a no-show over the weekend. I've informed your government of this failure to communicate on a number of occasions in this Legislature, in addition to the motion that was passed just last week.

Minister, you say that Peterson is still on the job. What is his response to this weekend's events? How can my constituents contact him for further advice? And why has he no longer been communicating with people in the area?

1520

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The main table of discussion is where the negotiations are taking place now, because the federal government has a presence there, as we've always wanted to have. We're very happy that the federal government is there with the province. As you know, we have the liaison group. Dave Levac works with that group in the community, keeping the broader community informed of our progress.

Just to say that, as the Premier did, we are very concerned about what happened Friday. Everything changed on Friday. We do not accept that lawlessness and intimidation that we saw Friday, and you've heard the very strong language from the Premier of this province in regard to that.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a question for the Minister of the Environment. Down in Pelham, folks are concerned, angry and afraid about a growing mountain of paper fibre biosolids, paper sludge, down on Church Street. You know about paper sludge. It contains significant concentrations of acrylamide polymer, a known animal carcinogen, as well as total petroleum hydrocarbons, along with other contaminants. Despite the implications for human health and the environment that were outlined, in fact, by your expert panel, you continue to allow paper sludge to be dumped anywhere, any time, with no policing, no monitoring requirements and no regulatory oversight.

Minister, will you intervene immediately to stop the dumping of paper sludge in Pelham and immediately require the hydrogeological monitoring of the dumpsite that your own expert panel recommended over a year and a half ago?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I thank my friend opposite for the question. It has been brought to my attention that the local residents in Pelham are concerned about these issues, and these issues were raised at the town of Pelham council meeting on June 5, just last week.

Let me be clear to the people of this community that our government favours taking a science-based approach to the assessment of the material and a precautionary approach. The ministry regularly inspects sites where the material is being placed, and at the ministry's urging, groundwater monitoring wells are being installed on

some of the sites where the proximity of water is evident, and any odour or dust problems are promptly being required to be responded to. I think it's really important for the people of Pelham to know that the ministry is watching this circumstance very closely and will be there to require that these steps be taken.

Mr. Kormos: Minister, it's a frightening observation to make. The member for Erie-Lincoln and I were there on the weekend. The trucks continue to bring this sludge into this site adjacent to the Welland River and other waterways, adjacent to residential and very important farming properties.

Your own expert panel told you that there has to be not only hydrogeological monitoring but a legal framework within which the dumping of this dangerous sludge can be policed and controlled. It's being dumped willy-nilly on property in Pelham, and in fact across the province of Ontario.

Eighteen months after this report from your expert panel, you've done nothing. The people in Pelham don't want you to watch; they want you to act. They need your protection against a potentially toxic site and against the poisoning of their waterways, their groundwater and their land. When are you going to act on this and do something positive and concrete; do your job?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I think it's important for the people of the community to understand what the expert panel did say. The government's actions are exactly consistent with what the expert panel said. They said to take a science-based approach, and they said that we did not need to ban the material but we had to take precautions. We had to put measures in place to make sure that the environment and human health were protected. The ministry has tested it for 90 chemicals and bacteria, and the tests did not indicate that there were significant effects on the environment and human health. What they did have concerns about was the groundwater, and that's exactly the issues that I've mentioned the ministry is taking. Monitoring wells are being put in place and odour and dust problems are being forced to be mitigated promptly.

PETERBOROUGH REGIONAL HEALTH CENTRE

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Peterborough residents are looking forward to their new state-of-the-art hospital that's scheduled to open in 2008. In preparation for this 500-bed capacity, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre is looking to increase the number of beds in its current facility. Last week, you came to Peterborough to make an announcement to acknowledge the hospital's future ambitions. Minister, could you please explain what the announcement means to the hospital's capability to handle their increased patient volumes and move individuals out of the emergency department?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It was with great pleasure that I had the opportunity to be in Peterborough at sunrise last

Thursday morning alongside the honourable member to witness the tremendous development and emergence of a long overdue new hospital in Peterborough. I credit the honourable member for his excellent efforts there.

I was pleased to be able to announce a total of \$7.8 million in additional base funding for the Peterborough regional hospital: \$3.9 million, which we've already flowed, that will allow the development of 15 additional beds; and a further \$3.9 million, which will come into effect on April 1 of next year, for a further 15 beds. This ramp-up towards new construction of the hospital is designed, of course, to make sure that as the new hospital comes to life, it's providing services immediately, particularly to make sure that the residents of Peterborough have all of the appropriate care that they require and deserve. I credit the honourable member that we were able to make that important announcement.

Mr. Leal: I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank the staff of the Peterborough Regional Health Centre for the great work they're doing.

This announcement proves our government is not only listening to local concerns, but we're also taking decisive action. Wendy Fucile, vice-president and chief of nursing at PRHC, says that these new beds will mean shorter wait times in the emergency department and will solve a problem that's been outstanding since 1998, leading to more jobs, improved working conditions for staff and better patient care.

Minister, what other great investments have you made at Peterborough Regional to improve health care access in our great community?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The Peterborough community is one that we're very proud of, not just because we've delivered a long overdue hospital but also as a result of the family health teams—five different teams that are coming to life in Peterborough. Incredibly, though they're not fully evolved yet, already 3,234 residents of Peterborough, not long ago considered orphan patients, can now call the family health team home from the standpoint of that support.

In addition, our \$1.2-million investment in wait times has resulted in a 28-day drop in waits for hip and knee; a 20-day drop in waits for MRI exams; a 41-day drop in waits for cataract surgeries; and, incredibly, as a result of the high performance of the Peterborough hospital, wait times for cancer surgery have been reduced by 50%—they've been cut in half—further evidence of the progress that's being made to deliver care to the great people of Peterborough and the county.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): To the Premier: The events in Caledonia are not only of great concern to the residents of that community but, increasingly, to people across the province. Your occasional insistence that all is well is not great comfort to those who are seeing news reports and who still don't see a resolution. The key is communication for people across the province. They

need to know what is happening; they need to know that the issue is being managed.

Will you agree to implement daily briefings so that the people of Ontario will fully understand what the facts of the matter are; so that they know what the government is doing; so that the rumours don't persist; so that everyone has a full understanding of what the issues are? Would you agree to implement daily briefings so that we know what the facts are?

Interjection.

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think the honourable member should not be accusing a member of spreading rumours. That is unparliamentary and it's outside of the proper decorum of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Premier.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I'm sure the member is aware, as I've stated in this House many times, that there are several avenues of communication that have been developed. The latest has been a liaison working group in the community that is made up of municipal officials, business officials and other community representatives, where there are daily briefings by government officials. Of course, we are always available and, through your questioning on it every day, we are giving you updates all the time on the situation there. We think that is very important for the community, and we try to do that for all sides so that all sides know what is going on at all times.

Mr. Klees: I thank the minister for his response. What I'm trying to do is be helpful here. Coming to this place and simply getting briefed as members of the Legislature is one thing. What I think would be very helpful is if in fact there were a structured briefing that members of the public could rely on, that the media could rely on, to ensure that the kind of rumour-accusations that are being made here have no basis, that in fact all of us across the province have factual information and know that this issue is being managed. Why would you not agree to a five-minute or a 10-minute briefing on a daily basis until this matter is resolved? I just believe that would be a responsible way for you to handle this issue.

1530

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I would say to the member that I will take his suggestion as being one in good faith. We are always looking for ways to try to make sure that the general public has information. As you know, some of these other avenues we've done with the website, with the 1-800 number, the daily briefings with the liaison committee—we have individual calls from the people in government to the liaison committee also, over and above the daily briefing. We look at every avenue we can, so we will look at all suggestions. We want to make sure that we always improve our communications on this issue.

YOUNG OFFENDER FACILITY

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): A question to the Premier: Kennedy House has a history of problems that your government has long been aware of. The government failed to act on the operational review and the problems identified there that were revealed in 2003. Now there's a strike on your watch, the third labour dispute at Kennedy House in five years. You talk a big game about investing in youth justice and being tough on gun crimes and gangs, yet you sit back and do nothing to fix the problems at a facility that has housed, and where you obviously intend to continue to house, some of our province's most dangerous young offenders. What are you going to do in terms of addressing these issues and ensuring that these labour disputes are resolved promptly?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister for Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): The member has raised this issue previously in the House. At that time, I shared with him the fact that the children who have been in custody at Kennedy House have been located elsewhere. So they are where they need to be.

Kennedy House is a transfer payment agency, paid by this government, and has responsibility for working this out with their staff and their union. Quite frankly, I don't see any reason why we should intervene in this matter.

If, at the end of the fiscal year, it proves to be the case that our funding should be reviewed, we will do so. But in the meantime, the children whom they are supposed to be caring for in custody have been relocated.

Mr. Kormos: Minister, these are children who have been convicted of murder, robbery, rape, other sexual assaults. This is the 11th week of a strike. It's the third strike in five years. Kennedy House has a history of labour relations that is poor, to say the least. It's not doing the job you're paying it to do. Why would you maintain a relationship with it? Why have you not responded to the concerns raised in the review? The executive director was told to treat the Ajax youth centre as an immediate priority and create a plan with an aim to avoid future problems. That wasn't done. You've been in power three years and you've made all sorts of splashy announcements. Why won't you insist and ensure that the recommendations of the operational review be complied with, that Kennedy House maintain a relationship with its staff that allows it to accommodate these dangerous young offenders or cut them loose and terminate your relationship with them?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Again, I'll repeat that this dispute is between Kennedy House, the employer, and their staff. This is a transfer payment agent organization, and if they don't deliver the services, they will not be compensated for services they don't deliver. My priority is the care of the kids who are being held in custody, and they are not at Kennedy House right now; they have been

relocated. It's up to Kennedy House and the union representing their employees to work out their dispute.

I have personally visited Kennedy House in Ajax. It's a beautiful facility. At that time, everyone was there, working together. I was actually quite impressed by what I saw. These kinds of disputes arise from time to time, and it's entirely up to employers and their union representatives to work these out. Government should not be intervening in everything. It's up to the employers and the union representatives to work these things out.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is to the Minister of Finance. I'm wondering if the minister could clear up some confusion that seems to exist here in the Legislature. Late last week, the leader of the third party rose in his place and called on the creation of a job protection commissioner in the province of Ontario, yet the very next day StatsCan released its May job numbers and we saw media report after media report about the record job creation that has taken place here in Ontario, as well as the booming economy. So I wonder if the minister could clear up some of the confusion that seems to exist on either side of this House and give us an update on the state of Ontario's economy.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I think what the people of Ontario can really celebrate is how well the Ontario economy has performed, particularly over the past three years. That is a tribute to the hard-working men and women of this province and those people who manage businesses and own businesses. In the month of May, some 34,000 new jobs were created in the province. What's extraordinary is that since October 2003, almost 290,000 new jobs have been created. What is extraordinary is that almost 99% of those new jobs are full-time jobs. That's a tribute to the strength of our economy.

Mr. Milloy: I thank the minister for this update. I know that my area of Waterloo region has benefited from the booming economy, especially in the high-tech sector.

