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Wednesday 4 April 2007

Mercredi 4 avril 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 4 April 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 4 avril 2007

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM
APPROPRIATION ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LES MESURES
BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION
ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 2, 2007, on the motion for second reading of Bill 187, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 187, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I seem to recall that the member for Beaches–East York had the floor.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): You are correct, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

This is another one of what I describe as my bifurcated speeches: start one day and—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Bifurcated?

Mr. Prue: Yes, bifurcated: cut in half. But it wasn't really cut in half, because it was 20 minutes the first day and pretty close to 40 minutes the second.

I'd just like to recap a little, because there was one point that I made on the last occasion that I would like to better clarify. It was brought to my attention by the member from Lanark–Carleton after we left the chamber, in the members' gallery. He told me that perhaps my spin on a certain element was not exactly the way he wished it could have been. I started to think very carefully and clearly about what he had to say, and in fact he probably was right. It was in my description of the changes to the Assessment Act, which are really almost non-existent in the budget.

I've heard Liberal member after Liberal member stand up and talk about how wonderful it is that they're now going to have a four-year phase-in of any increases and that they're only going to do the assessment once every four years, so that when you get whacked, you get whacked four times as much as you would get whacked individually in any one given year.

I explained during my speech that this was potentially going to cost municipalities a lot of money, because if

you are getting a decrease, you get it all at once. If you are getting an increase, it is phased in over the next four years. I gave an example, that a \$100 decrease would be given to the homeowner immediately in the first taxation year, and a \$100 increase to a similar property down the road would be given a phase-in over four years of \$25, \$25, \$25 and \$25 until that \$100 increase was worked out. I suggested that this was going to cost municipalities a lot of money because they were going to have to reduce the taxes on certain properties without having the corresponding ability to raise the taxes on others, so that for every property where the taxes were raised, they could only collect a quarter of the amounts of money where they were decreased.

The member from Lanark–Carleton pointed out quite succinctly that this isn't going to cost municipalities any money at all, in his view, because what the municipalities, of course, will do is simply raise the taxes for everybody. That is an option which I acknowledge is a possibility, and in fact would probably be a probability, because the municipalities need the funds that they have. So when they hand out a \$100 decrease and can only get a \$25 increase in the first taxation year, the only option they have is to find the \$75 from somewhere else, which will in turn lead to an increase in taxes for all properties within the municipality to cover that deficit.

1850

I don't know whether the finance minister has thought this through. It clearly is illogical. I don't know whether or not the members who have stood one after another to laud this particular portion of the bill are thinking clearly of how this is going to affect the 480 municipalities in this province. Maybe my learned friend here, the parliamentary assistant, will answer how this is going to happen. I know that either one of two things is going to happen: The municipalities are going to get whacked in the short term, although over four years I guess they'd get their money back, or, in the alternative, every single taxpayer is going to have to pay that higher percentage in order to make up the shortfall of, in the example, the \$75 on a \$100 increase that is not charged. That's really, I think, what needs to be said. I thank the member from Lanark–Carleton for giving me some thoughts and allowing me to clarify what I think is a glaring omission and error in this bill.

On the last occasion, I talked about how Bill 187 is one of a compendium of budget bills that are brought forward. It's not just the budget, on the day the finance minister rises in the House to give it, but it's a whole

series of budget bills that flow from that, and this is Bill 187, which gives a lot of substance to what was said on that day. I talked about the Assessment Act. I talked about how it had failed in many other ways, and finished my 20 minutes with the whole child benefit package and how we as New Democrats are not satisfied with a child benefit package that phases things in over five years so that poor children don't get the full benefit for five years. And that heinous clawback which the Liberals had promised to do away with in 2003 will not be done away with: not in this cycle of the election, not in the next cycle of the election, should the House last four years—not until the election after that. I don't think that that promise has been fulfilled, nor should people think that it has been.

Today I rise to talk about the other aspects of the bill and of the budget which I find troubling.

