



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 30 October 2006

Lundi 30 octobre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 30 October 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 30 octobre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Last week, the McGuinty Liberals spent most of their time in statements condemning the opposition parties for not supporting Bill 43. Let me make it very clear: I do not support Bill 43, because it does not protect precious groundwater around new landfills while at the same time handcuffing the agricultural community to abide by new strict rules without compensation.

How much did the McGuinty Liberals listen to the citizens of North Simcoe site 41 following the Walkerton tragedy? Not at all. Did they listen to the opposition they received in the form of thousands of letters and e-mails? No. Did they listen to the thousands of signatures they received on petitions? No. Did they listen to the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his 2004 annual report? No. Did they listen to the private member's bill Waste Disposal Site 41 in the Township of Tiny Act, that parallels the Adams Mine Lake Act, which I introduced? No, they did not. Did they listen to the expertise provided by experts in the field from around the world? No, they did not. Did they listen to Tiny's Residents Working Together and the five busloads of citizens who held a rally here on August 21, the opening day of the Clean Water Act? No, they did not.

What did they do? On Friday 21 October, the day after the Clean Water Act was proclaimed, they gave the final approval of site 41. Site 41 will contaminate the groundwater. Shame on Dalton McGuinty for allowing this to happen to the people in the township of Tiny.

INTERNATIONAL PLOWING MATCH

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I am pleased to rise in the House today to congratulate the organizers of the 2006 Peterborough county International Plowing Match and Rural Expo. I wish to thank the Ontario Plowmen's Association, the Peterborough County Plowmen's Association and the more than 2,200 volunteers for ensuring that the highest standards set by the North American Farm Show Council were met, if not exceeded.

Congratulations to local IPM Chairman Norm Blodgett, who has volunteered his time since 2004 to create Ontario's premier outdoor Rural Expo.

Finally, host farm family Jim and Marg Glenn deserve a special thank you for welcoming more than 81,000 visitors to their family farm. On Friday night they were honoured by the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce and the Peterborough County Federation of Agriculture with the 2006 Peterborough Farm Family of the Year Award.

Now that the dust has settled on Mather's Corners, we can all reflect on the tremendous success of this year's IPM. You've made Peterborough and Ontario very, very proud.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): As you know, P3s are public-private partnerships by which a government gets a consortium of private companies to finance, build and maintain buildings for a set amount of money.

Let me remind the House what Dalton McGuinty had to say about P3s just a few short years ago: "P3s represent an extraordinary departure from our history when it comes to public hospitals." "We don't support the Americanization of hospitals." But oh, how times have changed.

On Friday, the Royal Ottawa Hospital, a P3 initiative of the former Conservative government, was officially opened with Premier McGuinty front and centre—part of his self-congratulatory tour. What is galling is that, during the 2003 campaign, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals spoke strongly against the Conservatives' P3 hospital initiatives. In Brampton, Liberal candidates actually went door to door fear-mongering, telling the voters that their brand new hospital would be charging patients high fees because it was a triple-P project.

The former PC government knew that P3s were the way to rebuild our province's aging hospital infrastructure; Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals knew that as well. Clearly, this is yet another case of saying anything, doing anything, just to get elected—then flip-flop. This is ironclad proof that the Premier's words, promises and positions are nothing more than shallow attempts to get a vote.

A warning to the people of Ontario: He has done it before; he will try to do it to you again.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Several significant developments have occurred recently on the

child care front. Last Wednesday, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care released their guide book, which identifies their expectations of the McGuinty government. It's an excellent report. I highly recommend it, and congratulate the many hard-working individuals and groups that produced it. In fact, I have order forms here for anybody who would like to order the guide.

It reflects the participation of working women, people with disabilities, lower-income groups, single parents, rural and First Nations communities, immigrants, refugees and other racialized communities. It talks about the need for inclusion, for subsidies and investment, for decent wages in the child care sector.

We can't let the ever-present and growing need for regulated, not-for-profit, affordable child care drop from the radar screen just because the McGuinty Liberals haven't lived up to their promise. They say they recognize the importance of a child's early years and the provision of quality child care for all children, yet they haven't put the funding into the expansion they promised. They say they value the role of ECE and child care workers, but have done nothing to address the low pay and workplace issues they face.

We've seen the McGuinty government playing somewhat of a shell game over child care funding. They promised \$300 million investment for new child care spaces and it never arrived. The Harper cutbacks are wrong and shameful, but the pulling back by the McGuinty government is unconscionable.

Last week, we marked Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day. If the McGuinty government really values child care programs and the early years specialists who provide them, then show it with decent wages and working conditions, and flow the promised investments that never came.

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I rise in the House today to draw attention to some of the many grants that the Ontario Trillium Foundation is providing to communities in my riding, as they're doing throughout the province of Ontario. Each year, the Ontario Trillium Foundation makes approximately 1,500 grants to non-profit and charitable organizations. These grants are in great demand.

Grants announced in 2006 in my riding of Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge included: the Uxbridge Bowling Club, some \$53,800 to make recreational activities more accessible throughout the year; the Uxbridge-Scott Historical Society, some \$22,700 to improve accessibility to and the safety of their site; the Pickering Ajax Italian Social Club, some \$66,700 to ensure continued access to sports and recreation; the corporation of the township of Uxbridge, \$71,000 for their library facility repairs; the Frenchmen's Bay Yacht Club, some \$79,000 to make their entrance and washrooms accessible, and to integrate those with disabilities into their program; and the L.M. Montgomery Society of Ontario, \$50,000 for the restor-

ation of the Leaskdale Manse Museum, a national historic site, through completion of a conservation plan.

Grants announced in 2006 also served the broader part of the region of Durham, and those include: the Durham Children's Groundwater Festival, \$68,000; the Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham, \$100,000 to ensure programs are available for those who are immigrants to our community and refugees. Those are a few of the grants that the Ontario Trillium Foundation has announced in 2006.

1340

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CO-OPERATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): Exactly seven months ago today, I was elected by the people of Nepean–Carleton to represent them in this place. The day before that, I was proud to work for Canada's new government in Ottawa. As a member of this Legislature, I'm proud to work with my former colleagues in the federal government in Ottawa and with the municipality that I represent. I think working with other levels of government on behalf of the people, for the people, is the right thing to do.

This government clearly disagrees. In a bitter and twisted moment, the Premier referred to three of his former colleagues in this place—my predecessor, in fact—as “a recurring nightmare,” because they are serving our province and our country in the federal cabinet, doing the job they were elected to do by the people of this province and the people of this country. Not only was the Premier as antagonistic—

Interjections.

Ms. MacLeod: —as his members are right now, but it was a vast departure from his comments after the federal election, when he said, “Well, that was another government, at another time in history.”

The Premier will say one thing to Ontario's face but another behind its back. If he truly wanted to stand up for Ontario, he'd be working with Ministers Baird, Flaherty and Clement like the people expect him to. But instead, day in and day out, the McGuinty model of diplomacy is played out in this Legislature like it is right now. It is polarizing, and it is wrong. It pits us against them and it pits Ontario against Canada, and that is not helpful.

Building a partnership with the rest of Canada, including with Canada's new, and I might add honest, government is what is best for the residents of Ontario. But you know what they say: When you get in trouble at home, you pick a fight with the feds. I hardly call that standing up for Ontario. It sounds more like falling poll numbers.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): Recently we had some very special guests visit us here at Queen's Park. They were the graduating class of the University of Toronto's occupational therapy program for 2006-07. These young men and women will

soon begin their careers in a field that will only gain importance in the coming years.

Ontarians as a whole work long hours on the job, and it becomes more common for them to incur injuries, ranging from repetitive stress syndrome to the all-too-common BlackBerry thumb. Occupational therapists take a look at our work environments and strive to make them more worker friendly, leading to increased productivity, less strain and fewer hospital visits.

These students came to Queen's Park to thank the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and this government for supporting them. By investing in the occupational therapy program at the University of Toronto, this government has demonstrated foresight both in terms of supporting these young students and in terms of investing in the future of Ontario's workers and the health care system.

I wish to congratulate the students of the University of Toronto's occupational therapy program for coming to Queen's Park to recognize the government that is listening, and I join them in thanking this government for again showing leadership in planning for the future in health care. I wish to congratulate all future occupational therapists and wish them the very best in their studies in classrooms and field placements across this province.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): When this government was elected to office in 2003, the health care system of this province was in ruins after years of severe budget cuts by the previous NDP and Conservative governments. Hospitals had been closed, services were reduced, and thousands of doctors and nurses had been laid off. The only thing that increased during these difficult years was the length of time Ontarians had to wait for life-saving treatment.

But this government puts the health and safety of Ontarians first. We invested \$611 million in new medical procedures to reduce wait times. We increased hospital funding by \$2.4 billion. We hired more nurses and doctors and increased spaces in medical training programs. We invested millions to increase long-term-care beds.

I'm pleased to inform the House that Ontarians are being treated faster than other Canadians from coast to coast. Recently, the former CMA president gave us high praise when he said that Ontario has gone "from a laggard to a leader." In fact, in every category measured in a recent survey, Ontario now consistently shows the shortest wait times of all provinces, with the shortest wait time for specialist consultations, 7.4 weeks; the shortest wait time for treatment after seeing a specialist, 7.5 weeks; the shortest wait time for a CT scan, 4.3 weeks; the shortest wait time for an MRI, eight weeks; and the shortest wait time for ultrasounds, two weeks.

The results of this study show that the hard work of this government has paid off. It shows that this gov-

ernment is the only government to which Ontarians can trust their health care.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): Last Thursday, the member from Kenora-Rainy River, Mr. Hampton, suggested that the recent challenges faced by St. Marys Paper in Sault Ste. Marie are solely because of energy issues and said, in reference to our government, "We see you drive hydro rates through the roof."

If the leader of the third party had bothered to get the facts straight on St. Marys, he would have found that in 2003 they were paying 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour and are now paying 6.4 cents. This comes as a result of our government's commitment to bring new power online in this province after years of inaction.

We have produced more than 3,000 megawatts, on target for 10,000 megawatts.

The leader of the third party talks a lot about electricity, but when his party was in power they built no new electrical supply, paid \$150 million to cancel the Manitoba power agreement and raised hydro rates by 40%.

It's reprehensible that the NDP is preying on the fears of families and using this situation for cheap political gain. While they're handing out partisan flyers in the Soo, our government is working on real solutions for St. Marys Paper, the workers and their families.

This company, like many others, has been hard hit by a high Canadian dollar, and we all know that this factor alone is having the greatest effect on the company's ability to meet its pension obligations. So we're working to find efficiencies in areas that we, as a province, can influence.

We've provided \$900 million to support the forestry sector. We've introduced innovative purchasing agreements to help create projects like the Brookfield wind farm and ASI's cogen project.

Funding is available for St. Marys Paper to help them build a cogeneration project. We're at the table for St. Marys Paper, the workers—

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT ACT (DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DU POISSON ET DE LA FAUNE (CORMORANS À AIGRETTES)

Mr. Parsons moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 156, An Act to amend the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la protection du poisson et de la faune.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): This bill is intended to address the crisis that is being created in rural Ontario by the astronomical growth in the number of double-crested cormorants.

It is believed that the double-crested cormorants consume more fish in Ontario, at the rate of one pound per bird per day, than commercial fishing, sport fishing and poaching all put together. In addition, they are devastating the landscape in parts of rural Ontario, making public beaches unusable.

This bill will reclassify the double-crested cormorant to be considered in the same family as American crows, brown-headed cowbirds and common grackle and in fact will allow for greatly increased opportunities for the harvesting of these double-crested cormorants.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Once again, the much-anticipated motion, as follows—the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is awaiting this; the member for Niagara Centre is awaiting this. 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, October 30, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): 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 1349 to 1354.

The Speaker: Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion 219. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnett, Ted	Dombrowsky, Leona	Oraziotti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Parsons, Ernie
Balkissoon, Bas	Elliott, Christine	Peters, Steve
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Hardeman, Ernie	Racco, Mario G.
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Rinaldi, Lou
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Smitherman, George
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Tascona, Joseph N.
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Di Cocco, Caroline	O'Toole, John	Zimmer, David

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

Nays

DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	Yakabuski, John
Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 51; the nays are 8.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

VISITORS

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to welcome—and I know I speak for everyone in the House here—Lynn Peterson, the mayor of Thunder Bay. Her dedication to northern Ontario is truly appreciated by all.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to introduce the students from Leo Baeck Day School from Thornhill on this side of the House.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Today I'm pleased to announce that family medical leave has been expanded to allow many more people to take the time they need to care for a gravely ill loved one. They can do this without worrying about losing their jobs. Before today, the people who could take family medical leave were limited to a number of immediate family members. Family medical leave can now be taken to care for brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, nephews and nieces. It can also be taken to care for certain relatives of an employee's spouse. Even a close friend who is not a direct family member may now be eligible for family medical leave.

This government recognizes that people need assurances that while they are caring for the gravely ill, their jobs will be protected. By expanding the number of people who can benefit from family medical leave, we are now creating a new level of fairness. Members will recall that our government introduced amendments to the Employment Standards Act to create family medical leave in 2004 that were subsequently passed by this Legislature. Family medical leave ensures that Ontario employees who must take time off work to care for seriously ill loved ones do not lose their jobs. Our government is on the side of families who need to support loved ones during their final days.

Now, because we see the benefit in providing this leave, we believe it is right to make it possible for more

Ontarians to qualify for this program. In doing so, we recognize today's society, where family members may be hundreds if not thousands of miles apart; we recognize those people who are not in a traditional family situation; we also recognize the diversity of today's multi-ethnic society, with many groups relying on extended family to support one another. Our government understands that many can provide critically important support when illness strikes, not just a family member.

1400

Under family medical leave, an employee can take up to eight weeks of job-protected leave to provide care or support to a person who has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring during a period of 26 weeks. Family medical leave also allows people to better balance their work and family responsibilities, similar to pregnancy and parental leaves. Some employees may also be eligible for the employment insurance compassionate care benefit program.

You don't have to look far to see the growing level of employee stress due to work-family conflict caused by an aging population and increasing workplace demands. Employees are more likely to miss work because of caregiving responsibilities. Caregivers, we have to recognize, are under stress. Someone they love is gravely ill. Family medical leave provides support to individuals in that time of need.

It also is a positive step for businesses. Providing job-protected leave supports business by creating a more positive, loyal and productive workplace for employers. Employers know that family caregiving has a direct impact on workplaces. We believe in supporting Ontario families during difficult times. The approaching death of a loved one is one of the most difficult passages in life. The availability of care from family members will allow many to remain in familiar surroundings for much longer. They will have the comfort and support of those dearest to them.

This government is committed to improving the quality of life for the people of Ontario. This change provides support to even more families when they need it most. It further strengthens the working relationship between employers and employees, and it will provide comfort to more people who are seriously ill.

Family medical leave is the result of a compassionate government that cares for Ontario families. The expansion of family medical leave is good for families, it's good for employees and it's good for employers, but most of all, it's good for the citizens of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): In response to the Minister of Labour's statement on expanding family medical leave, I want to say that certainly we're in support of that. It's a program that was put in place in 2004, and we're certainly supportive. I don't know anyone who wouldn't be supportive, except maybe those people who don't have a job in Ontario because of the punitive taxation and the levels of wasted spending that this government has been putting on the people of Ontario.

They wasted \$6 million to drop the "C" from the OLCG, \$20 million for raises for Liberal appointees in government agencies and boards, \$100 million for partisan government advertising, \$91 million to fire nurses, and \$219,000 to pay a Liberal ad firm to redraw the trillium logo. This government is out of touch with the middle class. You are overtaxing them, wasting money, and therefore people are out of jobs.

Ninety thousand manufacturing jobs have been lost since the beginning of 2005. At least 4,000 forestry jobs were lost in that time. Ontario's unemployment rate is higher than the national average for only the second time in 30 years. RBC forecasts that Ontario will be dead last in Canada in economic growth this year and is on the cusp of a recession.

Some of those jobs that have been lost—I'll just read: Imperial Tobacco at Guelph and Aylmer, closure, 555 jobs; GM in various locations, layoffs, over 1,000 jobs lost; Ford, layoffs, over 1,100; DaimlerChrysler, over 1,000 jobs lost; Sears in various locations, 1,200 jobs lost; Backyard Products in Collingwood, 230 jobs lost; Blue Mountain Pottery, Collingwood, 37 jobs lost; Kaufman Furniture, Collingwood, 147 jobs lost; Nacan Starch Products, Collingwood, 87 jobs lost; Automation Tooling System, ATS, in Cambridge and Burlington, over 139 jobs lost; Nestlé plant in Chesterville, closure, 300 jobs lost; La-Z-Boy in Waterloo, closure of that plant, 413 jobs lost; Ferranti-Packard, St. Catharines, 212 jobs lost; Norampac Inc., Red Rock, 175 jobs lost; Uniboard Canada Inc., New Liskeard, 73 jobs lost; Trent Rubber in Lindsay, closure of the plant, 124 jobs lost; ERCO Worldwide, Thunder Bay, 26-plus jobs lost; Glenoit, Elmira, closure, 75 jobs; Hemosol, Mississauga, 50 jobs lost—

Interjection.

Mr. Wilson: It has everything to do with the statement. You get up and you expand a program, but if you don't have a job, family medical leave isn't going to do you any good.

Sleeman, Guelph, 40 jobs lost; Glis Inc., Sarnia, 35 jobs lost; Bazaar and Novelty, St. Catharines, 200 jobs lost; Rheem Canada, Hamilton, closure, 150 jobs lost; Ball Packaging, Burlington, 100 people laid off; Redpath Sugar, Niagara Falls, 20 jobs lost; Harrowsmith cheese, Harrowsmith, 89 jobs lost; World's Finest Chocolate Factory, Campbellford, 125 jobs lost; Hershey Chocolates, Smiths Falls, 50 jobs lost; KUS Canada Inc., Leamington, 120 jobs lost when that plant closed; Prescott Shirt Co., Prescott, 53 jobs lost; Nexen, Amherstburg, 20 jobs lost; Columbia Forest Products, Rutherglen, 63 jobs lost; Cascades Inc., Thunder Bay, 375 jobs lost; Fleetwood Metal Industries, Tilbury, 130 jobs lost; ABB, Guelph, 280 jobs; AFG Glass, London and Concord, 250 jobs; Humpty Dumpty, Brampton, 188 jobs lost; Saint-Gobain, Brantford, 39 jobs lost; Domtar, Ottawa and Cornwall, almost 1,000 jobs lost; Dana, Burlington, 80 jobs lost; Smurfit-Stone, Pembroke, 140 jobs lost; GDX Automotive, Welland, 150 jobs lost; ABC Taxi, Sudbury, 60 jobs lost; VSA LLC, Kitchener, 150 jobs lost; Ford, St. Thomas and Windsor, 1,200 jobs lost; John Deere,

Woodstock, 325 jobs; Bowater, Thunder Bay, 280; Curwood Packaging, Georgetown, 147 jobs lost; Good-year, Collingwood, 37 jobs lost; Winpack Technologies, Toronto, 250 jobs lost; Maytag, the head office in Burlington, 90 jobs cut there; Sterling Truck, St. Thomas, 600 jobs slashed there; International Truck, Chatham, 500 jobs lost there; Wallaceburg Preferred Partners, 250 jobs lost there.

I've got six more pages here of hundreds and hundreds more jobs that have been lost because there's no economic plan from this government. They're wasting taxpayers' money and they don't care about the middle class and people having good jobs.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): The irony of this announcement is that the people who have the greatest need to care for their own families—because they don't have the economic means, they don't have the assets and the resources to pay for private care—are the ones working at such low-wage jobs that they can't afford to take unpaid time off work to engage in that care. Here's a government that talks about compassion, yet it's a government that refuses to raise the minimum wage, the bare-bones minimum of \$10 an hour, like New Democrats have advocated and like Cheri DiNovo put forward in a private member's bill just a week ago, that even the Toronto Star endorses editorially.

When you've got workers, most of them increasingly women, working not just at one job but literally, no longer proverbially, at two and three jobs, we know where they're working. We know these women. We see them at 6 a.m. in the 7-Elevens, on their feet all day to 3 o'clock, until they get the kids home from school. Then they go off to the evening job in a restaurant or tavern, again working for minimum wage and hoping for a few tips.