That being said, there is an unfortunate reality that a high Canadian dollar as well as rising oil prices have had an impact on the economy, and we have seen some job losses, not just here in Ontario but across North America. I'm wondering if the minister can explain what the government is doing to assist those individuals who have experienced job losses.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I appreciate the member's question. Obviously, the most important thing that we can do is to continue what we're doing to build a stronger economy. What my colleague Minister Cordiano has done in the automotive industry with our investments, realizing some \$7 billion in new automotive capacity in the province, what the Premier himself has done in the area of research and development, these kinds of strategic investments build a strong economy and ensure that when there is job loss, when some industries are getting smaller,

other industries are there to take up those new working opportunities.

But my colleague is right. Now and again, the government needs to move in. We have a program—I just want to make sure I get the name of it right—the adjustment advisory program, delivered through my colleague the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. And we're there, even before jobs are lost, to make sure that if jobs are to be lost, we are there to help.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Premier. Premier, your absence has been widely noticed at Caledonia, and so has the absence of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services as well as the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs. On the other hand, however, our leader has been there a number of times. In spite of the fact that just last week in the House your Minister of Community Safety said that the Leader of the Opposition hasn't spoken to any police officers, nothing could be further from the truth. Premier, when can the good folks at Caledonia expect you to visit the community?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Again, I'm very confident that we have a number of channels of communication open with the community. I'm confident that we are doing everything we can, to this point in time, to bring about a peaceful resolution, and we will keep those channels open.

1540

Mr. Dunlop: I guess you're not going to the community.

The supplementary is for the Premier as well. The OPP have been present for over 100 days at Caledonia, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As one officer told me just yesterday, they are strung out and they are very tired. They tell me that they feel like meat in a sandwich. The OPP is using up very valuable resources at Caledonia—millions of dollars per month. That's after the cuts of \$31.3 million to the field and traffic division this year.

As you say, you're not going to visit Caledonia and you don't plan to. Can you tell me, Premier, what are you doing to support the Ontario Provincial Police at Caledonia?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: First of all, let me take this opportunity to thank the Ontario Provincial Police for all the work they've been doing at Caledonia. This is obviously a very challenging circumstance which they've been called upon to address. I think they've shown a remarkable aptitude in managing this.

If there are additional resources required, if there are additional efforts that we as the government can make, then of course we are very much open to representations made by the Ontario Provincial Police.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Hamilton doesn't want Toronto's sewage sludge and it doesn't want the pollution from Liberty Energy's proposed sewage sludge incinerator. Dr. David Pengelly, a professor of medicine at McMaster University, calls the emission of nitrogen oxides in Hamilton "an urgent matter of public health concern," especially given that Liberty Energy's own consultants admit the Hamilton airshed "has shown signs of reaching its capacity."

My question is this: Individuals and organizations, including the city of Hamilton, want an individual environmental assessment of Liberty Energy's proposed energy-from-waste incinerator. Will you announce today an EA bump-up?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): First, let me deal with the issue of the city of Toronto's waste. To be clear—and I've answered this in this Legislature before—I expect the city of Toronto to find a location to manage that waste and to do so in a prudent fashion, and I'm not intervening in the steps they are taking with respect to doing that.

With respect to the folks in Hamilton, we are absolutely committed to giving the local residents an opportunity to comment as the environmental process that is underway is taking place. Environmental assessments bring to the forefront those questions and concerns, and science and opinions. That's the process that is underway right now. We are in a timeframe when the director is in possession of information. We look forward to seeing this matter proceed through its normal course.

Ms. Horwath: The sewage sludge incinerator is skating around the environmental assessment process by inefficiently producing a small amount of energy. Less than one fifth of the energy output from the incinerator is actually converted into electricity. Clearly, energy conservation and efficiency are foreign to the McGuinty government, but such inefficient energy production is one of the flaws requiring close scrutiny under a full EA.

Will you listen to the public health experts, the residents and the city of Hamilton and immediately direct Liberty Energy to begin an individual environmental assessment for their proposed incinerator?

Hon. Ms. Broten: To the people of Hamilton: You should be absolutely clear that we will examine all of the comments they put forward to ensure that their air is protected, that their environment is protected. That's the responsibility of the Ministry of the Environment. All of the comments will be examined and the director will either deny their request or recommend to me that there be an individual EA. It's important to have all the information before us as we make that decision. That's the process that is underway right now. We need to examine those issues, take the science, bring that science forward, because that's what the people of the community expect. They expect us to look at this issue from a scientific analysis. That's what I'm committed to doing here in Hamilton and those are the steps we're going to take.

PETITIONS

HIGHWAY 26

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

“Whereas the redevelopment of Highway 26 was approved by MPP Jim Wilson and the previous PC government in 1999; and

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

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

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

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

Obviously, I agree with this petition and I’ve signed it.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to establishing measures that will ensure a fair and inclusive Ontario for newcomers; and

“Whereas these measures will ensure that the 34 regulatory professions in Ontario have admissions and application practices that are fair, transparent and clear; and

“Whereas these measures will include the establishment of a fairness commissioner, and an access centre for internationally trained individuals; and

“Whereas through providing a fair and equitable system, newcomers will be able to apply their global experience, which will not only be beneficial to their long-term career goals, but also to the Ontario economy as a whole;

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

“That all members of the House support the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and work to ensure its prompt passage in the Ontario Legislature.”

I agree with the petition, and I also put my signature on it.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SERVICES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here signed by a great number of my constituents, all the way from the people in the south in Tillsonburg and to the north end in Tavistock.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas over one million Ontarians of all ages suffer from communication disorders relating to speech, language and/or hearing; and

“Whereas there is a growing need for awareness of the profound developmental, economic and social consequences that communication disorders have on people and their families; and

“Whereas persons with communication problems require access to the professional services of audiologists and speech-language pathologists who provide treatments to improve and enhance quality of life; and

“Whereas effective treatment of communication disorders benefits all of society by allowing otherwise disadvantaged persons to achieve their academic and vocational potentials; and

“Whereas investments in treatments for communication disorders pay economic dividends in reduced reliance on other social services;

“We, the undersigned, in conjunction with the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to proclaim the month of May as Better Speech, Language and Hearing Month.”

I affix my signature and give it to my good friend from Oxford county, Greg, to take up to the table, and I’ll sign it as I agree with the petition.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I’m pleased to present a petition from over 100 CAW Local 1959 miners in Windsor urging the passage of my Bill 45, the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act. The petition reads as follows:

“Whereas workplace harassment is linked to the murders of women in Ontario; and

“Whereas harassment needs to be defined as a violation of the Occupational Health and Safety Act so that it is dealt with as quickly and seriously by employers as other health and safety issues; and

“Whereas employers should have a legal obligation to deal with harassment; and

“Whereas harassment poisons the workplace, takes many forms—sexual and sexist, verbal, physical, intimidation and racist—and should not be tolerated; and

“Whereas harassment in any form harms a victim’s physical and mental health, esteem and productivity, and contributes to trauma and stress on the job; and

“Whereas Bill 45 would make it the law to protect workers from workplace harassment by giving workers the right to refuse to work after harassment has occurred, require an investigation of allegations of workplace-related harassment and oblige employers to take steps to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related harassment;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to treat workplace harassment as a serious health and safety issue by passing MPP Andrea Horwath’s Bill 45, which would bring workplace

harassment under the scope of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.”

I have affixed my signature to the petition and present it today.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have a petition today for newcomers who want to get a job in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to establishing measures that will ensure a fair and inclusive Ontario for newcomers; and

“Whereas these measures will ensure that the 34 regulated professions in Ontario have admissions and application practices that are fair, transparent and clear; and

“Whereas these measures will include the establishment of a fairness commissioner, and an access centre for internationally trained individuals; and

“Whereas through providing a fair and equitable system, newcomers will be able to apply their global experience, which will not only be beneficial to their long-term career goals, but also to the Ontario economy as a whole;

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

“That all members of the House support the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and work to ensure its prompt passage in the Ontario Legislature.”

I agree with this and will affix my name to it.

1550

MOTORCYCLE INSURANCE

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I have a petition, and I’m hoping Madeleine Ghesquiere, the page from the town of Simcoe, will deliver this to the Clerk for me. It’s titled “Fix Motorcycle Insurance.

“Whereas responsible motorcyclists are being hit with huge increases in insurance or are being denied coverage; and

“Whereas motorcycle insurance has increased over 40% in the past two years; and

“Whereas sales of motorcycles in Ontario have dropped over 7%; and

“Whereas many businesses and individuals in the motorcycle industry are suffering because of the loss of sales and decreased employment that high insurance rates are causing;

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

“That the Dalton McGuinty government take steps to make motorcycle insurance more affordable and ensure that motorcyclists are treated fairly and equitably by the insurance industry.”

I support these motorcyclists and affix my signature to this petition.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to establishing measures that will ensure a fair and inclusive Ontario for newcomers; and

“Whereas these measures will ensure that the 34 regulated professions in Ontario have admissions and application practices that are fair, transparent and clear; and

“Whereas these measures will include the establishment of a fairness commissioner, and an access centre for internationally trained individuals; and

“Whereas through providing a fair and equitable system, newcomers will be able to apply their global experience, which will, not only be beneficial to their long-term career goals but also to the Ontario economy as a whole;

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

“That all members of the House support the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and work to ensure its prompt passage in the Ontario Legislature.”

I support it and I’ll sign it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to do with long-term care. It reads:

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

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario—literally hundreds of signatures gathered at the Aurora street sale—and it reads as follows:

“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'm pleased to apply my own signature, and I do trust that the Legislature will proceed with third reading for this bill.

ONTARIO SPCA

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the services provided by the Ontario SPCA, Lennox and Addington branch, is being forced due to budget constraints to close its doors; and

"Whereas the services provided by the Ontario SPCA, Lennox and Addington branch, to our community include animal cruelty investigations; 24-hour emergency rescue of injured animals; acceptance of abandoned animals; acceptance of owned animals, where people can no longer care for their pets; adoption of pets; family violence assistance program, allowing women entering a shelter to temporarily house their pets with the Ontario SPCA; humane education to local schools and community groups; and

"Whereas none of these services are provided by any other agency in the county and the municipal dog pound is small and not able to accept cats or other small animals; and

"Whereas investigation services will fall to the Ontario Provincial Police and they do not have the resources or training to fulfill this role and they are already overworked; and

"Whereas the Northumberland and Quinte humane societies are also facing financial challenges and will not be able to accept the additional animals;

"Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario act now to help prevent the closure of this facility and others across Ontario by ensuring that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services immediately implement the recommendations made in the February 2005 report of Grant Thornton, which called for interim funding to facilitate the operations of the Ontario SPCA until a long-term strategy is developed for animal welfare in Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign my name to that and to present it to Clarence to present to the table.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have a petition signed by 300 residents of the city of Burlington. I want to thank Lorri Interisano, who works at Halton

Child and Youth Services, for initiating this and sharing it with me. I'd now like to read the petition:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas one in five kids age three to 17 has a mental health issue;

"Whereas suicide is the leading cause of non-accidental deaths in 10- to 19-year-olds;

"Whereas early identification and treatment make the difference in children's mental health;

"Whereas the children's mental health system supports and strengthens a sustainable system of mental health services for children, youth and their families;

"Whereas last year treatment for thousands of children was disrupted and compromised because children's mental health agencies in Ontario lost hundreds of full-time equivalent "positions due to" provincial funding cutbacks;

"Whereas a one-time injection of 3% to base budgets, though appreciated after 12 years of no increases, is simply not adequate to enable agencies to maintain existing staff or services;

"Whereas it is important that the children in treatment be able to create and sustain trusting relationships with their child and youth workers, social workers, psychologist and other treatment team members;

"Whereas any reform efforts will fail unless there is more funding for existing core services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in providing secure and further funding to improve mental health services for all children in the province of Ontario."