Some of us had the opportunity some few minutes ago to be downstairs at the meet-the-miners reception. As I was leaving to come up here, there was the final speaker at the miners' reception, a gentleman whose name I did not catch but who spoke quite eloquently, from De Beers mining. He was talking about the impact this budget is having upon his particular company, upon northern Ontario, and upon mining in general. In fact, his words at the end were quite chilling. He talked about this tax having such a negative impact that the De Beers mine near Attawapiskat in all likelihood will be the last operating mine in Ontario, because nowhere else in the country and nowhere else in the world that he was able to recount are taxes imposed in such an arbitrary and unfair way. He talked at some length about his assurances to the head office of De Beers in London, to the head office of De Beers in South Africa, and about how he had given assurances that if there was one thing he could give an assurance about in Ontario, it was that we were stable, that people knew what was happening. So even though the quality of the diamonds may not be as high as in some locales, they were plentiful, and the government, he said, could be trusted in a stable environment to make sure that the diamond mine could be mined, and mined out, during the phase and that the profits and the considerable risk that De Beers had taken could be realized.

What he said, again, was chilling because that is not in fact what has happened. He used the words "bushwhacked," "ambushed," "consultation and lack thereof," and even spoke of meeting with ministry officials and being told everything was fine, only to see the finance minister rise in this House and literally bushwhack him, his company, and put the whole mining exploration in Ontario at considerable risk.

I understand why the government has done this. I understand not why they ambush them, but I understand that they're looking for money. That's what this is about. This government sees an opportunity to take \$15 million or \$20 million or \$50 million or \$100 million. I'm not sure what's going to be there by the time it's all mined out. They see an opportunity to take a lot of money from this fledgling company in Ontario. It's the first time

we've ever found diamonds in sufficient quantity for them to be mined and it's the first time that a company the size of De Beers has actually come here to do it. There was an opportunity here to make a few fast bucks, but I'm not sure that this is in the best interests of the mining industry nor in the best interests of the people of Ontario, and I am absolutely not sure it's in the best interests of the people of Attawapiskat, those people in northern Ontario, our First Canadian nation, the people who live in those small communities and who for the first time, in Attawapiskat, can see a real future for themselves and for their children.

Members of this Legislature, and I see some of them here today, had an opportunity, when we were debating and thinking about the revenue sharing bill, the private member's bill that was put forward by my colleague the member for Timmins-James Bay, to travel around northern Ontario to many of what people call reserves, and which I prefer to call First Nation communities, and to see the life and how people live in the far north of Ontario. I know that members who went will agree with me that the living conditions in those communities are shocking; they are terrible; they are bad. There are problems with the youth who don't have employment and who tend to go into drugs, drinking and despair. The suicide rate is extremely high. The housing is very poor. The number of families who are crowded into a single location is something that should cause all of us shame. There are little opportunities to find work. There are no recreational activities in most of them.

But I think the greatest thing that people who went on that tour with me noticed, the thing that struck them the most, was the northern stores they went into in those communities. When you went into the store to buy something which we in Toronto or anywhere in southern Ontario could simply go in and buy—a bag of milk for \$3 or \$4—it was \$25 there. If you went in for a bag of potatoes, which we would buy for 99 cents most times in Toronto, Windsor or London, it was \$20. I remember the member for Willowdale wanted to buy some of his favourite ice cream, which was a Häagen-Dazs of some kind that would cost \$4.69 in the supermarket near him in Willowdale. It was more than \$30 there. These are the communities where the level of unemployment is so incredibly high, where there is literally no future, where people are on welfare, where people don't have money, and this is the kind of life they have. This is what they pay for the things that we in southern Ontario take for granted.

I was hoping that the Attawapiskat mine would really do something for them, and to hear the chilling tale from the speaker from De Beers causes me great concern. It causes me great concern not because this government wants the money—of course they want the money. But who really needs the money isn't the government of Ontario; who really need the money aren't the people in Toronto and aren't the people in Hamilton, Ottawa, Windsor or Thunder Bay. The people who really need the money and really need these resources to be developed

and need to be part of it are our native communities, our First Nations people in northern Ontario. We have an obligation, I would suggest to them, to do more than take the money and cause a company like De Beers to stop exploration.