These are not anonymous people, these are not non-people, these are not mere statistics; these are real people. Ms. DiNovo has spoken of them most graphically and passionately when she addressed that issue but a few days ago here in this Legislature.

Here's a government that talks about compassion for workers and their families, but it still won't let every worker in this province belong to a trade union and engage in free collective bargaining, not just around wages but around workplace health and safety.

The Liberals in the year 2006 still say to agricultural workers in this province that, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms notwithstanding, agricultural workers will not be allowed, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, to belong to a trade union and to organize and collectively bargain around wages and workplace health and safety.

Here's a government that talks about compassion for workers and their families, but will they extend card-based certification to every worker in this province so that the poorest workers, so that the workers who are most at risk in their workplaces, so that the lowest-paid workers, so that the workers doing some of the most dangerous jobs in this province, could form a trade union and collectively bargain as well? Compassion, my foot. It takes a lot to sit and listen to Liberals talk about com-

passion for workers and their families when Wal-Mart is running rampant with anti-union campaigns and this government refuses to give those poorest workers some of the most modest tools to permit them to engage in trade union organization.

1410

Over the course of the last two years alone, you accommodated 118,000 workers. They've got all the time in the world now to take care of ill family members because they don't have jobs. Just last week, at Casino Niagara: 104 people tossed out like that in a New York minute; 300 positions eliminated, and the minister had the compassion to stand and say that the government would aid these people in their retraining. They've already been retrained, Minister. They were the people who used to work at Ferranti-Packard. They were the people who used to work at Atlas Steel. They were the people who used to work at E.G. Marsh. They were the people who used to work at Ford glass. They already lost their jobs in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. They're one of the 118,000. You retrained them. You trained them to be blackjack dealers, and now you've laid them off. You've tossed them out the door. You introduced technology that's going to guarantee bigger and bigger profits for casinos and more and more revenues for the province but fewer and fewer jobs for those workers for whom the casino was the workplace of last resort.

I say that this government hasn't displayed compassion for workers and their families. This government has displayed disdain for workers and their families. This government has displayed disdain for single moms who work at two and three jobs, working incredibly hard, oftentimes in incredibly dangerous workplaces and under dangerous circumstances and for the lowest of wages. This government hasn't shown compassion for senior citizens, people who've worked all their lives trying to continue to support themselves on pensions that become worthless over the course of a few years of this government's skyrocketing electricity prices and this government's refusal to tackle property taxes going through the roof, which is forcing senior citizens in their retirement years into literal homelessness after spending a lifetime of working, a lifetime of investing and often paying for that home twice as they put kids through university or community college.

This government has betrayed workers in this province. This government has betrayed workers and their families. This government has betrayed retirees. I take no solace from today's announcement—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Min-

ister, if you walk out the front doors of the Legislature you'll notice that there are students holding a mock funeral for post-secondary education in Ontario. This protest doesn't seem to jibe with Mr. McGuinty's self-appointed claim to be the education Premier. You claim to be funding an additional \$6.2 billion of post-secondary education, while the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance points out that you are spending half that money during this mandate, and the other half won't be spent until after the next election.

On over 40 occasions you've used the \$6.2-billion figure as if it's already been invested. In fact, the finance minister said last Thursday in this House, "Today, hundreds of thousands of students are benefiting from our historic \$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary education." Minister, why do you continue to use a figure that has no bearing on what is actually happening? You'll certainly say anything to get re-elected.

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): It's a great question coming from the party that raised tuition between 100% and 1,000% on the students in the province of Ontario. It's a great question coming from the member. The first act they did was to cut universities' and colleges' budgets by up to 20%.

We have invested in post-secondary education and skills training in the following ways: \$6.2 billion over five years. That's money going out the door. It means that college and university budgets are increasing by 26.4% over just four years. It means almost 200,000 students are receiving OSAP and 120,000 students are receiving grants. More opportunities, more assistance, more grants and higher-quality education for the students of Ontario: That's what Ontarians need from a party on post-secondary education, not the cuts that you delivered.

Mr. Wilson: This is a government that continues to live in the past.

Here's what the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance says: "A detached look at the numbers reveals that the public should not be left with the impression that all is well with higher education."

Here's what the Council of Ontario Universities says: "The government funding announced to date and the tuition revenues ... will not keep pace with anticipated enrolment growth. When university inflation ... is factored in, the resources per student are likely to leave Ontario still near last place among provinces in per-student funding for universities."

Why don't you just admit that rather than putting in unprecedented levels of funding, what you're really doing is an unprecedented number of photo ops and announcements using inflated numbers?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I think the member clearly outlines the challenge, that after their government and the NDP years, we have a huge mountain to climb. That's why we needed the investment of \$6.2 billion in post-secondary education and training. What have we accomplished? Eighty-six thousand more students today are receiving post-secondary education than when we started,

and that's progress; 120,000 students are receiving grants, including the restoration of upfront tuition grants to 60,000 students, which were cut by the NDP; 27% more assistance to students who need to be able to afford post-secondary education. During all of their years and all of their rhetoric, the NDP and the Tories raised tuition, but they didn't raise student assistance after 1993. And 800 more professors, better equipment, updated student support services—more students, better opportunities, higher-quality education. That's our commitment.

Mr. Wilson: Minister, not only have you been inaccurate in terms of the funding numbers you've used, you're also spreading inaccuracies in your statements about the student access guarantee program. Last week, in estimates, you admitted that 20,000 potential students a year apply but do not qualify for OSAP, and therefore do not qualify for your student access guarantee program. When you announced this initiative, you said, "No qualified Ontario students will be prevented from attending Ontario's public colleges and universities due to a lack of financial support programs." How can you call this a guarantee, when you've admitted that 20,000 students a year are turned away from this program?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Unbelievable: The party that raised tuition between 100% and 1,000% without increasing student assistance by one penny per student now worries about affordability. When we brought in the Reaching Higher plan, we doubled the student aid budget. Every individual student now qualifies for more, with 120,000 students receiving grants, and 60,000 upfront tuition grants, when two years ago there were none.

He had a guarantee: a guarantee of paying more and getting less. Our guarantee is more opportunities, more assistance in grants, higher-quality education and a commitment to the future of the province of Ontario. And what did you say to the colleges and universities when you cut their budget in the first year by 20%? What was the statement that you made then?

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. After three years of delay and denial, you finally acknowledged that you were aware of the crisis in emergency rooms across the province of Ontario. However, your response has focused not on the emergency room crisis but rather on your public relations crisis. Your announcement on Friday contained no timelines and no measurements. Will you tell us why Friday's announcement did not contain timelines or measurements?

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Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The reality is, of course, that for three years now we have been working to rebuild the system capacity that the honourable member's pen struck away from health care. The reports that we had worked on for Friday's successful

response have been written by health care institutions—the Ontario Hospital Association, the Ontario Medical Association—and their report laid the responsibility for the challenges of ERs on the decisions of previous governments, particularly with respect to doctor shortages and too small acute care capacity.

That minister's party reduced acute care capacity in Ontario by 22%. We're the party that's moving forward by reconstructing and, at 9%, bringing significant new capacity to the system while at the very same time adding community capacity as well. I think it's appreciated how much work was done by the Ontario Hospital Association, by the Ontario Medical Association and by community-based health care organizations working together, moving forward together. We're going to improve circumstances in Ontario's emergency rooms.

Mrs. Witmer: I would recommend to the minister that he look at all of the facts. The reality is that our government added 20,000 long-term-care beds to the system and we expanded community care services. I would suggest, as far as the statements that he's making, he knows that they're far away from the truth.

Minister, you said this summer that "addressing Ontario's increasing demand for health care services is a complex task, and we know that the answers aren't as easy as simply spending more money." True, and yet, throwing money at the problem is the only thing you've done in this case.

You've now had two reports. You've sat on some of them and you've ultimately ignored the recommendations. You received this last one. It had 16 recommendations and you've largely ignored them. As you know, they recommended performance targets, accountability frameworks, standards for emergency departments, and a methodology to define bed needs. Why are you ignoring the recommendations in this report?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It takes a considerable degree of chutzpah on the part of the honourable member to stand in this place and so directly contrast her comments with those of Dr. Bob Bell. On Friday, I was joined by one of the authors of the very report that the honourable member has just stood in her place and said that we sat on and that we ignored. I understand, for partisan purposes, why the honourable member brings her temperament and style to the Legislature and brings it on to me. But I don't understand, at the heart of it, why, when we're joined by the president of the Ontario Medical Association, by the head of the Ontario Hospital Association, by the president of our largest hospital, the signatory to the very report that the honourable member speaks about, she criticizes the sector. I don't understand that.

The report that she said we haven't responded to said this: "The main overarching causes of overcrowding are twofold: a lack of bed availability and a lack of integration between community and hospital health care resources. The number of acute care beds in Ontario fell by 22% during the mid- to late 1990s."

Mrs. Witmer: If we want to be truthful, the report also—by the way, I have recently met with Dr. Bell

myself, and I would say to you that the report says that it "provides a rational framework ... to assess whether funding of additional acute care capacity is required." This "may include funding of additional acute care beds, long-term-care beds, mental health beds, rehabilitation beds ... and community resources." So there's the truth, as opposed to what you're saying. It also says, "It is imperative that the ... recommendations be read and implemented as a collective ... a system-wide problem cannot be remedied by selecting only portions of a system-wide solution."

I ask you again, Minister: Why have you resisted the opportunity to introduce benchmarks and targets for emergency room wait times?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Here the member goes again, one more time. She's hard at it, attacking the health care system. Here's what was said on Friday: "'We congratulate Minister Smitherman for acting on the issue of emergency department overcrowding and for recognizing that more acute care and long-term beds is at the heart of an effective systemic solution,' said Alan Drummond, an emergency physician and spokesperson for CAEP."

The point was made so clearly on Friday. We're taking these important steps forward and we're building on a critical care capacity that added \$90 million in January. As for health care and emergency rooms, there's really important and challenging work that must yet be done. We all agree on that point. But I don't think it's very helpful for the honourable member to come in here and attack the health care system like that. We're so grateful for the work that's being done on the front lines by people who are dedicated, passionate and committed. Working alongside them, we will improve access to health care in Ontario.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Deputy Premier: When the former Conservative government announced profit-driven, privately financed hospitals, one in Ottawa, Dalton McGuinty was very critical and was opposed. In fact, he said, "We believe in public ownership and public financing.... I will take these hospitals and bring them inside the public sector." But on Friday, Dalton McGuinty completely reversed himself. He participated in the official opening of the same profit-driven, privately financed hospital he was critical of, a hospital which advertises itself as "Canada's first hospital to partner with the private sector." What's more, it's a secret deal. The public isn't allowed to know the financial workings of this private hospital deal.

Deputy Premier, can you tell us why Dalton McGuinty reversed himself once again, this time in terms of now accepting private hospitals?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think the honourable member is significantly mistaken, particularly on one point. One of the things we were privileged to do as a government soon after we came to office was

to ensure that in the agreements related to both William Osler and the Royal Ottawa, public ownership and control was maintained. At the heart of it, we believe fundamentally in those principles. Accordingly, I can assure the people who will enjoy service at those two hospitals that those hospitals are public hospitals, that the people who work in them are as dedicated as ever to the underlying challenges for which they are working on behalf of patients.

I want to say very clearly that we're proud to be a government that has moved forward so much hospital construction. We know that long-awaited hospital facilities are coming to life across the province of Ontario, and that the patients who await the services in those hospitals are very excited in anticipation. They know as well that as they come in and receive services in those hospitals, it will always be, as has been appreciated, with dedication to the patients at hand. Nothing has been altered in that circumstance.

Mr. Hampton: In that case, I think the Premier would have been embarrassed if he'd read the hospital's own press release, where they say very clearly that this is private financing. The hospital's press release says that the private corporation will continue to provide hospital services, including laundry, dietary and food services, security, and building maintenance and operations—all of that by a profit-driven private corporation. What's worse is that since the last election, the McGuinty government, instead of protecting the public health care system, has now put forward 33 such profit-driven private hospital schemes.

Before the election, Dalton McGuinty said that it was self-evident that private financing of hospitals costs more. So can you tell me again, Deputy Premier, when did Dalton McGuinty suddenly become a fan of profit-driven, privately financed hospitals?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Notwithstanding the laundry list of services that the honourable member went over, what we haven't had in the two minutes of presentation so far from the honourable member is an explanation of why, during the time he served—sat on his hands, apparently—in cabinet, these very same services were outsourced at a variety of Ontario hospitals.

The circumstances are very clear. With respect to what the honourable member speaks of, he doesn't talk about the necessity of building new hospital capital. Of course, as a party, they've never been dedicated to that. That's why the stock of hospitals is so old. Way more to the point, that same list of services, the same order of services that the honourable member has just gone on a tirade about, are exactly the kinds of services that were privatized under his watch and saw a different operation. But the core services of hospitals, where the patients are getting the services they desire from our doctors and from front-line health care providers, have not been altered. These are public hospitals, and they are hospitals that people in those communities will be proud of.

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Mr. Hampton: There's a third problem with these profit-driven, privately financed hospitals, and that is that

the McGuinty government wants to keep the financial deals completely secret. If these are public hospitals, if indeed they belong to the public of Ontario, I would think that you'd want the public of Ontario to know what the financing is and how much is going where. What we know is this: If there's \$100 for patient care, maybe \$80 will go to patient care under your profit-driven scheme, but \$20 of that will be siphoned off to corporate profit.

Deputy Premier, can you tell us, if these profit-driven, private-finance deals are such good deals, why won't you make them public? Why does the Ontario Health Coalition have to go to court to try to force you to divulge what the public should already know? Why are you trying to keep this secret from the taxpayers of Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member is referring to secret information that's available on our public website. This is what we've been reduced to in question period because of the leader of the third party: Come in and say anything you want, but without any regard for the reality, which is that this information is broadly disseminated. I remember the circumstances related to the contracts on the first agreements: They were available in a room where people were given the opportunity to come in and sit and review them.

There is a legal issue at hand that the honourable member refers to, and he knows that the courts will resolve that appropriately. But at the heart of it, we believe that public accountability and transparency are core commitments and fundamental elements of our public health care system. At the end of the day, similarly, the patients who go into these hospitals in search of service will experience a hospital as they ever have. With pride, they will experience part of the public health care system in Ontario, and I'm sure they will be grateful for the quality of service provided by our public health care providers working hard on the front lines.

Mr. Hampton: The reality is, the Ontario Health Coalition is in court today trying to force the courts to open up these secret, profit-driven private hospital deals.

TUITION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Deputy Premier: Today in Ontario, too many of our students are denied the fair opportunities we hope for them as parents. Before the last election, Dalton McGuinty said that tuition fees for colleges and universities were already too high. He promised to stop skyrocketing tuition fees and help make post-secondary education affordable. Instead, what we're seeing is a proposed 36% increase in tuition fees. Deputy Premier, increasing tuition fees by up to 36% over the next four years is not affordable—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The Minister of Labour will come to order. I won't warn the Minister of Labour again.

Mr. Hampton: My question, before government members so rudely interrupted me, was this: You want to

increase tuition fees by 36% over the next four years. How are modest- and middle-income students supposed to pay for a 36% increase in tuition fees and education costs?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd be delighted to check the Hansard and find out what answer the member gave when his party raised tuition 50% over five years—a 50% increase from a party that has long promised to freeze tuition or, indeed, to reduce it; a party that has long said it cares about affordability. But of course, what about the poorest students in the province of Ontario? What about the students who need those up-front tuition grants? They cut those up-front tuition grants.

We doubled the student assistance budget. We restored the up-front tuition grants: 120,000 students are receiving a grant, 60,000 of them up-front tuition grants; 30% more in assistance. More spaces, more students getting in, more assistance for the students: That's what affordability and accessibility should be about, not their plan of 50% increases.

Mr. Hampton: I think we have another McGuinty Liberal cabinet minister complaining about the wannabe leader of the Liberal Party. Here is the reality, Minister: Modest—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Attorney General.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: The wannabe leader of the Liberal Party says that big tuition fee increases are okay, and the McGuinty government agrees with him. But here's the reality for modest- and middle-income families: Wages aren't going up by 36%. The minimum wage is certainly not going up by 36%. The lowest-income people in Ontario certainly aren't getting a raise. Even when you work in your so-called increases in student assistance, you're still increasing tuition fees more.

So my question, again, to the McGuinty government is this: How are students of middle- and modest-income families supposed to pay a 36% increase in tuition fees over the next four years?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: So the avowed leader of the party of principles says that for five years, while he sat in cabinet, he had no choice but to go along. He couldn't stand up on principle and attack the 50% increase.

So what did we do? We've increased the operating support so that institutions can support high-quality education. We've doubled the student assistance budget. We restored the tuition upfront grants for students from families up to \$75,000 that they cut. We've increased the amount of assistance you can get. We've introduced the student access guarantee and, for the most vulnerable students such as those from first-generation families, aboriginal students or persons with disabilities, special programs to ensure that they can get in. The proof's in

the pudding: 86,000 more students now than when we started. The grants are in. We're going to make sure everyone has a fair shot at success.

Mr. Hampton: Bob Rae was wrong to increase tuition fees then and you're wrong to agree with him in increasing tuition fees now.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I can wait.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, I will not warn you again.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I won't warn the Minister of Northern Development and Mines again.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Today, college and university students held a funeral for affordable post-secondary education, and for good reason. A 36% increase in tuition fees over four years is not affordable for anybody—any modest- or middle-income family. This is a far cry from what Dalton McGuinty promised. He promised to improve quality. What we find is that the faculty-to-student ratio is amongst the worst across North America. You promised that low-income students were going to get a better deal, but their tuition fees are increasing faster and more than student aid.

I say again to the McGuinty government, how are hard-pressed students supposed to be able to afford this? Why don't you keep your original promise and bring in a tuition freeze longer than two years—a real tuition freeze?

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Hon. Mr. Bentley: Unlike the member opposite, we kept our promise. We froze tuition for the first time ever. He never did. The NDP constantly promises freezes, and students everywhere should listen. They'll promise you a freeze, and they'll deliver you a 50% increase. You were there for 1,500 days. The leader of the NDP was in government for more than 1,500 days—1,500 chances to stand up and speak up for a tuition freeze, and he never did.

So what we did was create more spaces for all students. We chose 86,000 more opportunities; increased student assistance for all students—it's up 27%; increased the number of grants available for all students—one in four students gets a grant; restored the upfront tuition grant—\$60,000; and introduced a student access guarantee. We're determined to not let students fall through the cracks, unlike his—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

PHARMACISTS

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, now that the regulations surrounding Bill 102 have been rolled out, pharmacists in rural communities are as dissatisfied as they were before. When I speak to pharmacists in rural communities in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–

Pembroke, they tell me that this bill means that some of them will have to close and that, at the very least, there will be a reduction in services. Minister, in small communities, pharmacists are a bedrock, primary part of health care in those communities. A threat to them is a threat to health care in small communities. Why will you not admit that your bill amounts to another brutal cut to health care in rural Ontario, and why won't you stand in your place and do something to fix it before we lose pharmacists in rural Ontario and rural people lose primary health care?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): If the honourable member really wants to talk about brutal cuts to health care, he's only got about a foot of distance to make up, and it's directly to his left.

Circumstances are such that we're in the midst of implementation of Bill 102, working very vigorously on that with all the various stakeholders. I agree that at the heart of it the independent pharmacist is crucial, particularly in those parts of rural Ontario where there are fewer pharmacies. We worked very hard in the development of our package to ensure that, from an economic standpoint, they were kept whole, and we're continuing to work with the Ontario Pharmacists' Association to see that through. That's the commitment we offer, acknowledging that it's a significant bill. It's very complex; there's lots to it. We're working carefully with all of these stakeholders on implementation to ensure that the circumstances that the honourable member predicts are not, in fact, true.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary, the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): Minister, I would like to suggest that you keep working on the regulations for Bill 102. Like the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, I've heard from pharmacists all around Parry Sound–Muskoka—from Parry Sound, Huntsville, Bracebridge and Gravenhurst—and they're very concerned about the regulations in Bill 102. One pharmacist writes, "I am concerned that my business will soon not be able to operate under this new drug system. There are a few scenarios which will lead to financial loss for my business. I do not believe I am being overly alarmist. We have a crisis."