This has my signature of full support.

SPRING BEAR HUNT

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I want to present petitions brought to me by the Haliburton Highlands Outdoor Association president, Keith Hodgson.

"To the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources:

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources' own data shows a clear and undeniable connection between the termination of the spring bear hunt and the increase in nuisance bears; and

"Whereas there has been an increase of almost 500% in the number of calls to the Ministry of Natural Resources about nuisance bears but no change in calls in Manitoba, where the spring hunt continues; and

"Whereas at least five people have been attacked by bears in 2005, and since 1978, bears have killed seven people in Ontario, six in provincial parks where hunting is not allowed, and all fatalities have occurred where there is little or no hunting pressure; and

"Whereas adult male bears are cannibals and highly aggressive; there are thousands more adult male bears in the population since the hunt was terminated and thousands more bear cubs are being orphaned or killed; un-

precedented numbers of nuisance bears are being trapped, relocated or killed, but the problem persists; and

“Whereas the increase of nuisance bears since the spring bear hunt was cancelled has become a serious threat to public safety, and increasing interaction with humans from higher bear densities is likely to result in more bear attacks on humans; and

“Whereas, during a debate in the Legislative Assembly on November 17, 2005, members of all three official parties supported a return of the spring bear hunt;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we petition the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources:

“In the interests of public safety and scientific wildlife management, the government should immediately return a spring bear hunt to Ontario.”

This is signed by almost 800 people from my riding.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in his office.

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The following is the title of the bill to which His Honour did assent:

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 / Loi révisant les lois de 1997 Nos 1 et 2 sur la cité de Toronto, modifiant certaines lois d'intérêt public en ce qui concerne les pouvoirs municipaux et abrogeant certaines lois d'intérêt privé se rapportant à la cité de Toronto.

1600

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION STATUTE LAW

AMENDMENT ACT

(LEARNING TO AGE 18), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ÉDUCATION (APPRENTISSAGE JUSQU'À L'ÂGE DE 18 ANS)

Resuming the debated adjourned on May 31, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent et apportant des modifications complémentaires au Code de la route.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): First, I seek unanimous consent to stand down the lead speech of the NDP education critic.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Tabuns: This act before us is highly problematic. I hope over the next 20 minutes to explore why there are problems here, what the problems would manifest themselves as, and to ask the government to significantly reconsider the bill that they've put before the House, because I don't believe it will deal with the stated problems that the government has identified; I think it will create more problems. I think they need to go back, think this through more thoroughly, consult more widely and then bring a bill to this House that will deal with the issues they are concerned about.

First of all, on this idea of keeping students in school until the age of 18, no one would argue that the world is changing, that every country that wants to succeed in the world economy will have to have a better-educated, more literate and better-trained workforce. Frankly, beyond training people for the economy, the fact simply is that if you have a better-educated society, you have a society that can engage in political discourse at a higher level, a society that has the potential to be more humane, a society that is able to better direct itself. I don't have confidence, though, that the bill before us—with the requirement of changing the school leaving age to 18, with the requirement that those who don't stay in school until they are 18 will not be able to get a driver's licence—will address those questions in the way they need to be addressed.

I think the first question the government should have asked, and that I'm going to put forward here, is, what keeps young people learning and what undermines their ability to learn? What leads students to stay? Frankly, if you have students who have a solid base at home, who have had the support from their parents, who have had the family stability to actually allow themselves to focus on school without being distracted by huge difficulties at home, those students have a better chance at succeeding. If, on the other hand, you have students who come from homes that are disruptive, constantly in a state of crisis, in a situation where the parents have difficulty holding things together, then those students are going to have tremendous difficulty applying themselves to lessons, thinking about the longer term and staying in school in a productive way. In this bill we are not, in any way, shape or form, addressing those issues. So those students who come from homes that are stressed, unstable and problematic are going to face huge problems if they leave, and, frankly, if they stay in school they will face substantial problems.

The reality is that although across the spectrum of earning you have people with low incomes who are able to pull together a household and make it secure, make it stable, low-income households tend to have a much more difficult time avoiding those stresses and tensions that

come with the inherent problems of not having a stable home, of not having a stable income, of not having an income that's adequate to the problems and the demands at hand. On the other hand, if you come from a household that's well off, then it's far more likely that your situation will allow you to have that stability.

What we have is a situation where students from poor families who are far more likely to face those home difficulties, and thus far more likely to face difficulties at school, will once again be hit for not staying in school and performing the way they are expected to perform. In practical terms then, this bill won't deal with the underlying problems that make it difficult for people to study and won't deal with the underlying problems that make it possible for them to stay in school and apply themselves.

It's my opinion that the bill before us will not in fact deal with the problems that we are trying to deal with. Simply telling students, simply telling young people, that they can't get their driver's licence unless they stay in school, in my opinion, is not going to be effective. What will the fallout be from the implementation of this bill?

First of all, in rural areas I would expect that we will see far greater burdens thrown on those young people because, as we all know, if you're living on the outskirts of Timmins or Sudbury as opposed to, say, suburban Toronto, your ability to access public transit is zero. We don't have public transit worthy of the name, in fact just simply existing, in most rural areas of Ontario. So poor rural students will be hit much more heavily here than urban students. That is going to be a significant problem. How will they deal with this? How will they deal with the fact that they find it difficult to get around? I would expect that many of them will simply drive their cars without a licence. They leave school at 16, they find a job somewhere, they have to drive to get there and they are going to drive.

Similarly, in urban situations you'll have a reality that there will be students who can drop out because they know they have access to transit. In many instances they can walk to places they need to get to because the city is far more compact, or they too will drive illegally. In fact, this bill opens the door to many young people, already in difficult circumstances, quitting because the prerequisites to allow them to learn, to participate in the educational system—because they're locked out of that, because they are locked out of their driver's licence—simply breaking the law. So a difficulty they already had puts them at risk of having a much greater difficulty, a substantially greater difficulty.

I don't think that those who drafted this legislation would want that to happen. Frankly, I think this government should reconsider what it has put before this House and say, "Yes, this is a significant problem. This is an unintended outcome. We don't think we should proceed. We think we have to substantially amend this bill so that we don't put young people at far greater risk of being in violation of the law." That is one of the more significant problems with this bill.

But there are questions as well about the actual implementation of these punitive measures, because you can't just state something. Well, maybe you can, but then you have a bill that just sits on the shelf, gathering dust, and is of no consequence. If you do that, you bring the law into disrepute but you're going to have difficulty getting people to actually enforce this law. Think about it. School principals or their designates are supposed to determine whether or not someone is still learning until age 18.

What's the reality there? Are these principals going to be the ones who will be maintaining all of these records? Are teachers going out and checking on this alternative education element that is made real here in this legislation? Let's say that a young person says to their principal, "Well, yes, I'm not in your school, but I'm working with community group X. I'm there 30 hours a week and I'm learning." Who is going to go out and do the quality control on this? Who is going to say, "Yes, they're actually learning; yes, they're doing enough to qualify themselves to get a driver's licence"?

Teachers, when you talk to them, already work to their limits. Principals already have tons on their plates. If you look at attendance counsellors, many school boards have eliminated attendance counsellors. So a question to be asked to those who drafted the legislation and to the government that wants this legislation to go through is how exactly are we going to make the resources come into existence so we can determine whether or not students are doing what they say they're doing when they're not in a school, but taking advantage of the other section of the bill that says they can have an alternative learning experience?

1610

If this bill was clear about entirely in whose hands these responsibilities were laid, that would be one thing, but in fact the bill waffles between giving an option to the Ministry of Transportation to determine, or the principals or the schools. Perhaps this can all be combined into some new mechanism of enforcement. But I don't see why on earth the Ministry of Transportation should be trying to determine whether or not a 17-year-old is in school or whether or not a 17-year-old is participating in an alternative educational experience—whatever that is—that will allow them to qualify for a driver's licence. I think there are practical matters here in terms of enforcing this bill that have not been considered by the drafters and by the government bringing this forward.

The interesting element in this bill, aside from the problems I've outlined, is that the bill punishes those who don't yet have a driver's licence. When I was 16, I was enrolled in a CAA course in Hamilton to get my driver's licence, and by the time I was 16½, I had my driver's licence. Whether that was a wise thing or not, I won't comment further, but nonetheless, I had one. Many students can do that. Many young people can do that and then immediately resign from school. They've done what they had to do. They got that driver's licence, they stayed

in long enough to ensure there were no impediments and then they got on with life. This bill does not set up enforcement against those who already have their driver's licence. So if they're really slow at getting it, they're in trouble. If they plan, strategize, then this bill to keep them in school, this enforcement or this penalty, is of no consequence.

If school boards, principals, the Ministry of Transportation decide, "Yes, we have to enforce this," then you start applying resources to a solution that in fact doesn't deal with the base problems. You have a diversion of resources—which could be used to give students more support in school—to the enforcement of a penalty that I'm sure doesn't make sense to most students and to most parents. We need to focus on the positive aspects of keeping people in school. We need to focus on making sure they have the support so that they will want to stay in school, instead of diverting our resources to these kinds of penalties—not a wise use of resources, not a wise way to deal with a profound social problem.

What I find extraordinary is that this is being brought forward without any great public outcry for this as a solution. People who go to classrooms can see very quickly—and I'm talking about teachers for the most part—where their problems arise. They aren't calling out for this. The teachers in this province are not calling out for this. I imagine it's an approach, a solution, that looks good in a leaflet but does not look good in practice.

Having addressed what I think is a fruitless approach, a worthless approach to keeping people in school, I want to talk about the section of the bill that talks about equivalent learning. In the act, people are allowed to engage in alternative learning opportunities, equivalent learning. The regulations that will be promulgated by the government after this act is adopted, accepted, in place, will define acceptable learning locations and will be further refined by board policies and guidelines. So from our hands it travels quite a distance until you get the actual definition.

We've seen some interesting examples already of government sliding standards when it comes to apprenticeship funding. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities issues an apprenticeship training tax credit, nominally for employers who train employees. Last year—it was a good year for this sort of stuff—we learned that Dell computers had received credit for staff in their Ottawa call centres. I know we all want to embrace the idea of people apprenticing in call centres. That's the future, that's where our young pages will go. They too will go on to call centres in future years.

To quote the Ottawa Citizen, "The province has generously included IT call centre workers in the apprenticeship plan, subsidizing their wages by allowing Dell to collect a tax credit of \$5,000 per employee for three years. The actual training period for the call centre workers is two to three weeks, Dell says."

That's very pricey tuition for two or three weeks. That's awfully pricey tuition for two or three weeks. When our critic asked about this, our critic was told that

they were being trained in the skilled trade of helpdesk analyst. Well, I don't think that's where we should be putting public money. I don't think that we should be approaching or developing a situation where McDonald's or Burger King can be coming to school boards and saying, "We want to train people in burgerology. We want them to get an equivalent-to-high-school certificate. We want a subsidy to train them to deliver fast food." I don't think that what's before us is going to deal with the problems that we have with young people who need to acquire skills, and I don't think it's going to help develop our economy and develop our society the way they have to be developed.