Nearly everyone who lives north of the 51st parallel in this province—not everyone; nearly everyone—is aboriginal. Nearly everyone belongs to one of these small communities that are in despair, and we have an obligation. Some members will think, “Oh, no, this is a federal responsibility,” but I think they would be very sadly mistaken if they think that. It is equally a provincial responsibility because the whole of the area of northern Ontario is made up of a series of treaties, and one of those treaties, the largest one, is Treaty 9, and the people who live north of the 51st parallel have a treaty not only with the crown, not only with the government of Canada, but in 1906 the treaty was signed with the province of Ontario. That treaty says they will be treated in a way that is just and fair, that they will be consulted, that they will be helped, and I think we have an obligation in this Legislature not to say even for one minute that those people are not full citizens of Ontario, and not for one minute that we do not have a moral and a legal obligation to do everything in our power to develop their lands and to give them hope, a future, jobs and prosperity.

1900

I'm hoping the government will reconsider this money they're going to take from De Beers. If you feel it's absolutely necessary to take the money, then take it to invest in Attawapiskat; take it to invest in Peawanuck; take it to invest in Marten Falls, Ogoki, and all the other places we went—in Kashechewan. If there is a community in this province that needs some help, it's Kashechewan. If you're going to take that money from De Beers, make sure it is spent where it is needed and honour the commitments of the province of Ontario in 1906 in the signing, 101 years ago, of Treaty 9. For the first time, do the right thing by the people who live there.

I want to talk about the other things that are found in Bill 187. The next one which troubles me a lot too, because it contains so little, is the whole discussion around the status of the artist. I have heard the minister and members stand up and say, “This is really good,” that what is contained within Bill 187 is something for artists. But I looked at it and I was dumbfounded by what isn't there, not by what is there. What is there is having a Saturday in June as status-of-the-artist day, as if that is going to help. I don't think it's going to help artists a whole lot for all of us to say on that day, “Aren't artists wonderful?” We should all in our hearts each and every day, 365 days a year, say, “Aren't artists wonderful?”

I wore this tie in part for the native peoples today—it's a Norval Morrisseau tie—talking about native people, but also about the artists, who I think in this Bill 187 are not being treated the way they should be. If the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Culture and the whole cabinet are serious, the provisions of the status of the artist need to be reworked. There is nothing in this bill that allows

the minister to change or to enforce the standards of working conditions. There's nothing in here about child performers, and there are a lot of child performers in plays, on television and in movies. There's nothing in here that protects them. There's nothing in here that gives artists tax preferences that we often give to many business people. There's nothing in here to give it to artists.

Artists are among the poorest members of our society. Some might end up being very rich over time. Some musicians end up being very rich. If you happen to be in a really good band and call yourselves the Rolling Stones or some other thing—

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): It's taken.

Mr. Prue: It's taken; that one's gone. But most artists struggle and get by on what is minimum wage or less. They do it because they love their art. They do it because they have an ideal of producing something wonderful that will outlast them. Artists are very poorly paid, and we have an obligation and indeed an opportunity to allow artists that kind of money so they can continue to do what they do, because the heart and soul of any community, and I speak of any community in the world, is vested in the artists and the people who explain it through music, through paintings and sculpture, who explain it through all of the mediums of the artistic mind. That is what defines us. It defines us as Ontarians, as Canadians, it defines us as a people, and we need to do that.

There's nothing in here about training issues. There's nothing in here about the status-of-the-artist legislation that people have been asking for, which this government back in 2003 promised would be undertaken and would be law within one year of the election of the Liberals. It's not there. All that is in this budget, all that is here—and I asked the Liberals; I asked the parliamentary assistant if he wanted to comment on this—is that on a Saturday in June—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: He's the one who will respond. Okay. It is a finance bill, after all. He will respond.