Until last week, Minister, pharmacists could rely on a cost-to-operator provision which would ensure they were not forced to fill prescriptions at a loss. Now your new regulations have removed that provision. A pharmacist I met with on Friday said that he might as well close his doors and leave Ontario. Your regulations force pharmacists to choose between going bankrupt and patient care.

Minister, we already have a doctor shortage in Ontario. Will you take steps to rectify this situation so we don't have a pharmacist shortage?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I want to say to the honourable member very directly that I take seriously the responsibility we have to ensure that small, independent, rural pharmacies more particularly are appropriately supported. The work we did in Bill 102 was designed to

ensure the survivability—in fact, the thriveability—of these very same organizations. Caucus members of mine and on all sides of this House take appropriate concern with respect to how these independent pharmacists deal with the implications of Bill 102, and I take that very seriously. I do know that there's concern. Any time there is change, there is difficulty around that. I offer to the honourable members who have asked questions and to others who have spoken to me about it that I continue to work on this to ensure that, working with groups like the Ontario Pharmacists' Association, as we move forward we have a stable, small, rural, independent pharmacy in the province of Ontario, recognizing fully that these people provide tremendously important services to our patients.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question's for the Minister of the Environment. Minister, today the British government released a report warning that the impact of climate change on the world will be equivalent to that of the Great Depression and two world wars.

Minister, you've stated that climate change is a vital issue, and yet your actions have not matched your words. During estimates in September, I asked you what your target was for Ontario to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. You had no target. So today, Minister, I ask: Do you have a target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario that meets Kyoto obligations?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I'm pleased to have a chance to rise in the House and speak once again about a critical issue facing our province. It's a critical issue facing Canada and the world, and it's one where we look forward to demonstrating Ontario's leadership and building on the leadership we've already taken.

We are the first jurisdiction that is going to say no to coal. As a result of that singular commitment as a province, we will be providing the country with the single largest contribution in the reduction of greenhouse gases right across this country: 30 megatonnes of greenhouse gases, somewhat like taking seven million cars off the road.

Right now, we are looking for the federal government to step up and take leadership, along with Ontario. We signed an agreement with the federal government some many, many months ago and look forward to their contribution. Some \$538 million is on the line. That \$538 million will help us move forward with our very difficult goal of closing coal and taking on many other steps with respect to climate change. We look forward to doing that and we look forward to your input in that regard.

Mr. Tabuns: If this is the way leadership is shown, I'd be very scared to look at what happens with issues they don't care about.

Minister, the report that's being released today underscores the need to eliminate carbon emissions from the

generation of electricity. Your government has broken its promise twice on phasing out coal.

You and your Premier have talked about how you support Kyoto. Minister, will you see to it that the coal plants in this province are closed down to meet the Kyoto timelines? Are you going to meet the Kyoto timelines?

Hon. Ms. Broten: Although my friend participated in my most recent climate change breakfast, he apparently did not listen to the many efforts we're undertaking across a number of ministries. The Ministry of Energy is undertaking work with respect to the reduction of CO₂, and let me tell you, my friend: We have reduced CO₂ by 15% in our coal-fired facilities. We are taking a number of other steps across a variety of ministries, including the Ministry of Transportation, with historic investments in public transit which, too, will help us meet those critical commitments with the reduction of greenhouse gases here in our province. Our greenbelt, our gas tax, closing our Lakeview generating facility, reducing our overall coal reliance by 17%—the list goes on. We continue to take many, many steps across a variety of ministries.

Is there more to do? Absolutely. Are we going to undertake that work? You'd better believe it.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. I would like to ask the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities about the investments we have made in student aid to ensure that our students are able to attend post-secondary if they are qualified.

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): There has been a lot that has been going on. Under the Reaching Higher plan, we, in fact, doubled the amount of student assistance, and I know that's very important to the member's constituents, many of whom attend the University of Guelph or the Conestoga campus in Guelph.

We have doubled the student aid budget. We've increased the amount of assistance that any individual student can get—for the first time in nine years—by 27%. We restored the upfront tuition grants that had been eliminated by the NDP in 1993, so now, 60,000 students this September are receiving an upfront tuition grant covering between a quarter and all of their tuition, from families up to \$75,000 in income. We've introduced a student access guarantee so that, as we harmonize and integrate the government's assistance program with those found in institutions, we don't want students falling through the cracks. We want to make sure that every student in need can find the assistance they need to attend post-secondary education.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary, the member for London North Centre.

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Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): My supplementary is to the very popular Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities today. We know that the government is investing an extra \$6.2 billion in post-

secondary education and training. This historic investment has helped our colleges and universities increase their enrolment by 86,000 students since 2002-03, a 20% increase—86,000 more students getting the skills they need to be competitive in this knowledge-based society. My riding, as you well know, is the home of the University of Western Ontario, and enrolment there has gone up over 2,000 students. That's 2,000 more students getting what they need.

Yet today at Queen's Park we've got people saying that they're protesting to mourn the death of accessible post-secondary education. With so many students going on to post-secondary, how can anyone argue that—

The Speaker: The question's been asked.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: In fact, post-secondary education is more accessible in so many ways. Our intent is to ensure more opportunities of higher quality for students in the province of Ontario, and the proof is in the results: 86,000 more student spaces. We choose 86,000 more opportunities for Ontario students, and others say, "No, freeze." We choose to increase the amount of assistance available by 27% while maintaining the repayable amount at \$7,000, and others say, "No, freeze." We choose to restore upfront tuition grants so that 60,000 more students than just two years ago get those, and others say, "No, freeze." We choose to invest in programs for first-generation students—students who've never had a break in their life—so they can get into post-secondary, and others say, "No, freeze." We choose to invest in 800 more profs and higher quality education.

No freeze. We're not going to stand still; we're not going to freeze. We're going to improve the quality of education and its accessibility for all Ontarians.

WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association has expressed their concerns with your lack of action on the condition of the water pipes that bring water to and from our homes and workplaces. I'm sure you're aware that several water mains burst last week in the GTA and a huge problem occurred this week in Scarborough.

The Watertight report released over 15 months ago has not seen any action from your government. In 2002, Bill 175 laid the foundation to address the issue of aging water pipes. We've been waiting almost four years for your government to develop regulations for this legislation, yet the loss of business and residential use continues to occur due to serious water main issues. Minister, when will you provide regulations for consultation with respect to Bill 175, the Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): It is interesting to see our friends on the opposite side of the House agreeing with us that investments are long overdue with respect to our infrastructure in this province. For many, many years, our friends on that side

of the House had the opportunity to ensure that proper investments were made in sewage and infrastructure right across this province, and they chose not to make those investments.

As a result of the responsibility that we hold, the Ministry of the Environment works closely with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal—again, a cross-ministry approach across this government, because we know it is time to see those investments. We are working very closely with folks right across the province to make sure that those necessary investments are made, that people right across this province can have clean, safe water to drink, and that when we put water back into our system, it is also safe and clean.

Ms. Scott: You campaigned that you would implement all of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. You didn't do it with source water protection and you haven't done it with aging infrastructure. Your government commissioned a report from the water strategy expert panel, and you have not even responded. In a recent news article, Minister Caplan's communications adviser is quoted as saying that the ministry might look into the other recommendations in the report. While we wait, we see more broken water mains and sinkholes. In Collingwood, in spite of the state-of-the-art filtration plant, they still have to superchlorinate the water because of the corroded pipes that deliver the water. In some municipalities, up to 50% of treated water may be lost through leaks in the system. I asked you this question five months ago and you refused to respond.

Minister, too many businesses are losing money; too many residents are affected. When will you release your response to the expert water panel report, and when will you hold consultations on regulations for Bill 175? When will you do it?

Hon. Ms. Broten: It is very shocking to receive these questions from friends on the opposite side of the House who have chosen to vote against 12 of Justice O'Connor's recommendations and the Clean Water Act. If my friends truly cared about water investments, they would have made them in the past. But now we are pleased to have the responsibility because we have turned the page from where we were in the past.

We are currently developing the regulations with respect to OSWCA to move forward in a flexible approach to ensure that water investment strategies are made right across the province so that we will meet every single one of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. Our party is the party that will not go back to the days of Walkerton, unlike my friends opposite, who do not want to move forward with those really critical recommendations that Justice O'Connor made.

We look forward to moving forward with those regulations and fixing the mess that my friends opposite have left.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Deputy Premier. Across Toronto, indeed,

across Ontario, public schools are in disrepair. A recent study by the Toronto Parent Network pointed to vermin, exposed asbestos and poor air quality. Our children deserve better. Can you explain why you're encouraging the Toronto school board to spend \$40 million designated for school repairs on operating expenses?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's always nice to get a question from the honourable member. I have the privilege of living across the street from a school that includes infrastructure that's about 130 years. I also noticed, living close to these schools, that there's been an unprecedented amount of maintenance activity around them over the last few years. I had the chance to attend with the chair of the Toronto District School Board at the announcement of a \$1.8-million expenditure, related to the replacement of windows at Nelson Mandela Park school on Shuter Street. These are the personal experiences that I can relate to the honourable member.

We've made good progress in terms of reinvestment in education: \$2.7 billion so far. We were very, very proud that the Toronto District School Board has accepted the responsibility of dealing with their budget circumstances. There are challenging decisions to be made every single day, and we're very, very appreciative that those appropriately responsible to do so have made those decisions. We'll be working closely with them through our colleague the Minister of Education to continue to see that Toronto and other school boards' kids get the support they need.

Mr. Marchese: Deputy Premier, your government has promised \$275 million in the last three years to leverage \$4 billion worth of capital projects. You've only spent \$30 million of the \$75 million that you said would happen in Good Places to Learn; that's all you've spent so far.

Students in our schools deserve a real solution, not a political quick fix. You've pushed Toronto trustees to scrap plans for desperately needed repairs and use that money to pay for day-to-day operations. But when trustees at the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board attempted to try the same thing, your minister, in a private meeting with trustees, refused to let them do it.

If raiding the maintenance budget to pay for day-to-day operations is good for students in Toronto, why did you forbid it for students in Dufferin-Peel?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member brings onto the floor of the House a private meeting that I wasn't a part of and, accordingly, I think it's more appropriate that the parties who might have been there have a chance to address that.

I do think it's crucial to know that across multi-billion dollar budgets, there are always opportunities, challenges, that we are forced to look at to address the circumstances we are at present expected to address. Look at it: 3,000 projects started or completed already, 3,000 projects done or underway, bringing new life and restored capacity to, in some cases, dated capital facilities.

This is but one more example of the work we've been very involved in to address the capital deficit that we inherited. The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal can provide much more information, as required, to demonstrate the commitment we've made to enhancing the capital stock of a variety of sectors.

There is, of course, on all of these matters more work to be done. I'm very glad to see that the Toronto District School Board has decided to do that work and that our colleague the Minister of Education has already been proactive in working with them and will continue to do so on behalf of Ontario—

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

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ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh has suffered its share of economic setbacks over the last year, so I took particular interest in hearing our government's fall economic statement last Thursday. I am pleased to say that my riding is showing some encouraging signs of economic turnaround and that our government has played a key role in spurring that growth. A planned \$4.9-million upgrade to the McConnell site of the Cornwall Community Hospital has helped push the city's building construction value this year above the \$68-million mark. We are also seeing healthy building construction values in many of the townships; examples, \$7.6 million in south Stormont and \$9.3 million in south Dundas to September 2006.

Still, Minister, there is much more work to be done before Cornwall and the surrounding area can reach its full potential. What impact will the measures taken by the government have on eastern Ontario in the coming years?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I appreciate the question from my colleague because I know the extent to which he is a very modest man. He may not want me to mention in this House the extent to which some of those good things that are happening throughout his riding are directly as a result of the work that he is doing. In fact, I had an opportunity to visit the riding during the summer-time, and my colleague took me around from community to community. Individuals, whether mayors or leaders of various community organizations, would take me aside and tell me what a great job my colleague was doing. So I want to congratulate him for that.

I want to say to him, just in answer to his question, that amongst the four things that I put on the table, I think one that's going to impact his community is this additional energy we're putting into local tourism. He lives in and represents a magnificent part of the province. We want more and more Ontarians to visit those communities over the course of the next year.

Mr. Brownell: Our government understands that one of the keys to promoting a truly sustainable economic future is investing in solid public services and infrastructure. New businesses seek to establish where their employees can enjoy good hospitals, roads and schools. Meanwhile, strong public and post-secondary education systems help our future workforce compete for the best-paying jobs. Minister, our government has made great strides investing in public services and works like health care, education and roads while facing the challenge of balancing our books. Crucial to our ability to continue with this progress is a solid funding partnership with the federal government. In light of last Wednesday's news coverage that the federal government is already \$2 billion ahead of its projected surplus for this fiscal year, what steps are you taking to ensure that the federal government honours its commitments to preserving Ontario's public services and infrastructure?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: The answer is that we all need to take steps to try and get the attention of the federal government and get it to honour its obligations to the people of this province. So I'm inviting people in this Legislature—whether they're with the Tories or the New Democrats or with our own party—just to communicate with the government. I'm saying to my friends in the Conservative Party, they have a special relationship with Stephen Harper. The leader of that party, John Tory, was endorsed by Stephen Harper not very long ago. I invite them to try and wake the federal government up and let them know that they've made financial commitments to this province, and the people of Ontario expect the federal government to honour those commitments. We all need to join in that exercise, and I know my friend from Charlottenburgh is going to help us out with that.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, your party promised in writing in the last election to fully fund the fish and wildlife program of the Ministry of Natural Resources. You've broken that promise and we are now seeing the results of this broken promise. I'm hearing from conservation officers around the province that they are not able to do their job.

Earlier this month I asked you about the chronic underfunding of conservation officers. You responded that everything was just fine. You said, and I'd like to quote you: "I'd like to assure the member that compliance and enforcement of our fish and game laws is a core function of the Ministry of Natural Resources and it will remain so in the future." Minister, do you stand by that response?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Since I stood up in the House a couple of weeks ago and said that, I do stand by my response. It is a core function of the ministry and always will remain so. We obviously take very seriously the responsibility that we have to protect the

wildlife of the province of Ontario. We are right now in the midst of hunting season and our COs are out there doing their job and making sure that those who don't want to obey the rules and who abuse the privilege of harvesting our wildlife are prosecuted. They're doing their jobs and the funding is just about the same as it was last year.

Mr. Miller: Minister, let me refer you to a recent Sun Times newspaper report. I'd like to quote it: "If the Ministry of Natural Resources can't provide enough staff to enforce laws, the OPP may be able to help. Blue Mountains council voted Monday to approve spending of up to \$1,000 for the local OPP detachment to use toward hiring a fish and wildlife conservation contract training officer. The MNR employee is needed to train OPP officers to enforce the rules under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, a job normally done by the ministry's conservation officers. Provincial cutbacks have left the MNR short-staffed."

The already overtaxed OPP are being trained to do the job of conservation officers because the Ministry of Natural Resources can't provide enough staff. Minister, do you think it's right that municipalities and the OPP should have to assume the responsibilities for one of your ministry's core functions?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: We work in partnership with the OPP on many of the operations, some of those being undercover and some other types that we do together. To find some efficiencies, we are doing some of the enforcement that other agencies historically have done. So if our conservation officers are out there patrolling the backwoods and they come across people who have, for instance, liquor law violations, they are able to lay those charges now. We're working more closely together, and through that we're getting efficiencies and making sure the laws of Ontario are upheld.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Health. On Friday, you announced what you called a solution to Ontario's emergency room crisis, but it sure isn't a solution to the crisis affecting health care in Hamilton. Agencies in Hamilton will begin laying off nurses from home care any day now because you have failed to fund the high level of need in Hamilton's CCAC. Your underfunding is pushing our CCAC into a deficit and forcing it to cut home care for pediatrics, respite care, nursing care and patients with the highest needs.

When are you going to step up and provide adequate funding to the Hamilton CCAC so people will get the health care they need, nurses won't be laid off and emergency departments can free up their beds?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I want to tell the honourable member that we're very proud of the investments we've been able to make in home care over our time as a government: about a third of a billion

dollars. We recognize that some CCACs in particular are facing more pressures than others. There's \$5 million in one part of Friday's announcement and a further \$30 million in another that will be flowed to CCACs to assist these circumstances.

I cannot yet confirm an exact amount for the honourable member related to a distribution to the Hamilton CCAC, but I can confirm to the honourable member that they will be getting some additional resources in-year to address the circumstances that are possible, those reflecting on the comprehensive strategy that's necessary to support the appropriate operation of our emergency rooms.

I agree, at the heart of the honourable member's question, the necessity of better supporting community services, and there was a significant element of that in our announcement on Friday.

Ms. Horwath: Minister, Hamilton's problem is extremely acute at this point in time. But at this point, it seems like you're denying there's a crisis that we have in Hamilton. Numerous communities across Ontario, including Windsor, Niagara and Cornwall, are all experiencing crises in their local health care systems. For years, New Democrats have been calling for investments in long-term care and home care to relieve hospital overcrowding. Minister, why did you shortchange health care in Hamilton so badly, and, as with many other communities across Ontario, why did you let us down in this round?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: If the honourable member wants to talk about being let down, she should look around at her colleagues who were there when Ontario got shortchanged on the number of doctors we have.

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The circumstances are clear in the announcement that we made on Friday. We're rolling out \$142 million of resource to hospitals all across the province of Ontario. The honourable member likes to speak about one circumstance versus the other. We recognize that our obligation is to work with all Ontario communities and the 160 emergency rooms that exist there. Accordingly, you can see increased resources for communities experiencing greater-than-proportional growth. You can see resources, particularly for the smallest and most rural hospitals in the province of Ontario. You can see specific resources targeted at 10 communities in Ontario experiencing the lowest proportion of long-term-care resource.

We've responded comprehensively to the opportunities that were available. We believe this will make important progress for the people of Ontario. I want to say, I'm very proud to be part of a government whose record with respect to health care stands in contrast to the honourable member's party. They made cuts; we have not.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. In

November 2005, the McGuinty government signed Ontario's first-ever immigration agreement with the former Martin federal government. It quadrupled federal funding on language training and settlement services from \$819 to \$3,400 per immigrant. It seems that the federal Tories are dissing Ontarians in other Canada-Ontario agreements, and I'm concerned about the status of the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement. My question to the minister is: How is this funding directed, and what is the status of this agreement at this time?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough Centre for the question. Every year there are 140,000 newcomers who come into Ontario, and they need language training; they need settlement services. That's why the Premier fought so hard to ensure that we had federal investment in Ontario like they had in other provinces. So we signed that agreement. It was signed by the former Liberal government, and the present Conservative government has agreed to uphold it. So we're very anxious to see that money, because that money does not go to the government of Ontario; the money goes to the NGOs in the communities across Ontario. It goes to federal programs in Ontario. The only problem is that the money is coming, but very slowly. We want that money quickly to improve the life and the career aspirations of these highly skilled foreign-trained people, and we're waiting for that money anxiously because it'll be good for Ontario, good for Canada. So the money has got to be sped up into all Ontario communities.

Mr. Duguid: It's becoming increasingly frustrating to see how difficult it is for Ontario to get what we're due from the federal government. I appreciate and greet with some degree of relief the fact that this particular agreement appears to be intact. It's too bad that the other agreements that we have with the federal government weren't being honoured in the same way. Recent media reports criticized the federal government's position with regard to the issue of undocumented workers in Ontario. The plight of these undocumented workers has highlighted the flaw that exists in the federal immigration selection process.

My question to the minister is the following: What can be done to make sure that the immigration system works better for Ontario's newcomers?

Hon. Mr. Colle: In Canada, we have hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers. They're coming into Canada by the back door, they're working here, yet there's no system in place to ensure that people can get in the front door. So the government of Ontario has said very clearly to the federal government that we need an immigration selection system that matches the labour market needs of Ontario. We need an immigration selection system that matches immigrant selection with jobs that exist.

Right now the system is broken. We are offering to help the federal government fix this system, because it is really shameful that a country like Canada has so many undocumented workers, job needs and a points system

that does not relate to reality. We want to fix this system that will benefit not only undocumented workers but benefit employers and benefit the economy of this province. So we need to fix it and fix it yesterday.