The last point I want to make is around the whole question of unmotivated students. Last December, the Toronto Star wrote about the whole question of unmotivated students and how this bill will affect them. They noted the kinds of problems that teachers will have dealing with large numbers of unmotivated students. I'm not talking about those who are staying there because they can't get their driver's licence; I'm talking about those who stay because that's the law, they don't want to have continued problems with their parents. They're going to stick around.

I've taught classes before. I was a part-time teacher at George Brown College. I have to say that most of those students were motivated because most were paying out of their own pocket. But I've also talked to my brother and brother-in-law, who are teachers, who have dealt with students in classes where large numbers of students were unmotivated. Frankly, it's entirely disruptive. If you don't deal with the fundamentals, if you don't deal with the social problems, if you don't deal with what are sometimes psychological problems, if you don't deal with the monetary problems that are at the root of many of the problems we have in school, then what you have is a teacher trying to deal with a classroom that is very difficult to manage, a teacher whose thinking and attention is focused on trying to keep in line a number of people who don't want to be there, who are disruptive, people whose approach is that of any person who is confined to a room they don't want to be in for an extended period of time they don't want to suffer through. This bill, if all of the other problems were dealt with, might be a useful bill, but as it is written, this bill will simply create problems, expand problems and in fact eventually cause this government to say, "You know what? We need another bill. We haven't dealt with the issues here. We're going to come back with something that will actually address the issues before us."

1620

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): Just following up on what the member for Toronto–Danforth was saying about unmotivated students, the point of this bill is that it's part of a much larger initiative on the part of the government. The legislation itself is not the whole program. The idea is that there is a whole structure of programs and extra resources. The issue of unmotivated

students, for example, will be partially addressed by having more adults in the system. There were 800-plus teachers put into the system—Student Success teachers—last year; there will be another 300 put in this year. What we know is that those adults in the system are the people who help students to connect with the programs they need. They are the mentors, they are the people who foster interest among students and help kids to figure out what their path is.

The other things that we're offering, like the high-skills major, like the dual credits, like the alternative equivalent learning situations, are the kinds of things the student success teachers will help the students find.

The driver's licence provisions in this legislation are not the core of the issue. That's simply a tool. What we're talking about is a culture shift. We're talking about a situation in this province where we know that it is in the best interests of every student to be in a learning environment—of every young person in this province 18 and under, and even 18 and over. I can't imagine a child in the province, even if they are working, who we wouldn't rather have also in a learning environment, and those learning environments need to be defined. The Student Success Commission that's been set up by the ministry will do that quality control and make sure that the equivalent learning situations are valuable. The legislation is just a part of that program.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to make some comments on Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning, and the speech by the member for Toronto–Danforth.

The member for Toronto–Danforth pointed out many of the practical problems with this bill. I think we would all agree that, in an ideal world, we would want to see students stay in school as long as possible, not just to get a high school diploma but to go on to college or an apprenticeship or post-secondary university. However, for many students that is just not practical. I was listening to some students on a CBC program when this was first introduced, students who had dropped out of high school but then had real-world experience, went back and finished off their high school diploma, and had gone on and done well. The students were asked whether this would assist them and their response was no, they just weren't ready to learn. They needed some real-world experience for their particular circumstance, and every circumstance is different. So as the member for Toronto–Danforth pointed out, there are some real problems with this.

In fact, this could be punitive, particularly for students in rural and northern Ontario, who absolutely need a driver's licence if they aren't in school and they're trying to get a job to get the sort of experience that might be necessary for them to realize how important it is to stay in school, that maybe having a job at 17 isn't what they really want to do and that going back to school and furthering their education will give them more opportunities in life.

This bill, although perhaps well meaning, is just not practical and may do more harm than good, as was the case with Bill 78, the “give control to the college of teachers and the teachers' unions” bill.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): I've been listening to the member from Toronto–Danforth for the last 20 minutes. When he was talking and criticizing the bill, I didn't hear from him what he thinks is the best alternative to the bill and to the strategy of our government. It's very important to assist the students in our province to continue going to school up to the age of 18. We think it's very important to assist education in this province.

Also, I heard him talking about how the McGuinty government has no strategy to absorb all the students, and the schools don't have the mechanism. As a matter of fact, we listened a lot to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities about planning for the future, to put in a mechanism to absorb all the students who for some reason are not able to continue going to school by creating some kind of program, whether in community centres or union facilities or a college or a high school, if that's possible. So all these issues have been raised and debated for a long time in our government between the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Education. Also, to create a strategy to enable the students in Ontario to learn some kind of profession and give them the ability, when they go out in life, to find a job, to help our economy and to help themselves to raise enough money to live comfortably in this time.

I think the member from Toronto–Danforth didn't read the bill very well. I didn't hear from him what his alternative was. As a matter of fact, when we talk about something bad, we have to offer another alternative, but I didn't hear anything from him to give us some kind of idea or plan as to how we can fix the bill.

I'm very proud of our government to have such a bill to help our students to live for the future.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to be able to make a few comments on the member from Toronto–Danforth's comments a few moments ago. I have to tell you, I've listened to a few comments over the last few months on this Bill 52. Certainly, although they make it sound as though the driver's licence portion of this bill is not important, the reality is that that is the main thing I'm hearing back from my constituents. I think it's a form of discrimination. How can you possibly hold over some young person's head the fact that they couldn't have a driver's licence? What are you going to do next? Take away a fishing licence if they want one, or a hunting licence? Is that next? Why would you possibly think of something so pathetic and so mean-spirited as holding back someone's driver's licence because they may not be able to continue in school?

There are parts of the bill that may not be too bad at times, but I can tell you, that part would stop me from ever supporting the bill—the fact that they discriminate against young people, people who may not be able to

learn as fast but who can pass a driver's test. They can get a job using their skills to drive at some point. To take that away I think is nothing more than a form of discrimination. I'm very disappointed that any government would include that in a piece of legislation. That would hurt young people from getting a job. The job may not be the highest-paying job in the world, but it is a job, if they have the skills to possess a driver's licence.

Again, I thank him for his comments. I congratulate him on them. As far as the section on the driver's licensing, it's just pathetic and I'm disappointed that the government would even dream of humiliating young people that way.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Toronto—Danforth, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tabuns: I appreciate the comments from those members who stood up, from Don Valley West, Parry Sound—Muskoka, London—Fanshawe and Simcoe North.

I want to speak first to the comments from the member for Don Valley West. It's useful for me to hear that you see this in the context of a larger program. I have to say to you that when I talk to the trustees in the city of Toronto, who are wrestling with a very large shortfall in their budgets, who are telling me that schools and parent-child centres are going to be closed—and I had a meeting with a large number of parents just last Friday on my constituency day saying that their parent-child centre was closing—it doesn't say to me that there are going to be more resources. It says to me that things are tighter. If we're going to talk about a larger program which will address these fundamental issues, then you have to have money on the table which will do it. So I look forward to hearing about the budget allocations that in fact will make it real to have extra support, real support, not just punitive measures.

The member from London—Fanshawe talked about alternatives. I think that's the right question. In fact, I say to the member, if this government persists in not honouring its commitments to end the clawback of the federal child benefit; if it doesn't in fact spend on child care the way it said it would in the last election; if it doesn't deal with the whole question of keeping Ontario Works and ODSP incomes rising, rather than simply stagnating given inflation—if you don't deal with those social problems, all of this stuff is just for show. Deal with the social problems, and then the other problems can be dealt with.

1630

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I have to say that it's a real honour for me to rise today in the House to speak about Bill 52, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act (Learning to Age 18), 2006. This legislation is something that will make a real difference for students in this province, now and in the future. I can't think of anything we do that is more important than providing education for our students. As I think people here know, this legislation would, if passed, give school boards the power to provide learning opportunities to their students by partnering up with community groups,

the business community, training centres, colleges, universities and other organizations that provide programming for young people.

Today is a very appropriate day to speak about an education bill, because today, for the third time in this government's mandate, we've announced that we're boosting our investment in this province's publicly funded schools. It's also an opportunity to reflect a little bit about what a difference a couple of years makes. I hear constantly from people in my constituency in London about a new spirit in our schools. I hear from educators, I hear from students, I hear from parents that there's a new spirit of optimism, of co-operation in our schools now, that there's a new and productive relationship between our teaching professionals and our government. I wholeheartedly think that Bill 52 reflects that new spirit of co-operation. It also reflects our commitment to our children—that's our focus, our children—and we are especially concerned about children who are at risk.

This government values the work of our teachers, our principals, our administrators and our students. We recognize the value of our public school system and the potential it has to completely change a child's life. We're putting our money where our mouth is, both literally and figuratively: \$50 million more for special-needs students; \$23 million for professional development programs; \$20 million from our 2006 budget was devoted to improving literacy and math levels, French programs, professional development for staff, parent engagement, and safe and healthy schools. I know from my work in community and social services how very, very important that strong education—the literacy, the commitment to becoming a productive member of society—is. It starts in our schools; we have to make the investments there. Overall, each student in this province is receiving almost \$1,600 more per year than they did under the previous government. That's a record we can all be very, very proud of.

The spin-off benefits of investing in our kids are enormous, and the long-term payoffs of ensuring that we work extra hard had to accommodate at-risk youth are innumerable. We're especially concerned, and this bill reflects that, about students who are having a hard time getting through the system as it currently exists. That's why we've invested in special-needs programs and apprenticeships at unprecedented levels.

Bill 52 is a continuation of these values. Simply put, we are going to do everything in our power to ensure that all Ontario students have a high school diploma or its equivalent. I'm sure the impacts of this bill will be just as powerful as the massive investments we are making in education from this year's budget.

We're ensuring that our students stay on track, that our students stay in traditional schools or continue learning in other settings. We believe in these kids. We know what they can do, what they're capable of, if we give them the opportunities and the support to achieve their full potential. That's what this is about. We believe in our students. We know they can succeed. We have to give them what they need to succeed.

This is an ambitious bill. Make no mistake about it. Some people will argue that it is too ambitious. But in a time when we have proven our commitment to education—we've proven that we can deliver smaller class sizes; we've proven we can deliver higher test scores—our commitment is firm on this as well. We are capable of implementing this bill. It will make a huge difference to students whom previous governments had given up on.

I share our Premier's and our new education minister's commitment to all the students. As I say, if they can't complete their high school diploma in the classroom the way most students can do, if that's not working for them, it allows them to continue to learn until they're 18 or until they graduate. It offers very creative programs, creative partnerships. It's a very, very good bill for our students. These programs are an excellent outlet for teens who are artistically inclined or who have skills outside the academic centre to realize their full potential. It allows them to build their self-confidence. We know that self-confidence is one of the greatest of great tools we can give a child, fostering their sense of pride in what they do. Eventually, this bill will guide them to a career path that will be fulfilling, rewarding and productive.

This bill is part of our overall plan for student success. We promised it in our campaign in 2003 and we are delivering it now. It is part of a comprehensive, \$1.3-billion plan. It's not everything contained in this bill, as has been said earlier. This bill has a very specific goal. It's all about helping students to achieve their potential. It is ambitious but it is essential to our future prosperity. It is a vital part of our student strategy.

There was a lot of planning and rebuilding necessary before we could move forward on this one. Our schools had fallen into a sorry state after many years of damage done to them. The morale was low. Buildings were broken and leaking. Students were stuck in portables. The art, music and technology departments had virtually disappeared because the previous government considered them to be frills.