That's all there is. There should be and there could be so much more. That's where we're at.

The next thing, looking down in this bill, that I wanted to comment on was the WSIB and the provisions. Now, I was happy, as I think anybody would be, to see that there was finally an increase. It's 2.5%. It's under the inflation rate, but at least it's something. But I was unhappy to see that that's really all the budget contains, a very modest increase after so many years of virtually nothing for those who are on workers' compensation. I use the old term because it's easier for people to understand.

I had a constituent come to see me this past week. He is a man who had to leave his job many years ago now, I guess 10 or 15 years ago, because he worked around solvents. His lungs became so bad working around the solvents that he was forced to retire. His doctors told him he only had a year or two to live because his lungs were in such bad shape. He received WSIB compensation. He had that compensation, but he fooled them all, because he

lived until he was 65. Now he's 65 and they have cut off all of that. They have told him that if he wants to be compensated, he has to get his old-age pension and he has to go down and apply for the supplement. He is very upset at that. I told him I would raise it in the Legislature. I don't blame him for being upset. He worked all of his life for companies, paid his taxes and was compensated by the courts for suffering grievous harm, and in his old age—because you have to remember, he had to retire 10 or 15 years early—he no longer has a pension from his company that is adequate, because he had to leave it early. He no longer has the WSIB, and his only option now, having lived to 65 and fooled the doctors, is to go and ask for the old-age supplement. He doesn't think it's right, nor do I. I looked in this bill and, apart from the 2.5% increase, there is no real reform to the WSIB, which this party talked about in 2003 and after four years has not accomplished.

I went down to the next one, which was the whole thing about the minimum wage. If I've heard one Liberal talk about this, I've heard them all talk about it, about \$10.25 if you can last it out for three years. I don't think that's enough. We New Democrats believe in a \$10 minimum wage. We've been fighting that campaign now for months and months. Any movement, I guess some people will say, is fine. In fact, the Liberal response is, "It's not enough, but it's a good start." That's the response to almost everything when I hear them speak.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It should have started four years ago.

Mr. Prue: That's where I'm going to come from. If the start was taking place four years ago, it seemed all well and good that it went from \$6.85 in small, little increments until finally, after four years, it made it all the way up to \$8. Now I guess they've seen the light in terms of—

Mr. Hudak: I don't believe them.

Mr. Prue: I don't either, but they appear by this budget to have seen—

Interjections.

Mr. Prue: They believe by this budget that they're going to increase it incrementally by 75 cents, but I ask them to think about this: The campaign for a \$10 minimum wage now, not in three or four years but now, was to lift people to the poverty level, the low-income cut-off figure as set by the federal government for municipalities and for towns in Ontario. Ten dollars for a single person would bring them approximately within \$100 of the low-income cut-off figure. What this government has promised is that you're going to get \$8 now; in a year and more from now you're going to get \$8.75; a year after that you're going to get \$9.50; and a year after that we're going to get you all the way up to \$10.25. That is tantamount to telling people that they are going to live in poverty not for this year or next year or three years, but even at the end of the three years people will be living in poverty, because in this country and around the world it is a truism that there is inflation.

Try to look at the numbers. At \$8.75 a year from now, if there is no inflation, people will be \$2,600 under the low-income cut-off figure. If they work 40 hours a week, they will be \$2,600 below. Now, that's \$2,600 below for a single person. If you're feeding a family, then you're way, way below that. In the year that the \$10.25 finally kicks in, people will be \$800 below, or about 6% below, if they can last that long, if there is no inflation. If there is inflation, that is not going to happen at all.

I listened, again, to the minister in the speech that he gave on the budget and in the scums that followed. He kept saying, "We have to be prudent." He kept using that word "prudent." "We have to make sure we don't drive jobs out." I don't know, and we still have been singularly unable to discover, where he got that information save and except that he hired some guy from the University of Toronto who seems to have been of like mind. There are many economists, though, who disagree vehemently with what was said. In fact, the only empirical evidence that exists where this has actually been studied, where people have looked at how many job losses occurred or did not occur, how the economy was affected, the only empirical study of this for a large increase was in the state of New Mexico. It's the only one we can find. It quite clearly showed that there was no job loss at all. It quite clearly showed that when that state raised their minimum wage—

Ms. Horwath: It was 65%.