GRIDLOCK

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, you'd be aware of the reports from Statistics Canada as well as the chambers of commerce and boards of trade, who have all been commenting, as well as the media outlets, on the state of gridlock on Ontario's highways. In fact, you would also know, Minister, that not just from my riding of Durham but from across the GTA, the commute can be as much as an hour and a half to two hours each day. If you look at this, it's worse than most of the large cities in North America, like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles. Not only that, it's a loss to the economy of about \$1.8 billion; it's bad for the environment.

Minister, there's so much evidence that this is something you should deal with and yet you've done nothing. You've made lots of promises on the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. You've made lots of promises, but you've delivered nothing. In fact, my question to you today: Minister, what is your plan, if you have one, to deal with gridlock in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'm more than pleased to respond to the member. The first thing I can suggest is the member go to www.mto.gov.on.ca. He can take a good look at the five-year plan that rolls out \$3.4 billion worth of improvements to roads and services. We have put in HOV lanes on Highway 404, HOV lanes on 403.

Interjection.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I know that the individual may not be very particularly interested; however, 11,000 people every day use that 404 HOV lane. We put in place the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority to look at the issues with gridlock that follow into the processes around the greenbelt and the moraine. We've continued to invest with our municipal partners on how they can upgrade their roads and their bridges by putting \$400 million into Move Ontario.

So there's no question we have a plan in place. It's a five-year plan that will enable us to move forward on gridlock—

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

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I've got a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

I support the petition and affix my signature.

IMMIGRANTS’ SKILLS

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition. I want to thank the members and clients of the Peel multicultural community in western Mississauga for this petition. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Access to Trades and Professions in Ontario

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas action by Ontario’s trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario’s trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

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

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario’s regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario’s employers, Ontario’s newcomers and their own member-

ship, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families.”

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

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PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. John O’Toole (Durham): I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham which reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas prostate specific antigen (PSA) tests are frequently used to screen patients for prostate conditions, including cancer; and

“Whereas there is currently a double standard because men usually pay to have a PSA test as part of a routine medical examination, while women have all cancer screening tests covered by OHIP;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, urge the province of Ontario to review its policy on funding PSA testing for men with a view to including this as a service wholly covered by OHIP.”

I’m pleased to sign and endorse this on behalf of my constituents and present it to Sarah, one of the pages.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition in support of skilled immigrants, Bill 124. It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty government is committed to establishing measures that will break down barriers for Ontario newcomers; and

“Whereas these measures will ensure that the 34 regulatory professions in Ontario have admissions and application practices that are fair, clear and open; 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, Bill 124, and work to ensure its prompt passage in the Ontario Legislature.”

I am delighted to read this petition because the member for York West is present with us, who’s the minister of—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I continue to receive petitions to do with Hydro One and forestry work. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. provides hydro to many communities in the region of Parry Sound–Muskoka; and

“Whereas there have recently been several lengthy power outages in this region affecting both private residences, schools and businesses; and

“Whereas rural customers pay among the highest distribution and delivery charges for electricity;

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

“That the Minister of Energy and the Ontario Energy Board require Hydro One Networks Inc. to make improvements in line maintenance and forestry management in the region of Parry Sound–Muskoka to ensure reliable energy for its customers.”

Mr. Speaker, I support this petition.

TUITION

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I’ve got thousands of petitions here from students. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government cancelled the tuition fee freeze after only two years and approved fee increases of up to 36% over the next four years; and

“Whereas tuition fees in Ontario have increased by more than four times the rate of inflation over the past 15 years; and

“Whereas a majority of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater public funding for colleges and universities; and

“Whereas improvements to student financial assistance are undermined by fee increases; and

“Whereas the Ontario government’s recent increase to student loan limits is set to push student debt to approximately \$28,000 for a four-year program; and

“Whereas per-student investment in Ontario still lags significantly behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students’ call to stop tuition fee hikes and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“—reduce tuition fees to 2004 levels for all students in Ontario and implement an immediate tuition fee freeze;

“—increase public funding for post-secondary education to promote access and quality;

“—expand access to financial aid in Ontario, especially for part-time students; and

“—double the number of upfront, need-based grants for Ontario students.”

I support this tuition, Speaker.

IMMIGRANTS’ SKILLS

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, managerial and professional talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin...;

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

“That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario’s regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario’s employers” and employees.

I’m happy to affix my signature to this.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

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

“Whereas the parents of St. Paul’s elementary school in Alliston have raised many issues regarding the security, cleanliness and state of repair of their school; and

“Whereas a 2003 condition assessment completed by the Ontario government identified the need for \$1.8 million in repairs to St. Paul’s elementary school; and

“Whereas the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board has approached the Ministry of Education with the intention of having the school deemed prohibitive to repair as they believe the school requires \$2.28 million in repairs, or 84% of the school replacement cost; and

“Whereas there are ongoing concerns with air quality, heating and ventilation, electrical, plumbing, lack of air conditioning and the overall structure of the building, including cracks from floor to ceiling, to name a few;

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

“That the Minister of Education immediately deem St. Paul’s elementary school prohibitive to repair, secure immediate funding and begin construction of a new facility so that the children of St. Paul’s can be educated in a facility that is secure and offers them the respect and dignity that they deserve.”

I want to thank Milva Biffis and Gaynor McLeary for sending me that petition.

TUITION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): This is one of the thousands of petitions from the Canadian Federation of Students. It reads:

"To Stop Tuition Fee Hikes and Improve Access and Quality In Post-Secondary Education

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Liberal government cancelled the tuition fee freeze after only two years and approved fee increases of up to 36% over the next four years; and

"Whereas tuition fees in Ontario have increased by more than four times the rate of inflation over the past 15 years; and

"Whereas a majority of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater public funding for colleges and universities; and

"Whereas improvements to student financial assistance are undermined by fee increases; and

"Whereas the Ontario government's recent increase to student loan limits is set to push student debt to approximately \$28,000 for a four-year program; and

"Whereas per-student investment in Ontario still lags significantly behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students' call to stop tuition fee hikes and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"—reduce tuition fees to 2004 levels for all students in Ontario and implement an immediate tuition fee freeze;

"—increase public funding for post-secondary education to promote access and quality;

"—expand access to financial aid in Ontario, especially for part-time students; and

"—double the number of upfront, need-based grants for Ontario students."

I'm proud to affix my signature to this.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have another petition sent to me by the Consumer Federation Canada, and it's in support of Bill 38. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

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

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

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

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

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

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to affix my signature to it.

HIGHWAY 417

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I have a petition here for the Legislature.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been dealing with the planning and design of the extension of Highway 417 for several years; and

"Whereas the previous Conservative government followed through with their commitment to extend Highway 417 to Arnprior; and

"Whereas Highway 417/17 is part of the Trans-Canada Highway system; and

"Whereas local municipal governments, the county of Renfrew and MPP John Yakabuski have continued to press the Liberal government on this issue;

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

"That the Liberal government move as swiftly as possible to approve the extension of Highway 417 through Arnprior to Renfrew and beyond and that this be included in their next five-year plan."

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

TUITION

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the University of Toronto Students' Administrative Council. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario Liberal government cancelled the tuition fee freeze after only two years and approved fee increases of up to 36% over the next four years; and

"Whereas tuition fees in Ontario have increased by more than four times the rate of inflation over the past 15 years; and

"Whereas a majority of Ontarians oppose tuition fee increases and support greater public funding for colleges and universities; and

"Whereas improvements to student financial assistance are undermined by fee increases; and

“Whereas the Ontario government’s recent increase to student loan limits is set to push student debt to approximately \$28,000 for a four-year program; and

“Whereas per student investment in Ontario still lags significantly behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students’ call to stop tuition fee hikes and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Reduce tuition fees to 2004 levels for all students in Ontario and implement an immediate tuition fee freeze;

“Increase public funding for post-secondary education to promote access and quality;

“Expand access to financial aid in Ontario, especially for part-time students;

“Double the number of upfront, need-based grants for Ontario students.”

I am in agreement and would affix my signature thereto.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2006 (NO. 2)

LOI DE 2006 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (NO 2)

Mr. Sorbara moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant diverses mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Sorbara.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): It’s a delightful opportunity that I have to speak for a few minutes this afternoon on Bill 151. I want to advise my colleagues that I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge. I think he’s going to be making the real strong points. Perhaps I could just do the job of introducing the matter, and then he’ll really give it the strength this bill deserves.

I should begin by saying that this bill really implements the second part of the budget plan presented by my predecessor, Minister Duncan, earlier on in March of this year. Let me say, parenthetically, that I think the budget was one of the real strong suits of this government this year, particularly its emphasis on public transit and transportation. Obviously, as a 905 member, as a greater Toronto area member, I was thrilled that Minister Duncan put so much emphasis on renewing our public transit infrastructure in the budget that he presented.

I know that members of this House have given a great deal of time and attention to the first budget bill. This bill—the title is a mouthful—simply puts into place the

other measures that require consideration by this Legislature to implement the full force and effect of the budget.

One other point that I want to make is that Bill 151 is very much a companion piece to the full economic statement that I delivered in the House last week. If members recall, the statement really made four points.

We’re in the midst of a period of somewhat more modest growth, we’re taking some very specific steps in response to that reduction in the rate of growth and we’re going to take some very specific steps to help workers whose jobs are threatened or who have been laid off.

We are expanding the ability of our own government to market Ontario as a tourism destination. I see the Minister of Tourism here, and I know he’s going to be making some announcement on this initiative over the course of the next few weeks. But the message is clear: We have a beautiful province here—winter, spring, summer and fall—and we’re going to be encouraging people to take their holidays in one or other part of the province.

Thirdly, we are going to move up some infrastructure projects that are already on the books. This will have an immediate, positive impact on job creation and strengthen the economy.

The fourth thing is something that my friend the Minister of Economic Development and Trade will undertake. In Canada the western provinces, particularly Alberta, are growing at a very rapid rate. They have industrial demands there that really, in the history of that province, are unprecedented. It’s driven, as you know, by the strength of the oil and gas economy. We have industrial capacity here at present because of the impact that a slower economy has had primarily on our manufacturing sector. Minister Papatello is going to try and link those two so that working people in Ontario are producing products that are in very high demand in western provinces, including Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia but primarily the province of Alberta.

We think those four elements will carry us over the hump. As I said in my statement, we anticipate a much stronger rate of economic growth as we move towards the second and third quarters of 2007.

The other point that I made in the fall economic statement that really is part of everything that we need to think about when we think about the Ontario economy is the fact that we look forward to the federal government honouring its obligations to the people of Ontario and the province of Ontario. There’s no doubt that we’ve got some real structural problems in the way in which we finance public services in this great nation. That’s been the subject of debate for many, many years, and over the course of the past three years our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, made that point with great clarity as he described the burden that Ontario had to carry as a result of the \$23-billion gap.

What’s the \$23-billion gap? It’s the difference between the amount of money that Ontario sends out of the province in federal taxes and federal levies and this and that and the amount of money that we receive back.

It represents, as the economist David MacKinnon pointed out, \$100 million a day that the Ontario economy sends to the rest of Canada every business day of the year in support of public services in other parts of Canada.

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As I mentioned in the fall economic statement, the Premier waged that battle successfully with Prime Minister Martin when he signed the Canada-Ontario agreement. It's an agreement that Mr. Harper said he would fully fund if he became the Prime Minister. Lo and behold, he's become the Prime Minister, and as of yet the federal government has not honoured the Canada-Ontario agreement.

Why is that so important for us? Because it represents \$6.9 billion for the people of Ontario over the course of the next six years. That means better hospitals, better health care and better education—all sorts of public services. It means better labour adjustment in times of slower economic growth, as we're experiencing right now. That's why it was such an important part of the statement.

As I wind up my remarks on Bill 151, I have to ask out loud in this Legislature what the Conservatives and the NDP are doing to create a unified voice from Ontario on this issue. This is not a partisan issue. I want to say to my friends in this House that the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Tory, ought to be speaking to his friend Stephen Harper about Stephen Harper honouring his agreements to Ontario. If John Tory wants to hold a joint press conference with me, calling upon the Conservative government to redress the grievances of Ontario, I am available at the drop of a hat. Thus far, we haven't heard one word from the Leader of the Opposition in Ontario about the ill treatment of Ontarians when it comes to funding from the federal government—and that treasury in Ottawa is bursting. Last year, they had a surplus of \$13 billion-plus; 40% of that, I tell my friends in this Legislature, came from 12.5 million hard-working people in the province of Ontario.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Then give it back to the people. You'll only waste it.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friends in the Conservative Party say that if that money comes to Ontarians, they'll only waste it. Is that their view? Is investment in infrastructure, in bridges in Renfrew, in better roads in Simcoe, I say to my friends from those ridings, wasting the money?

It's not a partisan issue. It's not about what the Conservatives believe or what the governing Liberal Party believes or what the NDP believes; it's about us joining together to make a strong case for 12.5 million people in Ontario. I wonder when we're going to start to hear from members of the opposition on this matter, because their constituents expect them to speak up. I say the same thing to Liberal members in the federal Parliament.

When Paul Martin was in government, we were very direct with the Liberal government in Ottawa about the burden and the unfairness for Ontarians in the current fiscal arrangements in Canada.

Mr. Yakabuski: You wouldn't support Mike Harris on the same issue.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: We didn't dampen our enthusiasm for this issue because there was a Liberal government. Now I'm saying the very same thing to Liberal members in the federal House, Conservative members in the federal House from Ontario and Jack Layton members in the federal House from Ontario. When are we going to hear from them? This is not about partisan politics; it's about Ontario and a better deal for Ontario, a fairer deal for Ontario.

I remind my friends opposite and I remind federal members that a worker in Ontario who has been laid off, who's lost his job and who looks to the employment insurance system, will receive some \$3,600 less in regular benefits compared to the benefits that a laid-off worker would receive in the other nine provinces and three territories. Do New Democratic Party members think that's fair? Do Conservative Party members think that's fair? Why haven't we heard from you on this issue? Why aren't you standing up and saying that it's high time that the federal government, now led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, come to the table and acknowledge the burden and start redressing the burden?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): Quit your whining.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend from Barrie says, "Quit your whining." Is that his view of what this is all about—whining? I don't think so. I think it's about a fairer deal. I think the people in Barrie want him to stand up and speak to this issue as eloquently as the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs or the Premier has spoken up on this issue. I'm inviting him to do that during the course of this debate.

We're debating a budget bill. Budgets are made up, in this province, of revenues that come from the taxpayers of Ontario, and the taxpayers of Ontario understand the burden that they carry. But revenues also come from the federal government, and it's high time that the federal government paid its fair and just share to services in this great province. I'm inviting my friends opposite in both the New Democratic Party and the Conservative Party to come to the table, stand up in their place and support the government on these initiatives.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and follow the finance minister and his comments. The finance minister has the privilege of looking at things at 30,000 feet and having that broad overview. It's the parliamentary assistants who get to grind it out on the details in these kinds of processes.

This very important piece of legislation delivers on our spring budget bill and our commitments to strengthen Ontario's economic advantage by strengthening its people and investing in their priorities. The bill proposes amendments to some 32 statutes, proposes three new statutes and makes consequential amendments to an additional 31 statutes. So it touches upon a broad range, obviously, of matters within the Legislature and within the statutes of the province of Ontario.

Among those worth noting, Bill 151 addresses the enforcement of the tobacco tax laws in the province of Ontario and, more specifically, our commitment to strengthen the enforcement of those provisions. There's no question that the illegal cigarette market has an impact on tobacco tax revenues, but our government, through our smoke-free Ontario, is working hard to reduce the number of Ontarians who actually smoke, and this, in addition, has had an impact on the revenue stream for the province.

We've already strengthened Ontario's Tobacco Tax Act by increasing fines and penalties, improving enforcement powers, providing for new offences and permitting sharing of enforcement information with other agencies that also have responsibility for the enforcement of tobacco-related legislation. In fact, convictions under the Tobacco Tax Act have doubled during the past three years as a result of the actions this government has taken. Measures in this bill aim to increase penalties for delivery of tobacco for resale without a wholesaler's permit and penalties for unregistered importers and exporters. We're taking these steps as part of our strategy to aggressively combat illegal and contraband cigarette sales in the province of Ontario. In addition to the changes in the bill, we're going to continue to monitor the issue and continue the hard work to reduce tobacco consumption and to fight the illegal sale of cigarettes here in the province of Ontario.

Bill 151 is also about fairness for lower-income senior couples in Ontario. In the 2004 budget, we introduced measures to increase the seniors' property tax credit by about 25%, from \$500 to \$625. In this bill, we're proposing measures that would further assist those same seniors. We're proposing to increase the income threshold for senior couples for the Ontario property and sales tax credit so that more seniors can qualify for the credit. The proposed increases for seniors who are married or who are living common law would be from \$22,250, to \$23,090 for 2006. This measure would ensure that 2006 increases in the amount of old age security and federal and guaranteed income supplements would not result in a reduction in the credits available. Without implementation of this change, a senior couple would experience a loss of benefits due to cost-of-living increases in federal seniors' benefits. If passed, the proposed enhancements would deliver some \$7 million in benefits to about 220,000 senior couples. Now, individually, it's not a lot, but it keeps pace, at the very least, with ensuring that there's not a further clawback of any sort on those benefits they're receiving as low-income seniors.

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Not all the proposed changes in Bill 151 are monumental; many are simply incremental. Working in conjunction with one another and with the rest of the overall package, they further our commitment to a fair, modern and competitive tax system. The proposed enhancements would extend the incentive to larger business, allowing more interactive media products to be eligible for tax credits and provide an enhanced credit rate for smaller

corporations developing original pieces of media. Bill 151 would also allow the minister to find circumstances where magazines may be provided tax-free as well.

There are additional administrative amendments. We've made these changes as well. These measures would also result in some significant changes for Ontario taxpayers and businesses in particular.

Bill 151, however, would also introduce changes of a different sort. For example, a proposed amendment to a number of tax statutes would make it clear for taxpayers when they must apply for an extension of the deadlines for filing tax appeals. The change to Ontario's definition of gasoline clarifies that fuel-grade ethanol is subject to the same rules under the act as other fuels that are taxed as gasoline. Measures such as these may not be the stuff of headlines on a day-to-day basis, but they're nonetheless important to the structure of Ontario's economic base. Ensuring the effectiveness of Ontario's tax laws is part of our commitment to governing our province responsibly and it's a commitment that we take very seriously.

As often is the case with budget bills, Bill 151 would legislate certain amendments to parallel changes introduced by our federal partners. We propose an amendment to the Income Tax Act dealing with the determination of foreign tax credit for non-business income. Another amendment we proposed would parallel recent enhancements to the federal dividend tax credit and introduce a second, higher tax credit for eligible dividends phased in over five years, starting at 6.5% and increasing to 7.7% by 2010. This measure would help make our tax system fairer by providing better integration of the personal and corporate income tax systems. It would also encourage investments by Ontarians in Canadian corporations.

Our government understands that the effectiveness and fairness of the tax system can be improved, and improvement is something we're striving for. This proposal is an important part of our overall plan to improve Ontario's investment climate. Bill 151 is a big step in the right direction in regard to these amendments. I've touched upon just a few of the items in Bill 51 that are kind of on-the-ground activity.

I want to spend just a minute or so talking a little bit about Ontario's economic advantage as a result of the skills that we have here in the province of Ontario and continue to build on. Ontario's top 10 manufacturing export industries have a particular skill advantage in that we have a much larger share of the workforce that has completed post-secondary education. In the motor vehicle and equipment sector of the economy, we have some 43% of those in that industry who have some form of post-secondary education. Our friends south of the border come in at about 27%. Effectively, 16% of our workforce has that higher level of education. In the chemical industry, the advantage is about 12%. In the computer electronics area, approximately 70% of those working in that industry in Ontario have post-secondary education, whereas with our friends south of the border, approximately 55% have achieved that goal. You can see

the spread there of about a 15% advantage in the skills training that we have available.

I can speak on a personal note to the opportunities young people have here in Ontario to pursue post-secondary education. I have personal experience in three of our universities. My children have attended Durham College in Oshawa and Sir Sandford Fleming College in Peterborough. One of my children was a graduate of Carleton University and another is finishing off his undergraduate work at the University of Waterloo. So my family has had a chance to be exposed to and experience the educational opportunities and skill development training in a number of our post-secondary educational institutions around the province.