Well, they're not frills. Many of these are the departments that keep students at school when they are at risk of leaving. When they are having difficulty with the core curriculum, teens can shine in other areas of the whole school environment. These departments have the power to make a student a celebrated member of the school community as a band member or as a teammate with a technology, auto shop or electronics team.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that 30% of the students under the previous government were not graduating—almost one third. It's still amazes me. We're committed to winning those students back. We're committed to increasing the number of students who complete successfully. Those students deserved a better school system and we are focused on giving them that better school system.

Some have characterized this as a punitive bill, that we're punishing students, locking them away in schools. There is nothing further from the truth. This bill in fact liberates students with options to learn on the job, to earn

credits for co-op experiences, to test out different types of jobs, different work routines and different skill sets. Everyone wins: Students continue learning; employers benefit from the assistance of young, capable, knowledgeable and eager staff.

Our school system adapts to the different interests and capabilities of its students. And the province will undoubtedly become richer. We will renew our skilled labour pool, which is definitely in high demand. We will have focused and capable high school graduates and fewer dropouts.

The Minister of Education summed it up well when she said, "The bill is called 'Learning to Age 18'; it's not called 'Classroom to 18' for a very good reason."

Before I finish, I just want to talk a little bit about a program in my hometown of London, Ontario, that I have seen with my own eyes. I'm glad that some of my colleagues from London are here today, because we're all big fans of this program. This is a program where kids who have dropped out of school, who are no longer enrolled in school, come and earn credit by credit in a very comfortable environment. In fact, I know that they're actually learning in the market in London. The market has generously donated space so these students can come and work on their own, earning credits, one at a time, with the goal of working towards graduation. These are students whom others have given up on. We believe in them, we applaud them, we see their potential, and we're willing and anxious to invest whatever we can to ensure that they become productive members of society.

I am very, very proud of this bill. It speaks to creativity, it speaks to optimism, it speaks to courage and it speaks to the potential of our students.

1640

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? Questions and comments?

Mr. Ramal: Since nobody will stand up and take the chance to comment on the remarks of my colleague the member from London North Centre and her great analysis of the bill and why we should support it, hopefully many people in the province of Ontario were listening to her, because I think—and especially the member from Toronto–Danforth; hopefully he learned from her explanation why our government is bringing forward this bill to assist the students of the province, to assist our youngsters who need a lot of attention. I believe by giving the support and the mechanism we can provide them with the tools and the equipment to go for the bright future for the province of Ontario and also for themselves.

I heard members talking about why the driver's licence is very important for many young students. It is a very good tool. We have to tell the people of Ontario that to obtain a driver's licence is a privilege; and to gain that privilege, you have to do something in your lifetime. What's it about? Education. It is a very important element: to tie the driver's licence with a good education.

As the member said, it is important to encourage students. Also, the member explained how the bill is not

going to be abstract. It is going to be tied to a lot of initiatives; it is going to look after the rural areas; it is going to look after the north; look after the students who want to continue their education; look after the community centre that will provide education for those students; look after the college, assisting the college to open up for those young people who want to continue alternative education, so they're able to go and learn something, not necessarily academic stuff.

I think it is a very good bill, and I want to commend the member from London North Centre for her eloquent explanation of this bill.

Mr. Miller: It is my pleasure to add comments on Bill 52, which is, as we know, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act.

As I previously stated when I was able to have an opportunity to speak for a couple of minutes, there are many problems with this bill. It's just not practical for many young people who, for a variety of reasons, aren't really ready to learn and ready to finish high school. No matter how much we may want them to stay in school, they just have things happening in their lives which don't permit them to stay in school. Taking away their driver's licence, taking away, if they're in rural Ontario, their ability to have transportation, to have a job, to be able to get some real life experience, to get ready to hopefully go back at a later date to finish their high school education, is punitive, and I think it's not necessarily going to help.

In the next few weeks, I will have the pleasure in Parry Sound–Muskoka of attending many of the graduation ceremonies around the riding, and I will attend as many as I possibly can. The ones I enjoy more than any are those of students who have gone into the workforce and then come back at a later date, usually under much more trying situations. Whether it be because of learning disabilities or life situations, they have had to have jobs and then go to school and achieve their high school diploma. I tell you, it's very gratifying to participate in those graduation ceremonies.

This bill is just not practical. It's not going to do any good in terms of the goal of having young people learn and more young people staying in high school and getting their high school diploma.

Mr. Tabuns: I want to speak first to the comments from the member for London North Centre, who is well read, who is fully capable of understanding the issues before us and their full complexity.

Early in World War II, the United States government did testing of young men who were coming in to join the army. They found that malnutrition—perhaps not even classic malnutrition but poor nutrition—meant that many of them did not meet the standards they needed for someone who would be capable of joining that army. In fact, it was out of that that the United States developed its school lunch programs, which Ronald Reagan took a buzz saw to in the 1980s. The reality is that if people are not well fed from childhood, if they are not looked after

from childhood, their ability to perform fully in society is grossly undermined.

This government promised to deal with much of that poverty by ending the clawback of the national child tax benefit, now the national child benefit, and by increasing payments for Ontario Works and ODSP in line with inflation. Those things have not happened. When I talk to people in legal clinics in my riding, when I talk to people from OCASI, when I look at the stats coming from food banks, I know that more people are using food banks. I know that kids are not getting the food they need. And their households are not stable. They are not getting the supports they need to ensure that young people can actually learn the way they need to learn. You can have as many bills as you want, but we all know that if people don't have a stable family life, education will not take place the way it has to take place.

Ms. Wynne: I want to speak to the comments of the member for London North Centre. I completely agree with her that this is an optimistic bill, that this bill is a testament to our belief in the courage of the young people in our community who can succeed in a variety of ways.

We're not actually content just to rebuild education to its previous state before the Conservative government took a hacksaw to it. We're actually recognizing that we have to build on the good parts of that system and improve and move forward. So we're doing some things that have never been done before. We're not only building back the technical shops into high schools, but we're offering new programs that will link students to college education while they're still in secondary school.

We're providing opportunities for equivalent learning that are going to be monitored by what's called the Student Success Commission, boards and teachers' federations and the ministry, talking together about what we can count as equivalent learning, so that when we write policy at the ministry, it will actually work on the ground. That's a process piece that doesn't show up in the legislation, but what it means is that when those equivalent learning opportunities are put in front of the students, we know they will work. We know they will have the buy-in of the teachers, the ministry and the boards so that students can be successful.

We're keeping tabs on graduation rates. When I was a school trustee, it wasn't easy to even know what the graduation rates were in our own board, let alone across the whole province. So we're starting to monitor that and then we'll be able to measure how much better we're doing in terms of our graduation rates.

Finally, about the comment the member made about winning students back, our adult education initiatives are part of learning to 18. We know we have to keep students in school, but we also have to bring them back if they do leave.

1650

The Deputy Speaker: The member for London North Centre has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Matthews: I think the comments we've had over the last round of two minutes really does indicate the range of opinion on this bill.

Although I thank the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka for his comments, I’m disappointed that he calls this not practical. He says it won’t do any good. I guess that just demonstrates the thought that these kids don’t have the potential to achieve. It’s so not where we’re coming from and it’s so where the previous government came from. I’m disappointed.

It’s important to note that there are some circumstances where it’s not the right thing for somebody to stay in school or to stay learning until they’re 18. This bill allows for exemptions under special circumstances. So some of the arguments you’ve made really are addressed in this legislation. This bill challenges our educators to capture the imagination of their students to keep them engaged, to keep them learning. They have to do that under this legislation.

The member from Toronto–Danforth raises an important point: the link between nutrition and the ability to learn. It’s one that I’m familiar with. I agree that that link does exist. But I also think it’s important to recognize that under this government a single parent with two children has actually seen a 16% increase in their benefits since we were elected.

Member from London–Fanshawe, I thank you so much. Your commitment to issues like this is exceptional and it’s a pleasure having you in my next-door riding.

To the member from Don Valley West, you’ve shown commitment on issues around education and you understand the societal implications of having a good, strong education system.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I’m pleased to participate in this debate. I’m going to spend a considerable amount of time talking about what I believe is the real intent of this bill. I’m going to bring to the attention of members of the Legislature the opinion of parents as well as education stakeholders and read into the record a number of those opinions. After all, we are talking about public education, and this government appears to be intent to take the “public” out of public education.

What I mean by that is that the foundation of public education is the parents, who are also the taxpayers who pay for that education. Even though there are some who would say that public education is free, it is not. It is a very expensive, very worthwhile investment on the part of government into education, into a program that is there to ensure that our young people have the knowledge and the skill to cope when they graduate and enter into the real world in competition with students and workers from other jurisdictions. It is not free. It is, as I said before, an important investment on the part of government. However, it is an education system that has, historically, served the public, that is accountable to the public and that is responsive to the public. Hence, a public education system. We have seen, since the election of this government, successive pieces of legislation and successive attempts made to undermine the public aspect of this, the accountability aspect of this to the very people who should be able to count on this public education system

to provide for their children the quality of education that they want for them.

I want to review, and will do so over the next number of minutes that I have, how that has come to be. It’s interesting that successive—when I say “successive,” The previous Minister of Education, who is now running for the leadership of the federal Liberal Party, and his successor, the current Minister of Education, have in fact been using the education system and education policy as a political tool. What is most interesting is that they continue to protest that. If you recall Bill 78, even within the context of that debate and in statements made by the Minister of Education repeatedly about that bill when it concerned specifically the restructuring of the Ontario College of Teachers, the statement was made by this government and by the minister and other members of the Liberal government here that the reason for the restructuring is that they wanted to depoliticize the realm of education. And yet that is precisely what this government has done, more so than any other government ever in this province. They have used public education policy as a means of repaying very specific political obligations. We heard again today, even in the course—the parliamentary assistant admitted that.

We have before us yet one more piece of legislation that I believe undermines public education. It doesn’t strengthen it; it undermines the very principles of public education. So you can conclude from my introductory remarks that we do not support this bill. It may come as a surprise to you, but it won’t come as a surprise to parents who are observing this debate and to stakeholders who observe this debate, because they know that our education policy is based on some very clear principles and values. There is in this policy, in this bill, very little that supports public education. In fact, this is more of a political document that imposes on Ontario students and their parents a punitive policy. It does a number of things. I’m going to, at the outset, itemize those and then I’ll speak to them individually.

This bill will, we submit, be counterproductive to students. It will not help them. It will create hardship for many families. It ignores the reality of life in many parts of this province. It creates yet another layer of bureaucracy, very expensive bureaucracy, in the education system. It covers up the real cause for students’ underachievement. Finally, this bill does nothing to address the real issues of creating a positive learning environment for those students for whom the existing system is not working.

It’s an interesting document that we have before us, but as I indicated, I believe that it’s a cover-up more than anything else. It is, as was said by the parliamentary assistant, a commitment. Actually, it is a follow-through on an election commitment that was made in an election document.

1700

There are many parents who are observing this debate, and they’re asking, “If you’re going to follow through on this promise, why are you not following through on the

promise you made to autistic children and their families that the government, that Mr. McGuinty, when he became Premier, would extend funding for autistic children and give them the same fair and equal opportunity to learn and to develop life skills as any other student in the province?" Why be so selective? Why come forward with this legislation that is, without question, very, very conflicting in terms of the support, very controversial? Even the teachers' federations oppose this bill. They have been urging the government not to proceed, to rethink what they're doing here. I know of very few education stakeholders who support this legislation.