Mr. Prue: Yes, they raised it 65%, in American dollars, from US\$5.15 to US\$8.50, which is slightly more than C\$10. When they raised it in one fell swoop, people said the sky was going to fall in, that people by the thousands were going to lose their jobs, and at the end there were no significant employment effects whatsoever. There were no fewer jobs created and not more jobs created. There were no problems. There were no companies that went bankrupt as a result of it. All there was was thousands upon thousands of people who were lifted out of poverty. Those same thousands of people were able to do things that all of us enjoy on a day-to-day basis. They were able to shop in their local stores. They were able to ride on their local buses. They were able to take their kids to the occasional movie or to the park. They were able to do things that they were not able to do in poverty at \$5.15 but that they were able to do when it was raised to \$8.50, a 65% increase in one fell swoop, with no job loss whatsoever.

1910

You can ask what happened. I've heard restaurateurs who say, "This is going to create havoc." I don't think so. If you go to McDonald's today, if anybody here has kids or if there are people who like that food—

Mr. Hudak: I like McDonald's.

Mr. Prue: You like McDonald's.

Mr. Hudak: A quarter pounder with cheese.

Mr. Prue: Okay, a quarter pounder with cheese. My friend from Erie-Lincoln says he wants to go there. I don't know what one of those costs today. Is it about two bucks?

Mr. Hudak: A bit more.

Mr. Prue: A bit more than two bucks. I will tell you that a person working behind the counter can make about 50 of those an hour. I once did it for McDonald's. You make about 50 of them an hour. That's about how many you can make if you're one person. Of course, they have multitudes of people, so they can make hundreds of them an hour. That will increase the cost of the meal by about a nickel. They will have to pass that on, but I would think that most Ontarians and most Canadians are generous enough to say, "If it's going to cost me \$2.00 or \$2.50, let's raise it to \$2.55. Let me pay the extra nickel to know that the person who is working behind that counter can have a decent standard of living."

I say the same thing about all the big chains. Wal-Mart pays minimum wage. What is wrong if Wal-Mart pays a little bit extra so that people who shop there can? I would not feel the same compunction of not shopping there if I knew that they paid their people a decent wage. One of the things that Wal-Mart does in Ontario when they hire people is that they tell them that the wage they are going to pay them is not sufficient for them to maintain themselves. In the Wal-Marts in Toronto, they give out a list of the nearest food banks along with your pay stub, and I think that's a crime. I would hope that if we are going to raise the wages, a company like Wal-Mart will have to pay the same decent wages that Canadian companies, similar companies like Zellers or the Bay, would already pay, because they pay higher than minimum wage. If I'm forcing someone like McDonald's or Wal-Mart to pay more, I hardly think that that's going to cause any great difficulty for a Standard and Poor's 500 company. So I'm not satisfied with this, and I'm not satisfied with how these people are generally being treated in this budget.

I looked at municipalities next. I'm looking at the good thing, which I think was the seven-year phase-in for businesses, and I think every single business will be happy with this. I wouldn't blame them for being happy. They've been fighting for it for years. I'm sure they're happy with it. But I also know that many of them are angry because they're not phasing in the educational property tax at any time at the same rate. The educational property taxes paid in many municipalities, including the one I'm from, Toronto, are far higher than in the surrounding municipalities. It's not so much the residents who are paying for this but the businesses, and it is quite literally driving businesses out of large municipalities like Toronto and Ottawa—

Ms. Horwath: And Hamilton.

Mr. Prue: —and Hamilton. My friend is right.