It's my view that the investment we're making in post-secondary education, and are committed to making over the next five years, is an important part of maintaining and enhancing that competitive advantage by ensuring that our skills advantage—that spread of well-qualified people available to industries in Ontario—will continue to be strong and will grow. That in itself will encourage expansion in Ontario of industry as well as the attraction of new industry to Ontario.

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has had the opportunity, on a number of occasions recently, to speak to some of the initiatives that the government has undertaken under his leadership. They include things like a significant increase in the number of students who are enrolled at colleges and universities, the fact that there will be some 14,000 more students in graduate education by the time we reach 2009-10, enhanced student assistance for 135,000 students, and 32,000 students are now receiving low-income tuition grants. There's a great opportunity that exists for young people to be able to get access to post-secondary education and continue to support the province so that we maintain that economic advantage as we work our way through the current softening of the economic condition.

Bill 151 is building on what we put forward in the spring of this year in the principal budget bill. My colleagues and I are dedicated to ensuring that all members of this House, to the extent possible, share a common understanding of the benefits that come from the provisions of this bill. It is my sincere hope that when the debate concludes, all members of the House will see the value in supporting Bill 151.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I will get an opportunity in just a few short minutes to make some comments on Bill 151. But I was really surprised to hear the comments of the Minister of Finance. He didn't talk about the bill whatsoever. It was sort of like a slamming-Stephen-Harper bill, meaning that everything that is wrong in Ontario must be Stephen Harper's fault. I found it amazing to listen to his comments because he never really did talk about this bill, and I guess I won't be either because I'm going to be talking about broken promises and job losses. I think that's what most Ontario citizens are interested in. How much of what Mr.

McGuinty says can you believe, and how is it impacting the economy? I think it is impacting the economy in a pretty severe manner right now. We'll be looking forward to continue on with that.

I want to put one thing on the record, and that's the fact that when the Chrétien-Martin government was in power federally, a resolution was put forth by then-Premier Mike Harris. He asked the three leaders to sign it at the time—Mr. Harris, Mr. Hampton and Mr. McGuinty—all calling on the federal government to provide more money for health care funding, bringing it up to a more reasonable rate than the 18% or whatever they paid at the time. I can recall to this day that Mr. Hampton signed the resolution and Premier Harris signed it, but Dalton McGuinty would not sign it on behalf of the Liberal Party. Here they are today giving long speeches—well, he spoke 12 minutes on the bill—and slamming Stephen Harper.

I found it a little discouraging that he has gone to that level, but we'll have lots of opportunities to speak in a few minutes.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): This is really just a housekeeping omnibus bill that continues where the budget started. I'm looking forward to speaking about the budget, what the budget didn't do, and about what this bill of course doesn't do too. I have to say it's profoundly sad. I've had the honour of sitting in this House for a month, and I remember about a month ago we were talking about a surplus from the other side of the floor, and all of a sudden we are talking about deficit. But whatever we are speaking about, we are certainly speaking about the acknowledged fact from across the floor that this government is sitting on about \$400 million. Whether they didn't get all they wanted from the federal government or not, there is this \$400 million.

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It was supposed to be earmarked for housing, so I'm going to use some of my time to talk about housing and why that 122,000-household list is waiting for money to be spent, money that is there, clearly is there, and is not being spent. I think Carol Goar in her article just on Friday was talking about the fact that 1,625 of the 25,000 affordable housing units have actually been built. At that rate—let's give them the benefit of the doubt because we heard last week that now it's 2,000 and something—say, even if it is a thousand a year, we are looking at another 17 years before the 20,000 affordable housing units that were promised in 2003 are actually provided.

These are not just figures. These are reality for a great many households—67,000 in Toronto—to people who die on the streets of our city every week. I know this firsthand from my work in Parkdale-High Park. I will speak about that and speak about all the things and all the areas that the budget does not speak about. What's really most sad is that, again, we have a majority government with money that could do something and does nothing. Thank you.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough-Rouge River): I'm happy to rise and join this debate on Bill 151. This is

an important piece of legislation for the government. It's just supporting our spring budget, and it's a continuing piece of legislation by the government that complements and builds on our previous accomplishments to date. This bill also gives the government a clear indication of our steady progress towards building stronger communities and making our economy prosperous. This bill actually gives municipalities more flexibility and additional provincial support in funding brownfield redevelopment and public infrastructure. Municipalities have been requesting that of the government to help them rejuvenate some of these brownfields around the province, help them to rebuild those pieces of land, bring new jobs and increase the prosperity of these municipalities. This bill does that.

This bill also allows taxpayers to pay less on their dividends from large Canadian corporations. We believe, when you give money back to taxpayers and they can invest it in other tools, that you actually build on the economy. Instead of having them pay more taxes, they're getting taxes back here. So it really responds to what the public is looking for from our government and continues to build on our spring budget promises.

I would say that the government is responding to the public, it's responding to the needs of the public, and we're moving forward with the commitments we made earlier in the year.

Mr. Tascona: I'm certainly pleased to join in on the debate on Bill 151. Certainly the member from Vaughan, talking about the federal government and whining consistently throughout his speech, was very disappointing. I was quite pleased with the federal government with respect to the expansion of GO Transit to the city of Barrie. The federal government anted up their portion of the needed monies for GO Transit to come from Bradford to Barrie, and it's very important. That's something I've worked on since 1996, to ensure that GO Transit returns to the city of Barrie, and in fact it did. It took the efforts of the federal government and the city of Barrie to sign off on the deal because the McGuinty government had been stalling throughout the process to deal with GO Transit. It's disappointing because it should have been done three years ago, bringing Go Transit back to the city of Barrie, but it wasn't. So I'm very pleased that Go Transit is returning to the city of Barrie, because that's where it should be.

Other initiatives: The member from Parkdale–High Park and the member from Simcoe–Grey very distinctly talked about things that they could be doing with the surplus that they've taken, the huge increase in taxes that they brought forth through the health tax bill that they have. In my area, we have an RVH cancer centre we want to bring in. They've done the fundraising necessary for that to happen, and yet this government is doing nothing with bringing that forward, to encourage that particular fundraising effort to even speed up further to bring back some much-needed radiation therapy into the community. Here today we have the colleges in the community—we're going to be speaking to them—and they haven't given one red cent to Georgian College with re-

spect to the needs that they have, not only for Simcoe county but also for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Arthurs: I want to thank the members from Simcoe North, Parkdale–High Park, Scarborough–Rouge River and Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford for their input into the minister's leadoff and my support of that. Clearly, we need our federal partners at the table with us. There's no question. It really doesn't matter whether it is, quite frankly, the current government or some change in government; we still need those federal partners here with us because we're delivering a lot more dollars to Ottawa than are being returned to us for the needs we have in some fair and equitable fashion. The Premier will continue that fight and keep it on the front burner, along with the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and others, to ensure that that fairness is kept in place.

The member from Parkdale–High Park spoke about the housing issue. I know she raised that question with Minister Gerretsen from Municipal Affairs and Housing during estimates. I thought that the responses that came both from the minister and from his deputy identified where we are in that process. There are a large number of units—I can't remember how many—that have already been built. There are quite a number that are in the building phases and still more that are following through in the approvals process. So there are fewer that are actually occupied today, but there's a large number coming up behind them that (1) you had to get the legislative framework in place for and (2) you had to negotiate contracts and the like to actually be able to get people into those houses. So I think there's significant progress being made on those fronts.

The member from Scarborough–Rouge River is quite correct that this supports our spring budget initiatives. It builds on prosperity in the province. It recognizes the current economic climate as somewhat softer. It recognizes the higher oil prices than we've seen in the past, although they're fluctuating right now. The Canadian dollar is up again at this point from where it was. We're seeing a number of softening issues in the economy. Much depends on what happens south of the border as to how well we do in the short term, but the long-range impacts remain very good for us. I know that all of us here look forward to strong economic growth in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Dunlop: I understand that we have unanimous consent to defer the leadoff by MPP Hudak.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe North has said there is consent to stand down the lead on this bill. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Dunlop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate very much you allowing that to happen.

I wanted to, first of all, say what a pleasure it is to be here this afternoon making comments on Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts. Of course, you know that

our party will not be supporting this bill. I think it's fairly well known that we don't agree with your budgetary policies and many of the things that you've done.

I think it goes back to a lot of faith and a lot of trust in politicians. Quite simply, when the Minister of Finance stands up and makes a fancy speech or an economic statement, many of us simply do not believe what he'll be saying because there have been so many broken promises by this government. We're now into the fourth year of their mandate, and one broken promise after another, month after month, day after day. When they do bring out their platform for their next election, how are they possibly going to explain to the people of Ontario that they're going to keep all those promises? Quite frankly, people just don't believe what you say.

I'm going to read a bunch of the broken promises. I'm sure you would all like to hear them again, because I know that from time to time we should remind the citizens of Ontario about some of these broken promises.

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I think the big one is number one: "I won't raise your taxes." That has to win the Academy Award of broken promises. When you think back to those election ads—I guess it's just past three years ago now. At that time, Dalton McGuinty, the leader of the Liberal Party, was standing on TV screens right across this province saying, "I won't raise your taxes," and then to see the kind of orgy of spending and tax-raising we've seen in this province. How can we ever go back and believe anything the man says again when he talks about raising taxes? That's why there's no confidence from people like Stephen Harper, Jean Chrétien or Paul Martin. They don't believe a word he says. The reality is that when he says things like, "I won't raise your taxes," and then turns around and has the largest tax increase in history, people simply do not believe that.

Of course, there was that big promise to roll back the tolls on the 407. They had that major fight with the 407 ETR, where they were going to try and show their authority and roll those tolls back. But of course, it didn't happen.

Interjection.

Mr. Dunlop: Well, I'm just telling you what you put in your document. When I read something in a platform document—and I've got copies in my office if anybody from the Liberal Party would like a copy of their own document.

Interjections.

Mr. Dunlop: You know, you don't have to talk about taxes and broken promises very long in this House to get a lot of heckling. I never heckled the minister at all when he was speaking, and now here we are. They're all heckling me because I'm just trying to bring out the broken promises, and I've only got two done of 50. I've got 50 to talk about here, so I'm not even going to get halfway through them and my time will be up.

Fund medically necessary health care services: What does that really mean? We know one thing: They took five priorities, and that's really all they're concerned

about right now. They threw a little bit of money at emergency rooms last week, only because Elizabeth Witmer drew attention to the public that they were being drastically underfunded. They're concentrating on those five wait time areas, and of course others areas of health care are falling through the cracks, particularly the long-term-care areas of health care, where we've seen a huge broken promise in the fact that they didn't come through with the \$6,000 per resident promised in previous budgets.

Not add to the province's debt: How much have they actually added to the debt, I wonder? We can't really figure that out yet, because apparently it looks like we may even have a deficit next year after some very good times in the history of the province. No question, the debt will rise substantially with this government. I'm guessing they'll add somewhere around \$15 billion to the debt in their four years in power, at the same time increasing spending substantially. I think we're going from about \$70 billion to \$88 billion by the end of 2008-09. That's an \$18-billion increase in spending.

Stop 6,600 houses from being built on the Oak Ridges moraine: That was one of the first broken promises we heard going back to the fall of 2003, when Dalton McGuinty said that there wouldn't be one new house built on the Oak Ridges moraine. Of course, that has not occurred.

Then we go up to number 6: Abide by the balanced budget law. Do you remember that one? Of course, they found a way in their first budget to eliminate that so their cabinet ministers wouldn't have to pay back the fee they would have had to pay. No question, they didn't abide by that and found a way to weasel out of that one.

Cap hydro rates at 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour until 2006: That was one where I think everybody lost a lot of faith immediately, because they had sworn that they would stick to that 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour, even during the election campaign of 2003. A month after they were sworn into office, power costs skyrocketed.

Allow all non-cabinet MPPs to criticize and vote against government legislation: The only guy I know doing that is the guy from Ottawa, Garth Turner. I can tell you that it looks like you all vote together on basically every bill. I don't think I've seen anyone—other than maybe Lou Rinaldi, the government member from Northumberland. I noticed he wasn't here for the Clean Water Act vote but came in immediately after. So I'm glad to see Lou standing up for that one.

Provide autism treatment beyond the age of six: That's a major broken promise. We've had autism rallies at many of our MPP offices. I think we've had at least three rallies out here on the front lawn. They keep saying the money's coming, but we're into the fourth year and that certainly doesn't seem to be the case.

Reduce auto insurance rates by 10% within 90 days: That never happened, as you know.

Reduce the use of private consultants: I know that one area they use a lot of private consultants in is advertising. Apparently, consultants are doing very well out of the

Liberal Party, with the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. ads and of course the Trillium ad. Who will ever forget that one? We had to change that. Money just had to be wasted.

Cancel P3 hospitals in Brampton and Ottawa: There we go again. They never cancelled them, of course; they've added on to them.

Public inquiry into meat inspection: That never happened either. That was something they promised during the election campaign, and it didn't happen. Apparently, they've hired more inspectors, but they didn't have the public inquiry.

Withdraw government appeal on the Richmond landfill: What can we say? That's another one. But one thing we do know about landfills is that they provided assistance for the city of Toronto when they approved the Green Lane landfill very quickly. Now, of course, Toronto's garbage will eventually all be going to London, and we know the people in London are not very happy.

Number 16: Make Ontario's chief medical officer of health an independent officer of the Legislature. Well, there we go. What can we say? That's fairly self-explanatory. There's nothing special about that one, other than they just didn't keep their promise.

Provide better mental health care: Providing better mental health care is something we know the government has paid very little attention to. It's a huge issue, particularly through homelessness in our society. Of course, Mr. McGuinty's going to have a hard time in his next platform saying, "We're going to provide better mental health care."

Value and support the public service: I work with a lot of people from OPSEU in my riding, and I can tell you that Dalton McGuinty's not the most popular person as a Premier. They don't seem to have a lot of confidence. In my riding alone, when you take 700 jobs out of the riding with the closure of Huronia Regional Centre, you've got a big problem. But I can tell you that valuing and supporting the public service is something else.

Divert 60% of municipal garbage through recycling by 2005: What have you diverted? About 3%? You haven't even come close to 60%, so that's out of the question.

Stop school closings: My God, the Simcoe County District School Board came out with a list just a few months ago, and there were about 15 schools on it. I thought they were going to provide assistance so that these things wouldn't happen, and now there's a list of 15 schools. Even high schools are included on the list of schools that some of the school boards in my riding have to close. I thought that was going to stop.

Close coal-fired electricity plants by 2007: I think that's the best one of them all. That's one that, even when it was first announced prior to the election that the government thought they could close them all by 2007, I don't think anybody believed at that point. The only one that they've actually closed is the one Elizabeth Witmer put in plans to close in 2001. She put the plans together, put the process in place to close it down. Of course, by the time they did get around to actually closing it, Dwight

Duncan was there getting his picture taken with it. But as we know, it was Elizabeth Witmer's priority to do that, and she went ahead and closed Lakefield.

Create tens of thousands of new child care spaces: It would be interesting to see just how many they have created, although we know that it's a long way from tens of thousands of child care spaces.

End the federal tax credit clawback: This is something my colleagues in the New Democratic Party are very, very passionate about, and of course we know that hasn't been done.

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Build 20,000 new affordable housing units: What have we got, after three years: 1,600? Something around 1,600 or 1,700 is all we've actually got.

Spend every penny of the new health tax on health care: Well, you know one thing. That can't be true, right off the bat, because most of it's being spent on advertising, these ads we're seeing on TV. It would be interesting—I see people heckle me as soon as I bring that out, but it would be very interesting to know how much those ads are actually costing. On CP24, at least three times an hour, I would suggest to you, during the daytime and into the evening, we see those Liberal ads.

Eliminate barriers to foreign-trained professionals within one year: Has that been accomplished? Does anybody know that? I don't think it has been.

Require trades and professions to accept qualified immigrants within one year: You know what? That hasn't happened either.

Boy, this is getting kind of sick, isn't it, when you think that they made these many promises and I'm not even halfway down the list. I've got all kinds of things to discuss here.

Repeal the Tenant Protection Act within one year: Again, nothing happened.

Establish a standing committee on education to hold yearly hearings: Has anybody been on that committee? I don't know of anybody. Maybe some of you folks over there are on the standing committee on education to hold their hearings.

Hire 8,000 new nurses: I'll tell you one thing. There certainly have been no 8,000 new nurses hired. I wonder how many have been hired. They had that in their platform.

Provide legal rights to victims of crime: I was out to the Holly Jones dinner one night. It was held out in York region. I can tell you that the people who are victims of crime certainly are not supporters of Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Make the Ministry of Agriculture a lead ministry: Wow. You've just about destroyed that ministry. What can we say? I can't think of any government in history that has done more to hurt rural Ontario and hurt agriculture than the Dalton McGuinty government. Certainly that's what we hear in our ridings.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dunlop: Support the province's cities: I know one thing. If they're going to support the province's cities, they did one thing: They sure supported Toronto by putting that garbage in London, so I'm sure they are supporting London as one of Toronto's cities.

Ensure health dollars are spent wisely: Again, we go back to the health care ads. I don't know how much they really are at this point, but I can tell you one thing: It's up into the millions of dollars being spent on government advertising.

Stop the waste of taxpayer dollars: I'm curious about that one, because when you look at the way the minister slammed Stephen Harper for his 12 minutes, when he spoke a little earlier, you would think that money was being spent very effectively and efficiently here in Ontario. Yet we talk about things like \$6 million to drop the "C" from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. logo; \$219,000 to pay the Liberal ad firm to redraw the trillium—that was something that everybody was screaming to have changed; \$91 million to fire nurses; \$100 million for partisan government advertising. When we talk about government waste, that's why we have some real problems with this bill and with this government.

Tackle gridlock: Boy, they've done a great job of that. Can you believe that? We keep putting more and more people on the highways. If I leave my house north of Barrie at 5:15 in the morning, I can make it to Toronto in decent time, like in an hour and a half, an hour and 40 minutes. If I leave it until quarter to 6, it's three hours. The gridlock is absolutely phenomenal, and you want to dump more and more people into Simcoe county. There's absolutely no infrastructure money coming with it whatsoever to tackle particularly the transportation system. I feel bad about that, but I can tell you that gridlock is going to be a very important part of the next provincial election, and this government really hasn't done a lot about it.

Give taxpayers better value for money while keeping taxes down: I'm sure everybody in the province would agree to that one. It's exactly the opposite. They're getting less and paying more.

Eliminate mercury emissions from coal-fired electric power generation stations by 2010 as part of a Canada-wide standard agreement: I'm not sure what they really mean by that, but you know that that's not occurring, because the coal-fired generation is still in place and will be for many, many years, I think even beyond the 2015 date.

Balance the budget every year of their mandate: Have they ever balanced it yet?

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): Not yet.

Mr. Dunlop: No, but they've increased spending.

Put the public interest ahead of special interests.

Unclog emergency rooms: Unclogging the emergency rooms was certainly something that we talked about last weekend, but of course last weekend's announcement came as a result of Elizabeth Witmer putting pressure on

the Waterloo hospitals. I can tell you, I know a number of health care professionals from Waterloo. They give Elizabeth Witmer all the credit in the world, both when she was minister and as critic, for putting pressure on the government. Maybe some of that money actually will flow when we find out where it has actually been sent for.

Give the Ministry of Natural Resources the resources to protect fish and wildlife: You know, this summer the Ministry of Natural Resources never had enough money for their enforcement officers to go out and put gas in the vehicles. That's a fact. The MNR conservation officers were basically sitting in their offices all summer. They had no way of enforcing the legislation and the laws because there was no money for fuel for their vehicles. Up in our area, where we have literally thousands of lakes in Simcoe county and north into Muskoka and Haliburton, we need to protect our fish and wildlife. Certainly the enforcement officers do not have the budget to do so.

What I'm getting at here is that we talk about a budget bill, the 2006 budget, which increased taxes, which made a lot of promises. But as we proceed down the road towards the next election, I think that who people in this province are going to want to believe are the people who keep their word: promises made, promises kept. That's very important. When you see just 50—and I could go on and on and on. There's probably another 75 on this list. When you talk about that, when you go down that road and talk about the number of people who do not believe what this government says, I think they've got a real problem when they develop their next platform, which they've already set.