So parents of autistic children, who are wrestling daily with the challenge of affording their children an equal opportunity for an education, are asking the question of this Premier, of the Minister of Education, why? Why take legislative time, why invest additional funds in a bill, in an initiative that, quite frankly, in the order of priority, when you consider that there are young children in this province who are struggling just to have the opportunity to learn language and speech, to communicate in the very basic fundamentals of how to carry on their lives—this government is turning its back on them. Having made the promise, they're parading now with great fanfare the fact that they're willing to follow through with this bill.

There would be those of us who would say the government should be brought to account for that, and I believe they will be. I believe, as people across the province get to know what this government truly is doing with education policy, they will come to understand that it's much less about serving the students and the parents of this province and ensuring that public education carries out the mandate of education and it's much more, in the mind of this government, to placate certain stakeholders, to placate certain interest groups, because it's in their political interest.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): No, it's for the kids.

Mr. Klees: The member carps, "No, it's for the kids." I would say to the member, because he obviously wasn't here when I put the question, if it's for the kids, why not the autistic kids? If it's for the kids, why not for those children who are suffering every day and those parents of those children who are simply asking the government to keep their promise? Autistic children, why not for them? Is the honourable member suggesting to me and does he dare suggest to his constituents that forcing a young person to stay in school until they are age 18, whether they want to or not, is more important than making it possible for a child who doesn't have the ability to learn the basic fundamentals in life to be there? I would suggest, if he calms down and thinks about this issue as a father—

Laughter.

Mr. Klees: I'm surprised. Mr. Levac laughs at me. I'm surprised. If you think about this as a parent, and if you think about what the fundamentals are that are at risk and at stake here, I'm surprised that members of the

Liberal Party, that members of this government, would dare to carp during this debate on that issue, because they leave themselves exposed on a very, very important issue.

I'd like to move on and read into the record for honourable members some opinions from parents, from the public, from individuals who have taken the time to write to the Minister of Education but who have been ignored. This, again, is a hallmark of this government; it certainly has been a hallmark of the Minister of Education. Time will tell whether the current Minister of Education will carry on with that reputation of ignoring parents, ignoring stakeholders, refusing to even acknowledge that they have phoned, that they have called, that they have sent an e-mail, that they have written letters. As the education critic for the official opposition, often those letters are then redirected to me with an appeal, advising me that they are being ignored by the Minister of Education and asking if I would assist at least in reminding him that people have an issue and encouraging him, urging him to respond.

I want to read into the record an e-mail that I received from Mr. Gerald Dickson. Mr. Dickson is from Kingston. He wrote the following in response to the government's announcement of this bill. It was actually initially addressed to his MPP, Mr. Gerretsen. It was copied to Gerard Kennedy and myself as well as Mr. Marchese, the education critic for the third party.

"I am writing you concerning impending legislation that I understand will prevent people under the age of 18 who have dropped out of school from obtaining a driver's licence. This is bad legislation for the following reasons. I urge you to oppose it."

This is directed to Mr. Gerretsen, who is Mr. Dickson's member of this House. He's urging his MPP to oppose it. We'll see whether Mr. Gerretsen takes his constituent's advice.

I continue with the letter:

"I appreciate that it has been adopted by several US states. It is bad there, too.

"For the record, I am a 57-year-old professional engineer. Neither I nor any of my family members will be affected personally by this legislation. I certainly agree that it is laudable to encourage young people to remain in school to at least the age of 18.

"However there is no reason why someone who has dropped out of school may not acquire the skills and behaviour to pass a driver's test and keep a driver's licence. Yes, a driver's licence is a privilege, but it is not a privilege that a government should ... deny any its citizens as a means of social engineering, and that is what this legislation would do. Acquisition of a driver's licence should depend only on being able to acquire and demonstrate the skills and behaviour needed to operate a motor vehicle safely—nothing more. Legislation such as this increasingly restricts personal freedoms for purposes that are not necessarily in the interests of those it affects.

"I would expect a government that is successful in implementing such legislation to move on from this to

other social engineering legislation, increasingly restrictive and even sinister. I hesitate to suggest examples.”

I wanted to read this into the record because it’s representative of literally hundreds of e-mails with a very similar appeal, and that is that the government should find other ways of dealing with this issue of motivating young people to stay in school.

1710

In fact, when I first saw this bill, I had a concern about the very title of the bill, which reads, “An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act.” Here was my concern: We have before us a bill that is legislating learning. It’s interesting that this government—this minister—does not understand that learning is not something you can legislate. Learning is what is done by the student. Others teach. It is the role of government to provide a learning environment. It is the responsibility of government to ensure that the resources are there to teach, that the resources are made available so that a child or a student can, in fact, apply themselves to learn. But for this government to come forward with the arrogance of suggesting that they can legislate that someone will learn is beyond reason.

Any of the pages that we have here, they’re motivated young people. One of the reasons they’re here, as we all know, is that they’re at the top of their class. The competition is high to get here, so we congratulate them for being here. But they’ll be the first ones to tell you that no law is going to legislate that they will learn; learning is something that they have to do of themselves. If they don’t have the motivation to do that, we can do all of the teaching we want, we can provide all of the resources we want, but if the trigger isn’t there within these young people to actually do the learning, it won’t take place.

So if, in fact, the government were straightforward, what they would have done is appropriately named this bill. It would have read something like, “An Act to amend the Education Act to force young people to stay in school and sit in their seats, whether they’re learning or not, until they are age 18.” But they didn’t, you see, because it sounds a lot better when you say that they will learn to age 18. Everybody says, “We can’t argue with that; of course people should learn to age 18.” I would say, if it’s that, people should be learning beyond age 18—far beyond. None of us should ever stop learning. But it is the attitude of this government, you see, that they can force people to do things—will legislate them to do it. It doesn’t matter about people’s freedoms, doesn’t matter about people’s rights.

There’s an interesting common theme that weaves its way through many of the bills that we’ve debated in this place. It’s that issue of government knowing best. It’s the fact that the minister knows better than anyone else what’s good for you, so the minister is prepared to set himself or herself up as the official parent of the province of Ontario. I submit that if the minister were to focus on his or her responsibility as the Minister of Education for

all of education in the province—which is, in fact, the mandate—and focus on those things that will motivate young people to stay in school, that will help young people to learn, to do what has to be done, to ensure that the education takes place—that should be the priority of the Minister of Education, rather than wasting her time and wasting our time in this House debating a bill that is undermining young people and actually, in the final analysis, will be counterproductive.

I want to refer to another letter that I received. It’s an e-mail that was sent to me by Mr. Martin McKillop from Sudbury. He writes as follows:

“I have a degree in public administration, and I have worked at Queen’s Park, so I know a little bit about public policy-making, sound or otherwise.

“I have three kids, grades 7, 9 and 11, and no worries about them moving through high school successfully. I rarely express my opinions to the powers that be. I do, however, feel compelled to tell you that, in my opinion, the proposal to deny a driver’s licence to teens that drop out is not only the most ridiculous proposal to come down the pike in a long time, it is also likely discriminatory under the age provisions of the charter.

“I also completely fail to see how it will do anything to solve the dropout crisis, unless you think blackmail works. Since when do drivers’ licences and success in high school correlate? Since when does a government have a right to resort to blackmail? And make no mistake: That is exactly what is perceived to be and, in my opinion, actually is in this bill. It is blackmail.

“Tell your ADMs and cabinet members to get serious about a serious problem and stop thinking that our youth can be blackmailed into staying in school. You can get them”—your staff, that is—“started by telling them that it is all about curriculum, teacher apathy, parental indifference, scarce resources, outdated objectives, political dogmatism and public skepticism, and that it is absolutely ridiculous to think otherwise.” This was sent to Gerard Kennedy.

The issue here, and what people are taking exception to, is the fact that this government, under the guise of this legislation, is taking the heavy-handed approach of forcing young people, notwithstanding their personal circumstances, notwithstanding the circumstances of their families, and, through this legislation, will inevitably create hardship for many families across this province.

I found it interesting that the member from London North Centre referred, in her debate on this bill, to a great example in her hometown of work that is taking place now and of a facility that is providing alternative learning for students who had dropped out of high school. Apparently, this program is working well, and what’s unique about it—although I’m not personally familiar, I take her at her word—is that this facility is accommodating those students because they learn differently. It’s a different setting. It’s a more practical approach. It’s an approach that actually works for students. It’s not an in-school setting. It’s not the setting that the students who were there became bored with, bailed out of, wrote off because it wasn’t working for them.

Here is why I raise this issue: because I'm sure every member in this House is familiar with similar programs, very successful programs within our constituencies, where young people who have dropped out of school for one reason or another re-engage, are reconnected with a learning environment that's more conducive to their ability to learn, and get on with life.

The member from London North Centre refers to this very successful program at the same time as she, as a member of the government, is saying, "Notwithstanding that, we need a new piece of legislation that will actually force young people against their will to stay in school, and if they don't, there will be serious penalties." To them, they won't get their licence. To any potential employer who may hire them, there's a \$1,000 fine if they're found to be giving a job to a young person because they dropped out of high school.

1720

You see, there are programs already in place in this province—many of them—that serve the very purpose this bill pretends to address. Our career colleges do exactly that. I'm familiar with many programs that are being administered through the career colleges that deliver those programs. So to you, Speaker, I put this question, and through you to the Minister of Education and members of the government, who seem to need this Bill 52 as a prop simply to fulfill an election promise because they broke 223 promises. This is one that they're now going to parade in front of the public to say, "We keep our promises." Well, this is the one you shouldn't have kept, along with the one to cancel the tax credit that allowed individual families across this province to educate their children in an independent school. They are still paying their education property taxes, they are still paying through their income taxes for the public education system, but they chose, in addition to that, to pay the additional tuition so that their children would have the choice of a unique education. They, as parents, chose to do that, and this government punitively cancelled that tax credit retroactively, and did so with glee. That's one they shouldn't have kept either. So two promises kept out of 223, the rest broken, and to what end?

I was speaking about our community colleges. There are many advantages that we already have existing today, many programs that are being delivered through our community colleges. For the benefit of members of the Legislature who may not be aware—look, it's possible that many members are not aware that these programs are being delivered, that the capacity is there for community colleges to deliver these programs. If this government should be doing anything, it is to take the punitive measures out of this bill, and rather than doing that, to collaborate and co-operate with the community colleges in this province to deliver on the motivational side of the intent of this bill and ensure that young people have options; that they know those options are there so that if, for one reason or another, the high school environment is not one where they're fitting in and isn't conducive to

their learning, there are alternatives. There should be bridging and introduction programs for any students who may be at risk of dropping out. But this is the positive side, and that's the way the government should be conducting themselves on this issue.

Ontario colleges offer the following opportunities: They provide, first, an adult learning environment that's quite different from the public elementary and secondary schools, and that's very important. It may well be that the environment itself is something that isn't conducive to a young person's ability to learn. So there is that unique environment of a community college that may well trigger in a young person a new interest, a renewed interest in learning. Ontario colleges have career-based education and training that help students to set targets for specific occupations. Students develop a clear sense of how the skills and knowledge they acquire will help them to succeed in the workplace.