There is one thing I will tell you: They did keep a promise to hold elections every four years on a specific date. Because you know what? They like to Americanize the politics here. Anything they can do to Americanize the politics—they like those set election dates. That's what's here. That was Greg Sorbara's private member's bill. Anything to Americanize this system, they will do: changing the fancy logos, bringing in Bill Clinton's advisers as their advisers. That's what it's all about, Americanizing Ontario politics right here in the province of Ontario.

I want to say to you that I've appreciated this opportunity. I look forward to the kind words of questions and answers that will come back or the comments that will come back. I look forward to a lot of debate on this bill. It's a good one to debate. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): It's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Simcoe North, but I must ask a question; I really must. It's towards you, Mr. Speaker, and I know the rules of this House. A great deal of latitude is given around financial bills, a great deal is given around budgets, and members can generally say what's on their mind related to the budget. I listened intently for the entire 20 minutes, and I do have to tell you, I did not hear the honourable member make one single reference to Bill 151, which is before us.

He was talking about what I consider many people in this province are concerned about. They are concerned about broken promises. They are concerned about the records of governments. They are concerned about what is going to happen in the next election. And I think all of those statements are trite. But I don't know what was really added to the debate.

I was somewhat bemused at the end, though, and amused as well, by his reference to the ragin' Cajun James Carville, because the only thing it told me, the only reference that I could think of, how that might have something to do with the budget, has not to do with the budget bill before us but the enormous budget of the Liberal Party, where they could spend \$50,000 for a 15-minute speech. I have to ask, if a government party has that much money to bring in someone from outside to talk for 15 or 18 minutes, as some have said—it may have been as long as that—why that amount of money was spent. But if they have the money, I guess they can spend it where they want. Would that they would take the money that is allocated to them in this province and spend it on better purposes, not on hearing from someone how to tailor a message, not on having someone say how they are going to keep the message simple in the next election, but actually spending it on good works that people are expecting.

1630

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It's a pleasure to stand in this House to comment on Bill 151 in regard to the previous 20 minutes from the member opposite. Just for the record, I do support Bill 43 and, yes, I wasn't here for the vote. I don't think I owe the member an explanation, but I have a very elderly father who is not well, and that was the reason I wasn't there. For somebody to accuse me of not supporting the bill when I made it public that I do support clean water, I do support Bill 43—I would ask the member opposite to be honest on his feet and stand up and apologize.

Bill 151, which you refuse to speak about, is about moving the business of government ahead and it's all about doing the right things at the right time. For somebody to spend 20 minutes in this place and talk about anything but Bill 151, talking about his own agenda and not stating the proper facts, I don't think is what this is all about.

Once again, for the record, I do support Bill 43 wholeheartedly. I have the full support of my community. I can tell you, I spoke to a number of people, and even at a farming community that I spoke to the other night, the vice-president of the OFA fully supported what our government did on Bill 43. They're prepared to work with us on the regulations to make sure we get it right.

So I fully support Bill 151. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond.

Mr. Murdoch: It is a pleasure to be able to talk a little bit about the member from Orillia's talk here. I know that some people said he didn't talk about the bill, but he did. It's everything that's in that bill. I mean, it's all there. It's all there how this Liberal government has refused to give

any respect to rural Ontario. They've just totally taken any respect that we had in rural Ontario away from us. Every chance they've got in this House, through bills like this and through other bills, they've dumped on rural Ontario. It's a lot like what happened to London: They're going to take all the garbage from Toronto. There are, I think, four or five members in this House who represent London. They all disappeared—never heard a word from them. They all went home. So it's the same thing, what they are doing on bills like this: no respect for rural Ontario.

The speaker before me, Mr. Dunlop, mentioned the different things that they've done to us in this House, and they have. Look at our MNR; they just got rid of it. Ag and food: They might as well have gotten rid of it. They just destroyed those ministries. They still seem to have a minister, but that's as far as it goes. If we look at anything, they've decided that Toronto is where it's at: "We'll give them billions of dollars; no problem with that. Let's give all the money there." I don't know what happened to the members who represent rural Ontario. Maybe they don't let them speak up in caucus; I don't know. But I know that there are some good members over there from rural Ontario, and I know they try their best. But when this happens, when you get a government whose strategy is, "Forget about rural Ontario. We don't need to worry about rural Ontario, because we don't respect them anyway," then you dump on them. That's what they've done, and that's what this bill has done.

Our speaker before mentioned all those things that they promised to do. They'll say anything. The biggest mistake is their three-men-in-a-tub logo. That is just awful.

Ms. DiNovo: Certainly, when the budget first came out, there were a lot of comments made, and I just wanted to share one. This is from the Income Security Advocacy Centre, and I quote. At that point, "Despite having more than \$2.5 billion at their disposal, the McGuinty government has condemned poor families to continued hunger and housing insecurity," says Sarah Blackstock, research and policy analyst at the Income Security Advocacy Centre. "The money to alleviate poverty is there. What's missing is the political will—that's always been the missing ingredient with this government. Clearly, poor families are still not a priority for the current government."

I would submit, respectfully, that it's not about money; it's about will. It's not about the jurisdictional squabble with the federal government; it's about the will to actually spend money where it's needed most in this province, and it's needed most by our children. We live in a province where 13,500 children in the GTA alone use food banks. I remember growing up in a family where my father talked about the Dirty Thirties and about food banks. I remember asking him, "What's that?" because there wasn't one. He used to talk about people having to sleep on church floors. I couldn't imagine such a thing, and here we live in that reality and that's our day-to-day. We've become inured to it, and that's sad. It's absolutely beyond sad; it's appalling.

We're going into a winter now where there will be more deaths and, again, there's not the money for it. I suggest that it's not a question of there not being money for it. As we know, they're sitting on at least \$400 million by their own admission, so it's not about the money; it's about the will. Clearly, poor children; clearly, families; clearly, women; and clearly, working families who are trying to make a go of it earning about \$1,320 a month—that's \$8 minimum wage—are clearly not priorities for this government. I'm going to talk about the budget and the economy where it counts.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Simcoe North, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dunlop: I would like to thank the members from Beaches–East York, Northumberland, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and Parkdale–High Park for their comments.

The member for Beaches–East York mentioned, “You didn't speak on Bill 151.” Do you know what? Neither did the minister. The minister spoke for 12 or 14 minutes and never mentioned Bill 151. All he did was slam Stephen Harper. So I thought that was the trend of the discussion: We're going to talk about broken promises and Stephen Harper. That's what I thought they were going to talk about.

So I'm going to talk about broken promises. The people in Ontario were used to Mike Harris: promises made, promises kept. Now we've got this team in place—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Thank you.
Member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Dunlop: We've got this team now that breaks a promise almost on a daily basis, and then they try to spin their way out of it by spending taxpayers' dollars on fancy ads. That's what the people of Ontario are sick of now. All I'm saying is that as we proceed down this path towards the next election, how is this government ever going to create another party platform? No one believes their old platform because they hardly kept a word in it.

Finally, I would like, if I in any way offended the member for Northumberland by mentioning that he hadn't been present for the Bill 43 vote, to apologize to this House on behalf of that. I do know that we voted that day, and immediately after the vote he came back into the House. I wanted to say that. So I thought maybe he had skipped out on the vote. However, if he was away because of a sickness and he got here late, I understand and I do apologize to Mr. Rinaldi for my comments.

Anyhow, I do want to say that I look forward to more debate on this bill. I want to make sure that people keep making sure that the public in Ontario is very much aware of the number of promises that Dalton McGuinty's government has broken.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Prue: I will be speaking to Bill 151 today. I would like to preface my remarks by acknowledging what the former debater, the member for Simcoe North, had to say. I listened intently as well to the minister, and

he went on and on and on about not the contents of this bill but about his jurisdictional and financial dispute with the government in Ottawa.

I want to talk about what is in this bill. I don't know how many members have had an opportunity to read the whole 192 pages of a rather arcane bill. I started to read it at my desk and I actually fell asleep. This is probably the best cure for insomnia that I have ever seen. It is arcane; it is hard to understand; it is filled with legal and complicated jargon. When you've read eight or 10 paragraphs, you think, “What have I just read?” It's hard to understand what is actually contained in it. But I spent a great deal of time and I think I've come to some understanding of what is contained within the four walls of this particular bill.

Some of the aspects of this bill, I find troubling; some of them, I wish the government would take a very good look at. I'm sure it's going to go to committee, as most government bills do, although I haven't heard anyone actually say that this bill will end up in committee for comment. But let's just start with the bills that it purports to change.

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The first one is the Development Charges Act. I was a little bit worried when I read this. I thought, what is the difference here? It's talking about being based on a planned level of service for 10 years following the preparation of a background study, and it's now going to read as being based on the planned level of the 10 years preceding the background. So what has been changed is “following the preparation of the background study” and “preceding the preparation of the background study.” How is that going to impact? Then, as I read further, I saw it had to do with the Spadina subway system, so this is a new financing mechanism hidden within here for the Spadina subway. It is based entirely on the future development potential and intensity of that particular corridor.

We know that this was a controversial issue when it first was presented to this House. We know that there were allegations made of the developers who stood to gain and to lose if the Spadina subway was built. But now, hidden inside this bill is a change that will allow that it will be based on the planned level of service following the preparation of the background study. To do this is to say that we know it's going in and how much these adjacent properties are going to escalate in value, rather than what they were worth at the time the study was going in and how the subway is going to be financed. Now we're going to look at it in a completely different way that this province has never done before with subway or expressway systems, or mass transit systems, or any other type of system, to say that we've just increased the value of all of this property. Now we can have this property sold off and trade hands and development money made. We've done this through a mechanism. We changed it within the body of a bill that nobody ever probably noticed or probably ever read.

Now, I have some very serious concerns with a government that behaves and acts in this way because,

quite literally, with the change of a couple of words, billions of potential dollars of development money can be made or lost. People may not realize the value of their property. The city of Toronto, quite clearly, may have difficulty in raising the funds. There's a whole bunch of stuff in here that is not crystal clear to me or probably to anyone in the government as well.

So if this goes to committee—and I suspect and expect it will—we would like very much to have the city of Toronto and their financial people called in. We would like very much to see whether or not that is going to increase the amounts of money that developers have made or are expected to make by virtue of these changes. Because very often in this Legislature there are allegations—sometimes founded, sometimes unfounded—about the development industry and whether or not they are in bed with certain politicians, whether or not secret deals have been made, whether or not large amounts of money can accrue from changes in legislation. This is one that is right there. This is one that conceivably could result in billions upon billions of dollars and is simply the change of a couple of words. So I found that one.

Then I looked at the next one. The next one is that the Assessment Act has been changed. So I looked at the Assessment Act and how that is being changed. At first blush, it's not being changed a whole lot. You are changing the date of the last assessment and the freeze from 2004 and replacing it with January 1, 2005. This is the date upon which the McGuinty government has chosen to freeze assessments across Ontario. This too was a very controversial development when it was made. I think many taxpayers, many ratepayers, many citizens of the province of Ontario breathed a collective sigh of relief that, at least in the two years that pass, they're not going to expect that their assessment is going to increase and thereby their house taxes increase with it. There it is. I thought, why are they sneaking this in here? Of course, it's quite convenient to not have a separate bill to do that because that invites a whole debate about the government trying to hide its agenda, trying not to act upon the commitments it made in the last election to do something about property taxes. In fact the bill, as it exists here, conveniently expires in 2008, mere months after the next election campaign. It freezes property assessment at 2005 rates and expires as soon after the 2007 election as is reasonably practicable, i.e., a couple of months later.

When the Premier announced this plan to the assembly at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, although at first blush it may have received some applause, there were many people from the 450 municipalities or so in attendance who thought this was a political ploy. It was merely to take this issue out of the electorate's mind until after the next election. I can't see any other reason, quite frankly, why this government has chosen to freeze it for two years.

When the questions were asked of the Minister of Finance in this House, I fully expected him to give some kind of answer that was at least credible—why he had chosen this date; why it would take him two years to force through a study as to whether any improvements

could be made—and the answer that came back, and I invite members to check Hansard, was that the government felt it needed the time to institute the 22 recommendations that had been put forward by the Ombudsman, Mr. Marin, in his report, which was highly and totally critical of MPAC and which was highly and totally critical of the secrecy and the way citizens were being treated by the bureaucracy of Ontario.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): How did he have time to do that investigation?

Mr. Prue: He did the investigation in his usual brilliant way.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: The Minister of Tourism laughs, but I believe that the Ombudsman of Ontario has done a brilliant job, an excellent job on behalf of the citizens of Ontario. In everything he has investigated, he has pointed out the foibles of government policy and he has pointed out the foibles of how the bureaucracy carries out that policy. In every single case, the government in its wisdom has seen fit, in spite of the laughter from the Minister of Tourism, to acknowledge that the statements he has made are correct.

In fact this government, on that very same issue, said they would, in time, follow all of the 22 recommendations made by Mr. Marin. Now, 17 of them were of absolutely limited consequence to the government. They were mostly in terms of how the bureaucrats dealt with ordinary citizens. That, it was agreed, was going to be done and was going to be accomplished within the bureaucracy in short order. I think that some or all of the recommendations were actually in place before the report was released, and I believe that all of the 17 have all been implemented at this stage.

I questioned the minister at great length, "Why is it going to take two years to do the 22 recommendations?" There are only two recommendations outstanding that are of any consequence, and they're very easy.

One is to reverse the onus so that the onus is no longer upon the citizen to prove that the MPAC recommendations are wrong, but that it is upon MPAC to prove that they are correct, that what they have done is right, so the citizen no longer has the burden of bearing the evidence and placing the evidence before the adjudicator. The evidence shifts and the onus is put on MPAC with its giant bureaucracy, its legions of workers, its computer plan and everything else they have ready and available to prove that they are right. That's a pretty simple thing. It's done in the province of Manitoba, for one place, and it certainly did not require two years of study to implement that.

The other one is rather bizarre. The other one is forcing MPAC to release the information upon which its computer model is based. I don't know why that takes two years of study either. They either release the information and the government does not consider it proprietary, or the government announces, full stop, that they're not going to have it released, which the gov-

ernment did not do. There you have something that should take a matter of two minutes, not two years, which the government is hiding behind. Certainly there is no logical reason that it will take the government two years to study those recommendations, which falls back to: Why is it taking two years? The only rational explanation, in view of the minister's saying absolutely nothing on this issue, is to take it out of the political mix of those ideas that will come forward for debate in the months leading up to October 2007.

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It's quite clear to me that taking this action to hide it in an omnibus bill is tantamount to the government's trying to hide from it and saying that they do not intend to deal with it, that they don't plan to take any action. Some would think this is cynical, that this is burying a broken promise. But I would think that, if this government is serious about doing anything, this would not be buried within the body of this bill. In fact, this government would come forward with some ideas of their own on how to fix the property tax mess that we have here in Ontario.

I know, when the Conservatives were in power and I was a rookie member sitting on this side of the House, that we heard how bad the bill was. We heard Liberal after Liberal stand up, when they were on this side of the House, talking about this bill and how bad it was for ratepayers. They were talking about how it needed to be improved. Even the Conservatives, who were then on the other side, admitted it was a deeply flawed bill that they had brought in. They had to change it seven times; it was changed seven times in the years following its introduction because it simply did not work. It was punitive. It drove small businesspeople, or threatened to drive them, out of their businesses until the properties were capped. It had to be phased in over a long period of time in many cities, including the city from whence I come, the megacity of Toronto. It simply was bad. It's so bad that the Conservative member from Erie-Lincoln saw fit to put in a private member's bill to radically change the bill that had been part of his government's legacy. He called it the Homestead Act. It received some support in this House, but I do not believe that it will ever see the light of day.

Having said that, I believe that this government has an obligation not to hide behind this bill; it has an obligation to do something. As a small party of nine members, we endeavoured to go out and hear what ordinary people had to say and made some suggestions. I'm not surprised that the Minister of Finance doesn't like my suggestions, at least in the House, but I look forward to seeing some of them in the Conservative Party policy leading up to this October. Quite frankly, all that needs to be done to bring an element of fairness into the taxation system of Ontario is to start with the premise that we are paying too much in property taxes. People who are watching today may be surprised, or may not be surprised, to know that we in Ontario pay the highest property taxes of any province in Canada—quite a bit higher: There is four times as much

property tax per household in Ontario as there is in the province of Newfoundland. The only one, of all the other provinces in between, that even comes remotely close to us is Quebec. But people would be even more surprised to learn that in the entire world, if Ontario were a lone jurisdiction in terms of property tax—we are number two. We pay the second-highest property tax in the entire world, save and except parts of England. That's the legacy we have.

It's quite simple how we got there. We got there because the previous government decided to download enormous amounts onto the municipalities, so that today the reality is, even if you leave education in there, that 25% of every dollar, 25 cents on every dollar, paid in property tax goes to provincially mandated services. They run the whole gamut—from welfare to supportive housing, to assisted housing, to children's services, to health, to ambulance, to seniors' affairs—some \$3.2 billion.

We as a party made some recommendations that we should start looking at ways to improve the property tax. We're not content to hide behind it. We said that we should upload that download, that we should phase it out over a period of some 10 years so that property taxes truly reflect the actual services to property. We said that we should give rebates to seniors to make sure that property taxes do not drive them out of their homes when and if property rates spike. We said that we should come up with a new form of assessment—which isn't all that new, because it's been used quite successfully in the state of Florida for a number of years—which is to freeze the property values until sale. We said that there should be a seasonal option made available to municipalities, that if they are not providing services to seasonal properties, i.e. cottages or trailers or campsites where people are there only for the summer months, they should have the option to say that those properties not be taxed to the same extent or the same amount as permanent residents, who can use all of the facilities, all of the libraries, all of the snowplowing and all of the garbage pickup 12 months a year. We said that all the 22 recommendations put forward by Mr. Marin are good ones. In fact, the government said they were all good ones, but we would act on them immediately.

Last but not least, we need a property tax assessment system that is fair to tenants. The one we have now is not. Tenants in some cities pay two and, in some cities, up to three times as much property tax on their apartments as comparable condominium towers that can be as close as next door. We need to act to make sure that tenants are favourably treated.

All of those things can be done, but they're not being done in the body of this bill. What is being done is to simply hide and do a two-year freeze in one line under the Assessment Act. That's what's found in the body of this bill, and, quite frankly, it's not good enough.

Then we went on and looked at some other stuff. We have the Ontario Energy Board Act. Here's another little piece of legislation in the big giant government puzzle

that's gradually coming together. It permits gas and electricity projects to be expedited in some cases. They can be expedited and moved ahead without the safeguards that communities have come to expect in the past, whether those safeguards be environmental assessments, whether those safeguards be, as some say, by the municipalities, by the planning board, by the Ontario Municipal Board, by all the other bodies. This is a further expediting of gas and electricity projects primarily by private producers to get around the safeguards that communities in this province have come to expect over the last 100 years.

This should not come as a surprise to people who watch this Legislature often because the first bill was Bill 52, which was the Municipal Act. The bill took away not only—I might have the number wrong; it might be Bill 103. But anyway, the Municipal Act bill took away the rights of municipalities to hold hearings and do planning on energy projects. So a right they had had for many, many years was taken away, and those rights were not to be given to them anymore. Under the former legislation, the Ontario Energy Board was exempt from that. But what the bill did was say that all private energy developers are now exempt, like government bodies. And it took that right away.

Not only did it take the right away from all of the smaller municipalities, but it took away the same right that had been granted to the city of Toronto in June of this year in the mega City of Toronto Act, which I supported. I supported that bill because I thought it was good for the city of Toronto. But then after six or eight weeks, I had to watch in some degree of horror while this government took away the same legislation which they had previously granted. They took it away from Toronto; they took it away literally from every other municipality in Ontario. When the mayors from the various towns and cities came before the committee they were, to a person, opposed to the actions of this government on that file.

Then I watched the second one, which was the detail surrounding the Ontario Municipal Board. It was either Bill 52 or 103, because I get them confused in my own mind—the numbers, not the contents. What it did is it closed the rights of appeal, so there are no rights of appeal in these forums anymore for ordinary citizens. It took away the rights of appeal for a citizen who was not present at the time of a development to go to the Ontario Municipal Board unless they had actually spoken at a hearing. They could have been present at the hearing; they could have signed a petition that was at the hearing; they could have had a spokesperson at the hearing who spoke on behalf of all of them, but unless they actually spoke, they were forbidden by this government, and are forbidden now, to appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board. So we saw that happen.