Contrary to what some may think, not every young person is built for the academic world. There are those who simply will not succeed within the traditional school environment. What is happening here is that the government is sending a signal to those young people that if you don't fit in there, there's something wrong with you, as opposed to taking the view that there are alternatives, and those alternatives are also part of our public education system, and we're letting you down by not allowing you to see and catch the vision of what you can be simply by taking a different path. There are many practical careers available to young people in this province about which they just need to be enlightened. They just need to be given the awareness that not making it in the traditional school setting doesn't mean they're condemned to a life of failure.

What it means, simply, is that there are other opportunities for them. That's the role that our school system should be playing: helping young people to take a glimpse of their future, helping them to understand that there is a public education system available to them that will help them become productive and give them a sense of confidence and worth within our community. I believe the community colleges do that extremely well, but what we need to do is ensure that the appropriate bridging programs are there to give them that insight.

Ontario colleges provide hands-on opportunities in those trades and technologies that can help many students to regain self-confidence. They also offer literacy and numeracy programs and other programs to help students to upgrade their skills. Above all, they have already an existing history of collaboration with local school boards to help develop those programs and to deliver them.

I listened to some of the debate. I heard what the Minister of Education and the parliamentary assistant had to say, and it seems as though, for the uninitiated, that through Bill 52 this government is somehow recreating the world and creating new opportunities that never existed before. On the one hand, that is either a lack of knowledge or understanding of what is taking place in the education sector and the programs that are available,

or it is a blatant attempt to—how can I put that? I would never suggest that there's a blatant attempt to misrepresent. I would never do that because that would be unparliamentary. So I'm sure that it must be simply an ignorance of what is there. Hopefully, through this process the government will become more aware of what is there, but we don't need to duplicate and we certainly don't need to overlay an already existing, well-functioning and highly effective system with a level of bureaucracy that is only going to drain important public dollars that should and could otherwise go into those Ontario colleges or into other programs that will make this learning experience much more meaningful for young people in our province.

I'd like to move on to another e-mail that I received, this one from Heather Chisvin. It's a very interesting perspective that Ms. Chisvin brings to this debate, and I quote:

"I have a 16-year-old daughter who is having trouble with high school. As she wants to be a hairdresser, she found a job with a local salon and started apprenticing only to find out that about five years ago, legislation was enacted that makes it impossible to become a hairdresser without a high school degree.

"If the new legislation is enacted, she won't be able to drive, or get a job. I'm not sure who all this legislation protects. Certainly not my daughter—she now can't work or drive unless she can finish high school. So that means she either sits home or does what she needs to do to become a productive member of society, illegally.

"Is there anything I can do to help stop this legislation from being enacted?" Ms. Chisvin asked me.

1730

My advice to her and others who are observing this debate is to put pressure on your local Liberal MPP. They're the only ones who will have the opportunity, the ability, to reach the Minister of Education. You see, the Liberal Party has a majority government and so they don't really need to listen to the public. They should. Anyone who's elected as an MPP should be listening to their constituents and taking advice and input from their constituents and from groups of constituents. The higher the volume gets within our constituency, the more we should be listening. But this government somehow must issue earplugs to all of their members, because the higher the volume goes on an issue, the more they duck, the less they listen and the more they come together and huddle and say, "No. Against all reason, we will forge ahead with this legislation." That's not how our democratic system of government is intended to work. I don't believe, in the final analysis, that it will serve this government well, but they're certainly experimenting with that strategy.

There is an opportunity for the electorate to pass judgment on how this government is conducting itself with regard to these important public policy matters. You see, if members of provincial Parliament are not prepared to listen to appeals either from individual constituents or from groups of people who are coming forward as stake-

holders in public education; if they're not prepared to listen to the proceedings that are available through standing committees; if they're not willing to respond to appeals from the official opposition or the third party to implement amendments, to at least incorporate some amendments into a piece of legislation to make it more reasonable; if they're not prepared to do that, then there is an opportunity for the electorate, for those constituents, to express their will. That will be October 4, 2007, not long down the road.

I would encourage people to become engaged in that process. It's said that if you don't become involved in the political process, you are destined to be governed by those who do. That is an encouragement to people to get involved. I believe that we should in fact be engaging many more people in this exercise of democracy. Unfortunately, they become unmotivated when they exercise their rights as individuals to appeal, whether it be to a Minister of Education or to MPPs, and then they're ignored, or telephone calls aren't returned or e-mails are ignored. Shame on any member of this House for doing that, because we work for those people; it's our job. Any call from any constituent should be the most important priority that we have on any given day. That's why I ask the Minister of Education how in good conscience the office of the Minister of Education can ignore hundreds of e-mails on an important issue such as this. How can that happen? The member opposite from the riding of Brant, the chief government whip, is perplexed as well about that, because I know that he doesn't conduct his business that way. So is it any wonder that we have public policy going astray here in the face of a great deal of public opposition?

I want to bring to your attention another issue that we're appealing. I'm going to make an appeal now to the government that they will entertain a number of amendments, but one specifically that relates to the many families in this province who are involved in home schooling. I must have received, if not 100, then at least 200 or 300 letters, e-mails and phone calls from parents who are doing home schooling. I'm going to read a couple of these letters into the record because I think it's important that their view is understood fully by this Minister of Education, because clearly she is not reading her letters. If at least other members of the Legislature and the public who are observing this debate will understand what those issues are, then I will have done my job.

I want to read this first letter from Georgie Donais of Toronto. This is addressed to Ms. Papatello. I doubt very much if Ms. Papatello has seen it, and if she has, I would doubt equally that she would ever respond. I'm going to read it into the record:

"Dear Ms. Papatello:

"I am writing to express my concerns with the 'Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning and to make complementary amendments to the Highway Traffic Act,' also known as Bill 52.

"As a parent to two home-schooled children, I am concerned about how this bill might affect my children's

ability to move freely in society, and to attain an important piece of identification, since their daily learning does not include attendance at a public or private school.

“For children in general, in school or not, I am concerned when I see measures meant to punish them for non-attendance. In my opinion, if schools are not offering something that engages students and helps them want to be there, then it is the school that must change for the student, not the other way around. I have heard once too often from people involved in the education system that there are children who ‘just don’t want to learn.’ I’m needing some understanding that they might not want to learn what is currently being taught, and that it’s the school’s job to offer them what they do want to learn more about, and in such a way that it honours their need for respect, autonomy and their many different ways of learning.

“I therefore second the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents’ position that recommends and urges that the government abandon Bill 52, abandon plans to raise the compulsory school age, abandon any plans to link school attendance and drivers’ licences, and work within the bounds of existing legislation to implement its positive plans to provide more support, choice and opportunity to young people as they transition through their secondary education to the post-secondary or post-educational destination of their choice.

“Sincerely yours,
“Georgie Donais.”

I think you’ll agree that Ms. Donais has very succinctly pointed out the weakness of this legislation, and also the unfairness of it, to a very large and growing group of students in this province who have been home-schooled. They’re asking for that consideration.

I’m under no illusion that this government won’t press ahead with this legislation. It obviously has become a cornerstone of their education policy. At the very least, what I’m going to appeal for is the inclusion of an amendment that will allow for exceptions for those children who are being home-schooled. I would also expect, in light of the fact that this minister has repeatedly made it clear that she holds in disdain independent and faith-based schools, that she would also entertain an amendment that would exclude independent and faith-based schools, over which the minister and the government continue to say they want no control. That notwithstanding, by virtue of being the government and by virtue of being the Minister of Education, the Minister of Education has responsibility even for those schools, and should have, and should take pride in the learning that takes place in those institutions in our province. So I’ll be very interested to see whether the minister will in fact accept our proposal for an amendment.

1740

I want to just give you an example of one more letter relating to the issue of home schooling. This letter comes from Bonni Altenpohl from Brockville. She says the following:

“I am writing to express my disappointment. It is my wish that Bill 52 is not passed into law as it is written. My position on this matter is similar to that of the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents. I believe you have already received detailed information from this organization regarding their position....

“My husband and I have decided to assume responsibility for our children’s education. We take full advantage of our right to provide a home-based education within our family. We feel our children are in the best possible situation, given our family’s circumstances. As home schoolers, we are able to schedule our day around our family’s needs and habits. We are able to focus on our children’s talents and interests.”

She goes on to provide a number of examples of how this legislation would, in fact, result in hardship to their family, to their circumstances and the unfairness of this legislation. She goes on to say, “I do hope you consider home schooling as you pursue Bill 52.” Again, this was addressed to the Minister of Education, Ms. Papatello. I have many letters here to the exact same issue.

I want to turn my attention to the fact that this legislation not only misses the mark in terms of fairness, in terms of substance but, as I mentioned earlier, overlays another layer of bureaucracy, not only into the education ministry and education system but also now imposes on the Ministry of Transportation. As a former Minister of Transportation, I can tell you that the last thing the Ministry of Education needs is the added responsibility to police 17- and 18-year-olds who may not be in school. Nowhere have I ever seen anything from the Ministry of Education that there is a funding allotment to that ministry for the additional staff, for the additional administration, for the systems changes that have to take place and how the ministry expects that liaison to work between the board of education, where also now you’re going to hire some more police—licence police. Truant officers now will become a new career in the province. Maybe that’s part of their intent, that you make this illegal and so we’re going to need more truant officers. There’s employment for you: Let’s go out and hire another 1,000 people to police young people to see if they’re dropping out or not. It’s irrational, it is impractical, it is unenforceable. It is beyond the ability of the Ministry of Transportation to cope, and it’s beyond the ability of boards of education to cope as well.

Every member in this place has heard, without question, from their school board trustees, from their directors of education, that they are facing serious funding issues this coming fiscal year. There will be deficits—multi-million dollar deficits—in every school board in this province because of the policies of this government of announcing targeted new programs and rolling out new programs. These people never stopped electioneering. The rhetoric continues, new programs by the week, but no money. Of course, the school boards can’t say very much because they’re intimidated by the minister. They don’t dare say that this is something that they can’t cope with.

Interjections.

Mr. Klees: Here we go. The members opposite are catcalling again because they don't like the truth. You see, the truth hurts.

I just want to point one thing out. This goes to the bizarre way that this government continues to attempt to fool the people; it's all through their rhetoric. I'm going to give you an example.

Since the new Minister of Education was appointed, there have been numerous—I'm holding them here as a deck of cards—press releases and announcements. But here's what's interesting, and this is what I don't think the average person in this province catches on to: the subtlety of the messaging and what they're trying to do here to the people of Ontario.

Listen to this. Here was the first one, May 29: "Student Success Commission to Focus on Greater Student Achievement." Here's what the minister said: "Our government is on the side of Ontario families who want the best public education for their children," said Papatello."

Interesting. Here's the next one, May 30: "A New Transition Plan to Help Struggling Students Prepare for High School." Here's the quote from the minister—this is the next release: "Our government is on the side of Ontario families who want the best public education for their children," said Papatello."

Here's the next one, June 1: "Legislation Passes to Boost Student Performance." Here's the quote from the minister: "We are on the side of hard-working Ontario families who want the best public education for their children."

Here is June 5: "Ontario Students to Benefit from Enhanced Training for Teachers." Here's the quote from the minister. She got up that morning and said, "I'm going to say something new to the people of Ontario." Quote: "We are on the side of Ontario families who want the best public education for their children."