1700

Now we have expedited gas and electricity. We'll see that visited, I'm sure: This three-pronged attack against citizens' rights, against community rights and against cities' and towns' rights to have a say in how all of this

fixes within their municipality. We've certainly seen it in my own riding and in the adjacent riding of Toronto–Danforth. We've seen the power plant and what the Liberals have planned down on the waterfront of Toronto.

I've spoken about this on a number of occasions, but this is a portion of the bill today that will allow this to be expedited in ways that it never has been before. There was considerable—and remains considerable—community consternation against what this government is doing on the waterfront in Toronto. If you go around the streets in Toronto–Danforth and in the Beach to this day, you will see a lot of election signs. I guarantee you, there are a lot of election signs for various candidates, but what is numbering as many as, I think, almost any candidate has are signs that say “Breathe much?”—“Breathe much” with a question mark. They're signs against the mega power plant that's located in the port lands of Toronto harbour. People are upset. People are upset that they have lost their say. They are demonstrating in the only way left available to them: with a sign that says, “Breathe much?”

This the first community, I believe, that has been affected in this way, but every other community in Ontario, as a result of this bill and the other two bills that precede it, are now going to see expedited permits for gas and electricity projects. They're going to be there as a result of Bill 151 and if this section passes. That, too, is contained within here.

I went on to look at how the gas tax act is being changed. This one I found rather strange for a party that purports to be environmental and for a minister who stands up and tells us every day the great job she thinks she and her party are doing around the environment, because this one here says quite bluntly and forcefully that ethanol will be subject to the same rules as other fuels and will be taxed identically to gasoline.

It seemed to me that ethanol is a cleaner-burning substitute for gasoline. Ethanol does not add to the carbon mix because ethanol comes from the carbon mix. It comes from wood fibre, it can come from corn fibre and it can come from agricultural waste. As you grow it, it takes carbon out of the atmosphere and out of the air to grow these plants. You simply take it back out, so it's not adding to the carbon mix; it's simply putting the carbon back in from whence the carbon had come in the year or two or five years before.

It is something I thought was and is environmentally very sound, but this province is going to treat ethanol in exactly the same way you treat gasoline. You're going to tax it at exactly the same rate, and you are saying it is exactly the same as carbon-based fuels that are made synthetically from the ground.

I find this hard to fathom—why this government is choosing to do this. I find it very hard to fathom. If you go to a country which is much more into ethanol, if you go to a place like Brazil which uses mixtures of half-ethanol and half-gasoline and runs most of its cars and trucks on this mixture, you will find that the taxes on ethanol are less, so that the gasoline does not have to be imported nor does it have to be extracted. But this gov-

ernment in this act is sneaking through, without telling a soul—without the minister referring to it, without the parliamentary assistant referring to it—that ethanol will be subject to the same rules as other fuels and will be taxed as gasoline. I think that in terms of environmental stuff, this is wrong too.

I went on to look further. There's a section here in the provincial land tax. This one here is, I'm sure, going to cause a great deal of grief, particularly in northern Ontario and in unincorporated lands, particularly again in the north. It says that the government and the minister are now going to have the assessment on unincorporated territories and the land contained inside those unincorporated territories. The assessments will now fall under the Assessment Act as opposed to the Municipal Act because it is unincorporated. The minister may be benign if he chooses to be so and may grant tax relief, but he may also tax the people who own the land in the unincorporated land whatever taxes the minister deems to be acceptable and affordable. So we're going to have places, particularly in northern Ontario, particularly in remote jurisdictions or non-jurisdictions outside of municipal boundaries, in land that often does not have any roads, certainly has no sewers, most often has no hydro lines, most often has no garbage pickup, municipal services, libraries, police force or anything else—this is land that's quite remote in most cases—were they are going to be subject to tax.

I'm of two minds on this. I think everyone should pay tax, but people who pay tax have a right to expect services for that tax. There are no services offered to the people who live in these remote areas. They are not part of a municipal structure and they may not access any of the municipal structures. They're simply too far away to make it practicable. Even so, if they were to go into the nearest town, which they may have to fly into and may be 400 or 500 kilometres away, it is not at all certain. Certainly they would not be eligible to receive any of the tax benefits from that particular town, but the minister's going to be able to tax them. I find this potentially very problematic, and I am sure there will be people who will rally against and say that they expect full services if they are to pay those taxes. But it's contained within the body of the bill. It benignly says that the minister may exempt people, but it also gives the power not to do so, and that's found here. I don't know how this snuck in. I certainly would have welcomed the minister, in however brief his address was to the Legislature today, talking about this and the need for this because it is and will be a very contentious issue in much of northern Ontario.

The minister did talk, however, about the dispute with the federal government. I listened to this, as I always do, trying to find some way to steel myself, to get myself up and say, "You're right; we should be getting more money from the federal government." Quite frankly, we all know that they are running billions and billions of dollars in reserves. We all know that the money is just dripping at the federal government. They have so much money, they don't know what to do with it. They're paying down the debt, whereas all of the provinces, save and except

Alberta, are having a real time, and Ontario is no exception. We are like the other provinces, save and except Alberta: We are needing to find additional sources of money. But I have to tell you, I am getting a little bit tired of the refrain and the blaming of the federal government and the talking about the federal government's billions of dollars—which I acknowledge they have. I'm getting tired of the refrain because I do not see that negotiations are taking place in good faith that are resulting in anything. What we're seeing here in this Legislature is Harper-bashing. I'm a politician; I expect to bash other guys from time to time. But all I'm seeing all the time is Harper-bashing, Harper-bashing, Harper-bashing and talking about, "Pick up the phone and phone these people," as if I can pick up the phone and talk to him, or any members of this Legislature would get through on even the best day of their life. It's simply not going to happen.

1710

What is happening is that the federal government has the money—and I'm not arguing that. I'm not arguing because the negotiations have gone badly, because surely they have gone badly. What I am saying is that the money, in large part, is not part of this Budget Measures Act and it's not part of the promises that this government made in 2003. This government did not get elected on a platform that said, "We make the following 231 promises, based in whole or in part upon the federal government coming forward with \$2 billion or \$3 billion or \$5 billion." That wasn't part of the statement that was made.

We are the second-largest government in this country and we have the wherewithal to raise our own taxes, we have the wherewithal to raise our own sources of money, and certainly we should have the decided wisdom on where to spend that money.

I tried to figure out why the federal government is so reluctant to forward money to Ontario. It's not that difficult, if you stop and look at what Ontario is doing, to understand why the federal government may not want to co-operate.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: This is interesting to hear.

Mr. Prue: Yes.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: So listen to it. This is how some of the things work. I've been trying to—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Well, okay. This is how it works.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: I'm not talking about tax cuts. The federal government sent a cheque on September 25 for \$1.13 billion, and it arrived and was cashed by this government. I expect you to cash it. I expect you to put it in the bank. I hope you're going to put it in treasury bills until it's used, where you can make some money off it. The \$1.13 billion has arrived and is sitting in the bank and in the various budget envelopes in the province of Ontario. Of this money, \$312 million was earmarked for affordable housing—and it's there. Eighty million dollars is for the off-reserve aboriginal affordable housing trust. That's the

\$400 million that was spoken about in Ottawa. That's really where the \$400 million is. The federal government says now that the province has been paid.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: It hasn't.

Mr. Prue: Well, no, you say they haven't. But the federal government—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Just listen to me. Just let me get my sentences out before you heckle. The federal government says that the province has now been paid. The province, on the other hand, says—possibly correctly—that the money should have been over and above the funds committed to in the agreement. So the federal government is saying, "Here's your \$400 million," and the province is saying, "That isn't our \$400 million. That's just other money. We expect another \$400 million." That's what the debate is about: whether or not the \$400 million constituted the amount that was agreed upon or whether the province has the right to an additional \$400 million over and above that which was given.

The province has seen fit to draw the money down. What that means—and I had to go and look that up, because I didn't know what "drawing the money down" actually meant. It means that it's booked as revenue. It's contained as revenue, and the government has it down as revenue. The province deposits the money in envelopes, and if the envelopes have budgets larger than the allocation, it is determined that that money is contained within it. That means that the government does not have the legal liability not to spend—I hope I've said that right. Let's put it in plain language: The government is not required to spend the money on the intended purpose that the federal government gave if they already had an envelope which was larger than the amount of the money flowing in. To make it simple, this government spends about \$35 billion on health. The federal government gives \$5 billion for health. The government of Ontario has the ability to simply take that \$5 billion and say, "We're still spending \$35 billion on health"—I'm just giving this as an example. It does not have to say, "It's now \$40 billion we're spending." It can still be the same \$35 billion. So the federal government, when they give the \$5 billion, is seeing Ontario take the money and not necessarily—because the law does not require it—increase the service.

This is causing, I think, a great deal of difficulty between the two levels of government. One considers that they should get the money as of right, that the budget envelope already contains that money and wants to take it, possibly to use for other purposes or to keep it in a trust fund; the other government is saying, "Hold on. We're giving you this money. We expect you to spend it on the same purpose or on the plans that are put forward by the federal government." There is no increase in the service.

This all twigged and it all came to light when my colleague the member from Parkdale–High Park questioned the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in committee the other day. We were looking at where this money that had been given by the federal government for

housing had actually gone; \$150 million was supposed to be money that went into housing, and it's booked as revenue for the year 2006-07.

When we asked the finance authorities—I believe his name was Mr. Barnes, from the ministry—questions were asked of the minister and Mr. Barnes. Finance claimed that the money had not arrived. When we questioned the money that was being spent and has been spent on housing—\$18 million from the province and \$44 million from the federal government—what happened to the rest of the \$150 million that the federal government had sent and that was obviously in the budget?

As I said, the member from Parkdale–High Park asked Minister Gerretsen and Mr. Barnes and they could not answer whether in fact (a) the money had arrived, (b) whether it was in a pocket or (c) where it was at all. They could not answer that question in estimates. They suggested—and Mr. Barnes said, at least, at the end—that those questions had to be asked of the Ministry of Finance because, within the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, they simply do not know where that federal money has gone and why it has not been spent on housing.

I have to ask the members opposite. Yes, we know the federal government has lots of money, and yes, we want—all of us, everyone in this House—more money for the people of Ontario because we do a really good job for the rest of Canada. We pay our taxes, we subsidize poorer regions and we do what Ontario has always done within Confederation, but the people in Ottawa have a legitimate right to ask the questions.

If they are giving money to the province of Ontario to accelerate our programs; if they are giving money to enhance our programs; if they are giving money for specific good purposes, like the building of housing on aboriginal lands or on reserves; if they are giving the money in Ontario to do good works, like building housing for people; if they're giving the money to end the clawback; if they're giving the money for housing or for children or for health or for any of 100 good reasons, then certainly they have the right to know that that money is being expended, because it is taxpayers' money and it is federal government money that is being apportioned to each and every one of the provinces. They're asking, simply, that this be done.

I don't have a great deal of difficulty—I am not going to castigate the Prime Minister or the people in Ottawa for asking that the money that is forwarded to Ontario be spent on the purposes for which it is intended. I, quite frankly, have a hard time understanding this bashing—what the Minister of Finance had to say today, to get on the phone and tell Ottawa we're not getting enough. That which we get we cannot account for. No one will account in estimates. No one will answer in this House. No one will say anything, save and except, "It is not enough." I feel like we're just almost like a Dickensian character: "More soup, sir?" I mean, what is this?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: There's the person who knows.

Mr. Prue: There's the person who knows. Well, then maybe she should stand up and speak next, because we

haven't heard it from anyone. We haven't heard it in the debate; we haven't seen it in the press; we haven't seen it in this House; we haven't seen it in this bill. We need to know—

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): You will. It's coming.

Mr. Prue: It's coming. Okay. I hope Harper's money is coming.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: That's the problem. The opposition members in the federal House are asleep at the switch.

1720

Mr. Prue: I'm hearing over there that the opposition members in the federal House are asleep at the switch. I'm not sure that that necessarily is the case. I would think the members in your own party are otherwise occupied. The 29 members of the New Democratic Party I am sure are doing the best they can with the limited time that they're given to debate or to ask questions in the House. They're only allowed four questions a day, for a minute each. It's not quite as lively as it is here. It's not like this House.

In any event, I don't blame them for doing what they do, all of them, the Bloc Québécois either. They're all trying to do the best they can in terms of their own jurisdiction and what they can ask.

What I am afraid of, and what I have not heard, is if this money is not to be spent, if we've only spent \$18 million of provincial funds on housing since this government came into power, if only 1,652 units are actually occupied in this province—when the questions were asked, no moneys had been expended on those other housing projects that are in the works because the money comes at the end, not in the beginning. It comes not at the planning stage but when the construction starts and when the construction ends, when the money is actually forwarded. Very little money has been spent. Where is all of this money going?

I try to be as non-partisan as anyone in this House. I think I succeed on most days but I have to question, if there are hundreds of millions of dollars of the federal government sitting in pools somewhere, what are they sitting there for? The question needs to be asked. The Toronto Star asked, why are you sitting on \$392 million of federal money? Why is it in the bank when there are 122,000 families in Ontario looking for funds?

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: I'm getting questioned, why are the feds sitting—I can't answer the questions for the feds. I can ask the questions. I can't answer them because they are not forthcoming, but I want to know what this government is doing with that nearly \$400 million. That could assuage the difficulties of so many families, of so many people, of so many children. So many people could be helped if that housing was actually built, if a fire was lit underneath some minister or some bureaucrat and it was actually built.

I don't want to think, and I want to hope it's not true, that this government is simply going to hold all of that money and, come next spring, announce, "Here's what we're doing. Look at all the money we have, and we're spending it. The election's in October; remember us." These problems are ongoing problems. Every day, kids go to bed hungry. Every day, people are on waiting lists for years and years to get affordable housing. Every day, things need to be done.

The government in Ottawa has said that they've given the money and all they're going to give, I guess. You have received some money and you say it's not enough. I guess that's true too.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: We're going to fight and get more.

Mr. Prue: Okay, here we are: "We're going to fight and get more." All I am saying is that in this budget bill, and in listening to the Minister of Finance, we have today what we have, and that money should not be locked away. That money should not be in a separate account. That money should be used for the purpose for which it was intended. It was given, either in good faith or in bad faith, by the federal government. It is in your vault. You have the keys to that vault. I am simply suggesting that the minister can no longer say that it's all wrong at the federal government. He has an obligation, with the monies he has, to put them to the use for which they were intended, and that's on that particular point.

I've still got 15 minutes left.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Go for it.

Mr. Prue: "Go for it." I'm not sure I'm going to use my whole time, but I think I've been on topic, have I not?

Ms. DiNovo: Absolutely.

Mr. Prue: Absolutely. Always on topic.

Mr. Levac: Are you for or against it?

Mr. Prue: Am I for or against this bill? I almost always vote against bills on second reading, save and except when I cannot find any flaws. I have talked about the flaws. I've talked about the flaws that I see in the Development Charges Act, the flaws in the Assessment Act, the flaws in the Ontario Energy Board Act, the flaws in the Gasoline Tax Act, the flaws in the Provincial Land Tax Act, and some of the arguments that need better explanation than we are getting in the whole debate with the federal government. This bill needs to go to committee. This bill needs to have—did I hear it will be?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: It will.

Mr. Prue: That's good. I started off by saying that this government has sent most of its bills, including its contentious bills, to committee. I appreciate that that is done.

If you ask me whether I will support this bill, it will depend in large part at third reading on what happens in committee to these contentious parts. It is hard, because this is a bill of 192 pages. This is a bill that looks at 30 different acts. I can find, at least without falling asleep, some difficulties with six or seven of these acts, questions that I have of the government, questions that I'm sure the taxpayers of Ontario would want to be asked by

an opposition member. How these are resolved will depend in large part on whether or not I can support the bill when it comes back. But certainly, if you were to ask me point blank whether I can support it, with these things in it, going into committee: No. Will I be happy that it goes to committee? Absolutely.

This will be, I'm sure, a difficult year for the Minister of Finance. We heard him the other day when he talked about the economic statement. He talked about what was happening in Canada and in the world. He talked about high energy costs, the dollar and the value of the dollar. I was somewhat bemused because the figures he used of the Canadian dollar were last spring's, when it was topping 91 cents, and although it has shown some recent strength, it is down some 3% since that time. He talked about the high cost of energy, particularly gasoline, and I remember buying gasoline most often at well above \$1 a litre. It's quite easy to find gasoline on the streets of Toronto today at about 75 cents if you go after 10 o'clock at night, when they've reduced the prices. The prices are right down. So I'm not sure how much that analysis carries through. Notwithstanding that, the analysis that is correct and that he has stated is that there is a downturn in the United States, our largest trading partner.

Mr. Tascona: Huge.

Mr. Prue: How large and how long that going is to last—

Mr. Tascona: Deep.

Mr. Prue: I have my Conservative colleague here saying "huge" and "deep." I hope that's not the case, because certainly that is what triggered the 1990s. That's what triggered 1989, 1990 through 1995, before that corrected itself. I would hope that Ontario is not going to go through a similar phase and a similar time as that. We need to steel ourselves, we need to be ready, and hopefully the downturn will not be as serious. But I have noticed that some of the key indicators in the United States, including the price of houses, where they have tumbled in some jurisdictions by 25% in just one year, may be the harbinger of bad things to come.

Having said that, we have here Bill 151. It is a very small portion of a budget which we are all anticipating and expecting early in the spring. I am sure it will be the government's trump card or their signal piece of legislation that they will want to put forward in the next election. But in the meantime, we have an obligation on this side of the House to make sure that the government deals with at least those items, and probably a lot more that I couldn't find over the last few days, contained within the body of this bill which are contentious and for which the citizens expect far better answers than they have had in the debate up until this point.

I'm not going to use my last nine minutes because I think I've said everything that needs to be said. Thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: I'm pleased to respond very quickly to my colleague from Beaches–East York: Excellent debate, and I will say that you will hear more

about this debate at the federal-provincial level on this unfairness. We have tried our best to be patient, we've tried to work with the federal government, but to no avail. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, is it fair that we get \$86 less per person for the Canada social transfer and the Canada health transfer than if we were citizens of any other province in the country? That's \$86 less per person, which doesn't sound like a lot, but it's \$1.1 billion a year for Ontarians. Included in that is, for example, \$171 less for someone who needs a hip replacement here in Ontario than if they were in any other province in the country, and \$112 less per college student than if they were college students in any other part of the country. I just popped into the college reception, where we had amazingly talented students showing their work. Are they any less talented or do they have any fewer rights than students across the country? I don't think so. There's \$684 less for skills training, and here's the big one: \$3,640 less in EI than if that unemployed person was living in any other province.

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This inequity hasn't happened in recent years; it's been in the last few years. We attacked and challenged the federal Liberals when they were in power, and we're doing the same thing right now. I'm pretty proud of my Premier, because it's not easy to attack a party that you belong to. Yet we did that when the Liberals were in power, and we're doing it now because our job is to stand up for Ontarians. We put partisan differences and partisan similarities aside when it comes to standing up for Ontarians. It's time for fairness for all Canadians, including the 40% who live right here in Ontario. That's all we're asking for, and you'll hear much more about it in the days and months to come.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'm pleased to be able to offer a couple of comments in response to the speech given by the member for Beaches–East York. Consistent with the theme of his remarks is the question of this constant pressure that this government has put on dealing with what they refer to as the fiscal imbalance and the federal partnership. One of the things that the member from Beaches–East York made reference to was the fact that we need to be looking at what Ontario is doing in terms of its budget. The constant references, putting up the phone number of the Prime Minister a couple of weeks ago—things like this all demonstrate that they're looking for some scapegoats, they're looking for some methods to try to take credit in particular situations and at the same time constantly looking for somebody else to blame.

I would just end on one comment that the minister made in his remarks the other day. He talked about how achieving goals "will require even more prudence and greater discipline in managing our expenditures and ... expectations." I think the question is, more than what? Certainly the kind of spending that we have seen by this government, the fact that it has so much outstripped the economic growth, begs the question, more than what prudence and more than what greater discipline?