June 8: "McGuinty Government Invests \$50 Million in Special Education Reforms." Here's the quote from the minister: "Our government is on the side of Ontario families who want the best public education for their children," said Papatello."

Who are we kidding? There's a propaganda machinery in that Ministry of Education like none other. They know how to make announcements, they know how to announce new programs, but what they don't know how to do is to manage competently. What they need to do is stop making new announcements and fund the ones that they've made, fund the commitments that they've made, and ensure that the trustees and the school boards across the province who have the burden and the responsibility of carrying out programs actually have the resources and the money to fund all of those commitments. No, that's not what this government's about.

This government knows very little about competency. This government knows very little about responsibility. It knows very little about how to manage. They know how to make announcements. They know how to electioneer. But it's catching up to them, you see? The reason it's

catching up to them is because you can only do this for so long and the rubber hits the road.

Where the rubber is hitting the road now is that, as they come through this stage of their government, what is going to happen is that the stakeholders are waking up and they realize they've been fooled. Parents are waking up and realizing they've been fooled. Whether it's parents of special-needs children who have been suffering because school boards have had to shuffle money from special-needs programs to other areas of very specified demands from the Minister of Education—and by the way, we're not even talking now about the four-year contracts that are underfunded: a multi-billion dollar shortfall in funding.

1750

Day after day, this Minister of Education continues to stand before people and make new announcements. We're going to track. I'd be willing to bet that by the end of the year we'll have another dozen of these: more commitments without the appropriate funding.

Folks, you as the government will have to be responsible to the electorate, who will hold you accountable. You're being irresponsible now. You're turning your backs on those parents to whom you made very real commitments about looking after the special needs of their children. You're turning your backs on autistic children and their parents. You are ignoring the very real needs in families across this province, and you dare to come forward with Bill 52, which does nothing to advance quality education. It does nothing in a practical way to address the real needs of those young people who are craving a motivation. They're asking their government, "Don't take my driver's licence. Give me a reason to stay in school. Give me the practical programs that I need. Help me to learn, because I learn differently." That's what it's all about.

Mr. Brownell: That's right. That's what we're doing.

Mr. Klees: The member opposite carps again, to his detriment. I'm going to close my remarks by asking him how he can, in good conscience, support this bill when he knows that his government, his leader, his Premier have turned their backs on autistic children and their parents after promising that they would extend support and funding to autistic children beyond the age of six. They've refused to do it. They refuse to be fair to those most vulnerable in our society, and the people of this province will hold them accountable for that.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to make a few remarks on the lead speech by the Progressive Conservative caucus's lead critic on this file, Bill 52. Unfortunately, we haven't had the opportunity to hear from the NDP critic yet on the issue, but I would hazard to say that some of the concerns that were raised, perhaps coming from a different perspective, are consistent with ones that New Democrats have already put on the record. I think it's interesting that the member relied heavily on letters and comments he has in his file from regular people in Ontario who are equally concerned about the direction that this government is going

in regard to Bill 52, the Education Statute Law Amendment Act, particularly people whose voices were brought to the table by the member from Oak Ridges, parents but also just interested people of Ontario who are raising issues around the possibility that this bill is a punishment of students who are not thriving under the current education system.

There's concern about the fact that the withdrawal or withholding of a driver's licence from students who are not achieving in high school and are looking for other options is a form of blackmail or punishment, and it's simply inappropriate for government to undertake that kind of punitive relationship with students.

Also, the member talked about lifelong learning, which of course is a principle that we would all agree to; however, recognizing that lifelong learning is something that is not necessarily done within the formal structure of schooling as we know it.

The member also spoke a great deal about the fact that the supports and the choices the government talks about simply aren't in place and are not clear in the bill, and also the added cost in bureaucracies to both the education system and the transportation ministry in that regard.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Indeed, it was interesting to listen to the remarks of the member from Oak Ridges. Gosh, what comes to mind is that it's one of these conversions, just like Saul on the road to Damascus. We remember his good friend the Oklahoma cowboy, John Snobelen, the man who said that he was going to create a crisis in public education in the province of Ontario. He succeeded for eight long years.

When you look at the statistics, back in 1998, as part of the crisis, we had a high school graduation rate of some 78%. By 2004-05, that dropped to 68%. We had 51,000 students in the province of Ontario dropping out of high school without enough credits to graduate, 51,000 people who have great potential, whose potential needed to be tapped. Bill 52, Learning to Age 18, goes a long way to achieve that. Bill 52 will allow students to achieve success, be the best fit possible for each student's potential. It will instill willingness and capacity for further learning, have a core of common knowledge, skills and values.

It's been 50 years since the Education Act has been updated in Ontario to move it from age 16 to age 18. This, indeed, when you look into this legislation, which will go to committee for review, is an opportunity to reach those 51,000 people. In the world we face today, in the Ontario we face today, we can't afford to leave 51,000 people sitting on the sidelines without opportunity. This bill targets that group. It's an important piece of legislation, a piece of legislation that needs to go forward to bring back positive learning for that particular group in Ontario. After eight years of chaos, I think Annie Kidder said it best in her report not too long ago: "The crisis is over in Ontario."

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): First of all, I want to commend my colleague the education critic for our party, the member from Oak Ridges, on the kind of thoughtful work he's done on this file. I just have to say,

we could have been here all day with all the documented letters from individuals across this province who are essentially saying one thing: "Where the heck did you come up with this idea?"

If we look to the origins of this, we were misinformed by the Minister of Education on the statistics—

The Deputy Speaker: No, no. I'd prefer the member to withdraw.

Mr. Jackson: I withdraw—the misinformation that was perpetrated by the minister by referring to Stats Canada. And now the member for Peterborough falls into the same trap, parroting the inappropriate numbers when the matter has been clarified.

Stats Canada: The true dropout rate over the last five years in this province is slightly under 10%, or at or near 10%. Again, that includes a couple of years of the current government's efforts. So to condemn outright the policies of the former government when, in fact, our dropout rate had lowered, misinforming the House—

The Deputy Speaker: No, no. I think "misinforming" and then "misinformation"—those kinds of words I'd like you to withdraw and then consider other words.

Mr. Jackson: I will withdraw. The word "misinformation," Mr. Speaker, has been used in this House in the last week. "Misinformation" was used on three occasions on the same day, last Tuesday, in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: I'm not debating the issue. I'd ask that you withdraw, that's all, or use other words. That's all.

Mr. Jackson: I've already withdrawn.

Frankly, if the member from Peterborough continues to use these statistics when, in fact, they're clearly wrong, they're not adding to the true importance of debate that needs to occur on this important subject.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to enter into the debate over the two-minuter. One of the things I think we're failing to do—the member from Oak Ridges, if I peel away the onion skin and talk about one of the things that he mentioned that I do agree with him 100% on, it is to try to find the programming that entices people to continue to learn. What he characterized, unfortunately, was that it was going to be a student at 18 years old sitting in the desk in front of the teacher in the same school. Unfortunately, that's not celebrating the great programs that are happening in our province as we speak.

Some of the wonderful recapturing of the essence of what we should be doing for students is happening in my riding, is happening in ridings across the province, where we're re-engaging. We had a graduation ceremony in Brantford that represented 32 different students who, until that point where we reinvented how we provide that education—we celebrated 32 new people. They were all guaranteed spots in college because of what they were doing, what those wonderful teachers have done, what those wonderful administrators have done and those supportive parents who came to us during that time and asked, "Is there a way we can continue to get our children to learn until they're 18 and beyond?" That's what this is.

Let's stop playing games with who said what and where; let's talk about our kids. Let's talk about those kids who have been failed as a result of our refusal—sticking a square peg in a round hole. It's time for us to start talking about what success should be. We should be celebrating those successes. We should be talking about what new, innovative ways we are getting those kids away from the streets, away from the bad choices and away from the people who are making them make bad choices. Yes, they're responsible for some of the choices they've made, and in my discussions with them they are accepting that responsibility. They are now saying, "Do you know what? You're on our side. We're going to go to college, we're going to get a job and we're going to contribute to our society." That's what we're talking about, and we should stay focused on that.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Oak Ridges has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Klees: I want to thank the members from Peterborough, Hamilton East, Burlington and Brant for their comments.

I want to thank especially the member for Brant because he makes my point and he makes it very well, that there are already existing programs in this province that do precisely what we know needs to be done: meet the needs of our students. What we don't need is a piece of legislation that is draconian, that is punitive, which is represented in Bill 52. That is my point.

That is why I am objecting and why we as the official opposition will soundly vote against this legislation, because it does not do what the member from Brant says. What it does is it paints the wrong picture about students in this province, who need to be celebrated; I agree. They don't need to be threatened with a withholding of their driver's licence; employers don't need to be threatened with a fine of \$1,000 for hiring someone into a part-time job because they happen not to be in high school. What we need to do is celebrate their differences, celebrate their unique way of learning and ensure that our education system is there to meet those needs. That's what we need to do. This bill is a desperate attempt by this government to cobble together results, to backfill an irresponsible campaign commitment by this government. That's what this is.

I believe the people in this province—parents across this province, education stakeholders—will see this bill for what it is: a political document. It is bad public policy. It will not do what the member from Brant says needs to be done; that is already being done. We need to support those kinds of programs, and he has my full support and the support of the official opposition for those kinds of programs.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1803.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Algoma–Manitoulin	Brown, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (L) Speaker / Président	Guelph–Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)
Ancaster–Dundas– Flamborough–Aldershot	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)
Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC) Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Haliburton–Victoria–Brock	Scott, Laurie (PC)
Beaches–East York / Beaches–York–Est	Prue, Michael (ND)	Halton	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
Bramalea–Gore–Malton– Springdale	Kular, Kuldip (L)	Hamilton East / Hamilton–Est	Horwath, Andrea (ND)
Brampton Centre / Brampton–Centre	Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Hon. / L'hon. Marie (L) Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Brampton West–Mississauga / Brampton–Ouest–Mississauga	Dhillon, Vic (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton–Ouest	Marsales, Judy (L)
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Hastings–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Huron–Bruce	Mitchell, Carol (L)
Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kenora–Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Chatham–Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener–Centre	Milloy, John (L)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Kitchener–Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Don Valley East / Don Valley–Est	Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, deputy government House leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
Don Valley West / Don Valley–Ouest	Wynne, Kathleen O. (L)	Lanark–Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Dufferin–Peel– Wellington–Grey	Tory, John (PC) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	Leeds–Grenville	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Durham	O'Toole, John (PC)	London North Centre / London–Centre–Nord	Matthews, Deborah (L)
Eglinton–Lawrence	Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L) Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration	London West / London–Ouest	Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Elgin–Middlesex–London	Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail	London–Fanshawe	Ramal, Khalil (L)
Erie–Lincoln Essex	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Markham	Wong, Tony C. (L)
Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke–Centre	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga–Centre	Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L) Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Etobicoke North / Etobicoke–Nord	Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports	Mississauga East / Mississauga–Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga–Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (L) Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement	Mississauga West / Mississauga–Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Nepean–Carleton	MacLeod, Lisa (PC)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)	St. Paul's	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général
Niagara Falls	Craitor, Kim (L)	Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)
Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)	Stormont–Dundas– Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L) Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Toronto–Danforth	Tabuns, Peter (ND)
Ottawa–Vanier	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones	Trinity–Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Parry Sound–Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Waterloo–Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Perth–Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Whitby–Ajax	Elliott, Christine (PC)
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.

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