Ms. DiNovo: A particular thank you to the member beside me, Mr. Prue, for his insightful look at some of the deficiencies of this bill. I think perhaps our honourable member across the way missed the key point that he was making—actually, he made a number of key points. I'll get to the key point, but first of all, he talked about some of the deficiencies. He talked about the deficiencies in the bill dealing with the MPAC system and the fact that this was kind of snuck through and not given the debate it deserved, and some wonderful recommendations from our Ombudsman were not taken to heart and acted upon. He talked about the deficiencies around the gas tax act and how ethanol, which is clearly a better substitute than traditional gasoline, is being taxed at the same rate. That's not very environmentally friendly. He talked about the new way of financing the Spadina line and how this might be open to abuse.

Finally, he made his most important point, I believe, and that is that one can complain about the federal activities all one wants, but at the end of the day, there's no question that this government is sitting on \$400 million that's earmarked for housing and they're not spending it. Is that an oversight? I don't think so. We've dealt with this in estimates. We've dealt with this in the House. They know they have \$400 million, they know it's earmarked for housing and they're not spending it on housing. Again, these are not just figures. These are lives. These are 122,000 households waiting for affordable housing. These are children. Many of them are single-mother-headed families who need this housing and need it now. And these are the lives of those homeless who die on our streets. That is your responsibility. That's not the federal government's responsibility; that's this Liberal majority government's responsibility. They could spend it if they wanted.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I'm very pleased to stand in support of Bill 151 for a number of reasons. I think Minister Sorbara really hit the nail on the head when he talked about the patently unfair treatment that we in Ontario—not the government of Ontario but the people of Ontario—are receiving from the federal government. We witnessed it locally in my community in Ottawa, where we have one federal minister who's meddling in municipal politics by threatening to withhold \$200 million in transit funding and cancellation of \$30 million for the expansion of the Ottawa Congress Centre, which is desperately needed in our community. As the Ottawa Citizen said just a few days ago, "Tory times are tough times for the city of Ottawa."

I think it's important that all members of the House remember the resolution that we passed unanimously in this Legislature last year, I believe it was, calling for fair treatment on the fiscal imbalance. It's important that we continue to remind our fellow citizens that the people in our ridings, in my case Ottawa West–Nepean, should not be treated differently than other Canadians. We're all equal in this country. So when an individual in the college system in the province of Quebec, for instance, receives \$112 more than a student at Algonquin College

does—and I was just with the president of Algonquin College, Bob Gillett, and la présidente de La Cité, Andrée Lortie. They too require additional dollars so that those young people can go and make positive contributions in our communities and throughout the world.

So we ask all opposition members to join with us in ensuring that the new Conservative government stands up for Ontario, and the Ontario caucus members stand up and make sure that their voices are heard to ensure we get our fair share.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Beaches–East York, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Prue: I would like to thank the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the member from York North, the member from Parkdale–High Park and the Minister of Health Promotion for their comments.

To start, it's true, Ontario needs fair treatment. No one is going to deny that. No one in this House is going to deny that. I don't want for a moment the statements that I made to be construed as not saying we need fair treatment. We need the same amount of money for our unemployed because it costs just as much to be unemployed in Ontario as it costs to be unemployed in Newfoundland or Nova Scotia.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: Actually, more.

Mr. Prue: And perhaps more. It costs just as much to go to school in this province as it costs to go anywhere else, and students need to have the same subsidies. It costs just as much for any of the other government programs that are funded, and Ontarians deserve their fair share.

What I do want to reiterate again is that I do not want this to end up in a jurisdictional dispute with name-calling. I do not want to see what I have unfortunately seen both in the press and in this Legislature over the last number of weeks and months: "Pick up the phone and call the Prime Minister"—as if that could possibly happen. I have no more probability of getting through to the Prime Minister's phone than an average citizen if I were to pick up the phone. I have to say I've never tried.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: Call Jack Layton.

Mr. Prue: I'm being told to call Jack Layton. I talk to lots of people, and there are people across this province, across all levels of government and in all parties who believe that Ontario needs a fairer shake. I do not want this, though, to degenerate into any kind of name-calling, which I have seen. I am asking, please, not to simply say, "Phone up and do this, do this and do that." I want this to be a mature dialogue between levels of government and that Ontario gets its fair share. That is what needs to be said, and said again and again. That is what Ontario deserves.

1740

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): It's a pleasure to rise here tonight and speak in favour of Bill 151, the Budget Measures Act, which complements and I think builds upon many of the accomplishments of our government to date.

I wanted to speak a bit about the bill and some of these accomplishments, but I couldn't sit here all afternoon listening to some the speeches—especially the one from Simcoe North, where Mr. Dunlop decided to take a walk down memory lane and sing the praises of the Harris-Eves years—without some comments. I think it took a lot of gall for him to stand here in the Legislature and talk about some of the things that went on in the last election campaign and forget to tell us all about one of my favourites: the balanced budget myth. All of us may remember that the election took place on October 2, but I'd like to share with some people some of the quotes of the then leader of the Conservative Party, Premier Eves. On September 22, on CHRO, he said, "No, we will not be running a deficit this year." On Global TV on September 27, a few days before the election, he said, "We will balance this year." On September 30, on CKVR, again he said, "We will balance this year." Then, during the course of the leaders' debate, right in the thick of the campaign, he told the people of Ontario, he promised, "There won't be a deficit this year."

That is what the Conservative Party said; that's what the Conservative Party proclaimed. We got into power, and what did we find? We found a \$5.5-billion deficit. That has been the starting point for this government. What did we do? Instead of engaging in the orgy of cuts that they did—Mr. Dunlop went on about the great Harris years—what we did is invested wisely in terms of health care and in terms of education, and we did much to enhance the services of this province. For him to stand here today and not praise us, when the fact is we took a \$5.5-billion deficit and turned it into a surplus without the kinds of cuts they're talking about—if the member for Simcoe North wants to talk about broken promises, let's go back to Mr. Harris's time—

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Kitchener Centre, let's also keep in mind that we're debating Bill 151.

Mr. Milloy: As I said, I was just commenting upon some of the comments Mr. Dunlop spoke about.

Bill 151, of course, talks about the budgetary policies of this government. As I said, we came in facing a very large deficit and managed to make some very significant investments in terms of health care, in terms of education, in terms of infrastructure.

I think of my own riding and some the benefits we've seen in terms of health care. One of the greatest problems that we've faced as a community has been the doctor shortage, and one of my proudest moments as an MPP was several months ago when we announced the establishment of a satellite medical school that's going to be located in downtown Kitchener, a satellite to McMaster University. That's certainly something which is going to be bringing a whole swath of medical students and faculty into our area. Again, that's something that comes from the budgetary policy of this government.

I think of the investments that have been made in family health teams. Two family health teams in my community recently announced that they've taken in

1,500 orphaned patients—patients who did not previously have a doctor and who have come under them.

I think of education and what's been going on in my community. I've had a chance to visit every single school in my riding and discover the benefits of smaller class sizes in the early years. Forty-seven million dollars was recently announced out of the budget for repairs to our schools. We have more specialty teachers, especially in the areas of art and gym, and other specialty subjects which didn't exist in previous years.

We look at infrastructure. Mention was made earlier of gridlock. We've seen investment, certainly in my community, in highways. Many members will know that the area of Highway 401 that goes by Kitchener-Waterloo is currently undergoing major redevelopment, which has been brought about because of us keeping the promises and bringing forth what was outlined in the budget. Highway 8, the major thoroughfare that goes into Kitchener, is currently undergoing three-laning, and although it's causing a bit of gridlock right now, the result's going to be a three-lane highway and an ease in entering onto it.

One of the issues that came up with my friend Mr. Prue has to do with the fiscal imbalance. I just wanted to spend a minute or two on that. As members may know, I have the honour of serving as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who spoke a few minutes ago. I want to begin by praising both the Premier and the minister for the degree to which they've gone out and fought for fairness in Ontario. That's what it's about, and I think that what the Minister of Finance spoke about earlier today is simply that: fairness. What we've tried to do, as a government and as a party, is take it beyond partisanship. The Minister of Health Promotion mentioned a few minutes ago that we saw the passage of a resolution in this Legislature by all parties and by all members and which talked about this fairness. No one in Ontario is saying that we do not have a responsibility to other parts of the country. I think all of us recognize that there's an equalization program where funds are transferred to the have-not provinces. We in Ontario are committed to that program and, certainly, every year billions of dollars come from Ontario to support other provinces.

What we are talking about, and certainly it has been alluded to by a number of the members, is fairness when it comes to transfer programs. I don't see any reason why other provinces should receive funds for health transfers, funds for post-secondary education and other social programs on a per capita basis, and yet Ontario does not fully receive it. It totals \$86 per Ontarian, which, when you add it up, comes up to \$1.1 billion. When you look at some of the health demands on our system, when you see what's going on in post-secondary education, I think there's basically a fairness argument here. Why should Ontario not be receiving the same per capita funding? You end up in a ridiculous situation where we're, in fact, spending less. We're supposed to be the engine of Canada, the economic engine. We live in a world where post-secondary education, where first-class health care,

are an economic as well as a social advantage. We have a situation where we have other provinces that are able to spend more on those areas than Ontario, and in a sense we're subsidizing them.

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and indeed the Premier have spoken about employment insurance. We live in a world which is seeing the labour market rapidly changing. The old days, where someone had a job where they were paying into EI and perhaps were unemployed for some reason and had to avail themselves of the old insurance programs, are gone. We now have a situation where we have new Canadians who are finding themselves unemployed and haven't worked the requisite number of hours. We have a situation where people might work through agencies and not be paying into the EI system. We have a changing workforce, and what we are saying is that we need to be treated with the same fairness as other parts of the country. If you go to the Maritimes in Canada, we have the development of an employment insurance system which has taken into account some of the transitional nature of some of our people in the fishing industry. So how come we have these policies which will take into account different labour market changes in the system but won't take into account what's happening in Ontario? Three thousand, six hundred and forty dollars per person: That's a lot of money that is lacking in Ontario.

Again, we are calling for fairness. We called for fairness when the Liberals were in power in Ottawa and we're certainly calling for fairness now, and we're calling on members of all sides of the House. I think the Premier reminded people on the weekend that all parties and all members, including some of those who are now in the federal House of Commons, in fact signed that deal.

I think we've been very proud to stand up for Ontario. We've seen the Premier and the minister across the province delivering the message. I've had a chance to speak to a number of chambers of commerce and business organizations and they've echoed that call that we do need that fairness, so I ask all members of the Legislature to join with us.

It comes to compare and contrast. When you're talking about the situation that we found ourselves in, we saw that we inherited a situation of a very large deficit, and what we decided to do was to go forward with key investments. At the same time, we brought forward the fiscal transparency act, which is going to mean that in future election situations—and we're facing one next year—we're going to be seeing the Auditor General come in and tell the people of this province the state of the books. All of us will be able to go into the election and put our policies up against what the Auditor General's findings were. I'm proud of the fact that the budget measures, some of which are contained in Bill 151, contain a blueprint for the future, and I think that when we go forward to the electorate, when we put our numbers up against what the Auditor General finds, we're going to find that that sort of accountability was there.

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Again, I stand here today to speak in favour of Bill 151.

Mr. Prue, and I say this with respect, decided to mock the bill as being overly technical. Well, budget bills do tend to be technical.

One of the things, though, that I would like to make mention of is that Bill 151 contains the enhanced property and sales tax credit for seniors. I know that all of us in our ridings are very preoccupied with seniors' issues. I've had the chance, over the summer months, to visit not only a number of long-term homes but also retirement residences and to meet with seniors' groups. They're finding that they have many concerns with public policy and issues coming forward, and one of them is about the amount of tax they pay. Under Bill 151, we're proposing to increase the income threshold for the enhanced property and sales tax credit for seniors who have a cohabiting spouse or common-law partner from \$22,250 to \$23,090, starting in 2006, to ensure that recent increases in the amount of old age security and the federal and Ontario guaranteed income supplements would not result in any reduction in the credits—so catching up there, for the benefit of seniors.

Another part of Bill 151 that hasn't been talked about today is the universal child care benefit. As members know, many Ontarians with young children will now qualify for the new federal universal child care benefit. Under the proposals in Bill 151, Ontarians would be able to keep the benefits they're entitled to receive under the Ontario property and sales tax credit and the Ontario child care supplement for working families; the UCCB would not affect that.

So there's some of the technical side of Bill 151, which, again, I think builds upon the successes that we've seen over the last three years and that we're going to see going forward.

Just in wrapping up, Mr. Speaker, and if you'll indulge me, going back to the member from Simcoe North—if he wants to have a walk down memory lane to the times of Mr. Harris and Mr. Eves, I'm quite prepared to put our record and the plan that we have for the future up against them any day. I think you're going to see a progressive budgetary policy continue that's going to be in the best interests of all Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I'm pleased to add some comments to the speech by the member from Kitchener Centre.

He started off talking about some past history and budgeting and referring to the deficit that this government had in its first year when they were in power. He said it was \$5.5 billion. I might remind the member that in that year, the government—I sat on the estimates committee, where Gerry Phillips made a presentation, I think, in June 2003. He said at that point that he felt the government had a \$3.5-billion challenge facing it. Of course, that was the year of SARS and the blackout. But despite all that, the government went ahead and made an

election promise to not bring in any new taxes and to balance the budget.

When we look back at what has happened over the last few years, we see that the government has actually had far more revenue than they expected to have, but the problem is that their spending has been just right out of control. When you look back at the McGuinty government's own public accounts for 2006, they've had \$5.7 billion more in spending than the fiscal plan that they released during the election. When you look at revenue, they actually had \$2.7 billion more than they were counting on when they made their election promise not to raise taxes. But they went ahead and made that promise anyway and then still brought in the health tax, despite all the extra revenues. Spending is the problem, this government has just not controlled their spending, and their budgeting has been off every single year that they've been doing their budgeting.

Ms. DiNovo: I just wanted to comment as well on the comments of the honourable member from Kitchener Centre. He mentioned seniors. I would simply bring his attention to the fact that in my riding and in ridings across this province, seniors are in danger of losing their houses because of property taxes. In this bill, as Mr. Prue pointed out, that is not addressed. In fact, the policy of just putting the discussion on hold and not following through with the 22 recommendations of our Ombudsman continues in force.

He mentions child care and, again, this is a government that promised 10,000 child care spaces. Of course it's to laugh at that promise right now. It also promised \$150 million to \$300 million into child care and, again, this bill does nothing to address that.

Most profoundly, it does nothing to address the problem of the clawback of the national child supplement. That makes a huge difference to poor children in this province, and these are the poorest of the poor children. They're being clawed back at the rate of \$122 a month, to \$227 a month if there are two children. That's a significant amount of money for our poorest families, so this bill does nothing with that.

We've had about six months now to work with the budget and we've seen that the budget doesn't work, and it certainly doesn't work for the poorest of our families. So we approached this bill with great hope that it might correct some of the inadequacies of that budget. Instead, all it does is extend them.

Needless to say, there's nothing about the fact that on ODSP, \$1,459 is about what a family brings in, a mother with two children, which is more than a woman with two children working at minimum wage, who would only be making \$1,320—clearly a huge deficiency in this bill when dealing with the poorest of our working families.

Mr. Levac: Maybe what we want to do is make sure that we are clear on what the bill is proposing to do if accepted, and that is to exclude income received from underneath the federal universal child care benefit from eligibility calculations of the Ontario property tax credits, and from the Ontario child care supplement for working

families. If the two opposition parties are choosing to vote against it, they're voting against these types of things.

Let's be clear. They've both said that they're going to be voting against it, so they're not going to enhance the dividend paid to tax credits. So the Tories are going to have to explain to the people who do the investing in the province why they don't want that particular piece of legislation voted for. And enhance the effectiveness of the Canadian Public Accountability Board's oversight for auditing public companies which support public confidence in financial reporting—that's not going to be voted for. That means you're voting against that particular type of style.

If that is a problem for you, and then do what we said we were going to do, which we've done with almost every single bill in this place, to send it to committee to hear feedback from the people, to make sure they have an opportunity to voice that concern—I don't know why you're against this. You say you're against it now but that you might change your mind when it comes to committee. Why don't you say that you're for the bill and then see what other improvements you can make in the bill when you come to committee? Let's take a look at that record.

The questions I have: Who are the ones who caused the \$5.5-billion deficit? Who is the group of people that on a Friday of a long weekend proposed to subject long-term-care facilities, now homes, to a 15% increase? Who was that? Who had the secret contract that couldn't be obtained by the opposition until this became the government: the contract for the 407? Who did that? Who was it that spent \$600 million on consultants? Who started a war with the public service and the teachers? Who closed the OMAF regional offices—who was that?—and also cut the Ministry of Agriculture by \$100 million? I know that some people over there were against it but they didn't get a chance to say no. Let's just get this thing done so we can improve the—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member for Whitby–Ajax.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak just briefly on Bill 151, the Budget Measures Act. I'm certainly cognizant of the need to respond directly to the comments that were made by the member from Kitchener Centre, and I'm really more than happy to do that. The member spoke about the improvements in health care, education and infrastructure in his riding, and then talked about fairness, and compared and contrasted the need to compare the rights of Ontarians versus the rest of the people in Canada. I think we need to take a look at the rights of some Ontarians vis-à-vis other Ontarians. I can tell you that in my area of Ontario, in Durham region, we're not seeing those improvements in health care, infrastructure and education. In fact, we're seriously underfunded per capita in terms of health care dollars, and nothing has been done by this government to address it. Similarly with respect to infrastructure, there was nothing in this government's budget this year that dealt with our infrastructure prob-

lems. We're strangling in gridlock in Durham region, there's no economic growth as a result of it, yet nothing has been happening for us in Durham region. But don't we pay taxes just like everybody else in Ontario? That's the argument that we're hearing from the government members with respect to the issues vis-à-vis the federal government and—

Mr. Murdoch: There's no gridlock in St. Catharines.

Mrs. Elliott: That's right. There are certain parts of this province that are doing very well, and others are being completely ignored. And it's not just in my area of Durham region; there are communities in the north, aboriginal citizens, women and children, as the member for Parkdale–High Park has indicated—none of them are being helped by this government. I would suggest that what the members of this government need to do is—it's very hypocritical to say that the feds aren't treating them fairly when they're not treating all—

The Deputy Speaker: You might want to think about the word.

Mrs. Elliott: I'm going to withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mrs. Elliott: Speaker, I'm sorry. "Disingenuous" would do. But I think it's important to point out that if you're looking at fairness for all Ontarians vis-à-vis the rest of Canada, you need to look at fairness for all Ontarians across the board. Members should consider those issues very seriously before they start continuing to pile the accusations onto the federal government.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Kitchener Centre, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Milloy: I want to thank all my colleagues who spoke on my comments. To the member for Parkdale–High Park, she raised concerns about seniors, and I think my colleague from Brant spoke about some of the things in this bill in terms of seniors. At the same time, last Friday we saw an announcement of 30 million additional dollars for home care in this province, which builds upon the increases in home care that have taken place since we

came to power. At the same time, we've seen investments in long-term-care homes; we've seen reductions of wait times for key surgeries, which is a particular concern for seniors; we've seen investments in health facilities.

She also raised the issue of poverty among children, and I want to thank my colleague from Brant who spoke about the aspects of Bill 151 which deal with the universal child care supplement and in fact do address, in a small way, some of the concerns that she raised about children right in the bill and certainly concerns that we've addressed in other budgetary measures.

I want to save the last few seconds I have for what I heard from my friends across the way in the Conservative Party. First, I heard my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka talk about how the big problem is that we spend too much over on this side of the House, and then I heard my friend from Whitby–Ajax say that the big problem is that we haven't spent enough over on this side of the House. I've got to tell you something: We came to power and we encountered a deficit—not only a deficit in terms of dollars, but a deficit in terms of health care and a deficit in terms of education, a deficit in terms of infrastructure. We've seen the investment of billions and billions of dollars. They say that we don't keep our promises? Well, our number one promise was to fix the services in this province.

They came to power, and I remember that Mr. Harris said he wasn't going to cut health care. Since we're taking a walk down memory lane, I have a press release, February 23, 1996: "Health Minister Jim Wilson announced today a new funding approach for hospitals. Beginning April 1, 1996"—

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

The House adjourned at 1804.

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