I looked at how much was being given, too, and it seems like such a pittance. This budget allows for \$240 million of phase-out over seven years. It's about \$33 million a year, which may seem like a lot, but there are literally tens of thousands or 100,000 businesses in the city of Toronto alone, and in Ontario I'd hazard a guess that it's probably five times that, and that doesn't seem like very much money when you spread it out. I don't

know whether it's going to have the effect that this government thinks it will, but at the same time, it's costing some considerable revenues.

I looked at the municipalities again, and what all 480 of the municipalities, through AMO, and the city of Toronto, which does not belong to AMO, are asking for is that the government end the download—a pretty simple thing. They have made a calculation which the minister has never, ever denied. I have asked him repeatedly. I know my friend from Erie-Lincoln, as the finance critic for the Conservatives, has repeatedly asked the question, is it true that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario says that the download is costing municipalities \$3.2 billion? I have never, ever had it denied, and I believe it to be true, because not this minister, nor the minister in the interregnum, nor Minister Sorbara before that, have ever denied that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario is correct. We think there is some \$3.2 billion which should be uploaded, and none of that is in the budget.

I know the city of Toronto has cried foul, and I know that some of the other municipalities are crying foul as well, but to add insult to injury—and I asked the question of the finance minister the other day here in the House—the province of Ontario is not paying its bills for the city of Toronto. There are three legislated programs where the province has agreed to pay a portion of the administrative costs. One of those is Ontario Works, another one is the shelter per diems for homeless shelters in Toronto and the third one is for child care. In each of those cases, Ontario has not honoured its commitment to the city of Toronto. They are not paying the administrative costs for Ontario Works up to what has been agreed to and what has been signed by law, they are not paying the per diem which has been agreed to and which has been signed in in an agreement in law, and they are not paying the portion of the child care which is their responsibility. When you look at those three figures, a \$29.3-million underpayment by the province of Ontario for Ontario Works, \$29.1 million in shelter per diems and \$13 million for child care, it adds up to \$71.4 million. That's \$71.4 million that the city of Toronto rightly is asking that the province pay.

I have heard members of the cabinet talk many times about deadbeat parents and about the wonderful government program that has found five deadbeat parents. Remember that? You know, the big announcement to find five people and to force those five deadbeat parents to actually pay up. Well, I think the same holds true for deadbeat governments.

Mr. Hudak: You should make a website.

Mr. Prue: I'm sure the city of Toronto will make a website. I'm sure that the city of Toronto will make this into a political issue. If the government of Ontario does not pay its legislated required bills of \$71 million for these three legislated programs, I know precisely what is going to happen. What is going to happen here in Toronto is the same thing that has happened in North Bay. When the taxes are going out in North Bay now,

they're going out with "the McGuinty tax" on it. Sorry, I had to name it, because that's what they're calling it. They don't say "the Premier's tax"; they say "the McGuinty tax." They're pointing out to the good citizens of North Bay that the reason the taxes are escalating and going up by this amount of money is because the province has not made good on the commitments. I know full well that municipalities across Ontario—and my good friend here from Burlington will attest that that's probably the case out there too—

Interjection.

1920

Mr. Prue: They may. You may have to fight a rear-guard battle to say how it got there, but they're going to put it out and say, "We are raising your taxes above what we said we were going to raise them by because we have to pay the provincial portion because the province hasn't paid." And I don't blame them for doing that. That's what they're going to do. You know they're going to do it and you know this is an election year and that's what they're going to do to you. I'm only asking that you honour the commitment and the legal document that you have signed to pay the portions of each of those that you have agreed to do. And it's not in this budget. When I asked the finance minister, all we got was a rant and a whole bunch of screams from the back bench about how Toronto has got enough. Whether they got enough or not, that's up to the negotiation, but what is important is that there is a legal requirement for you to pay this money and the people in Toronto expect it to be paid.

Mr. Speaker, I am fast running out of time.

About housing, I was disappointed in housing too. Wow. The province gets \$392 million from the federal government. They sit on it for a whole year and do nothing with it. And then finally in the budget they announce to great fanfare that they are spending \$127 million on housing, \$35 million a year for an allowance for people, a shelter allowance, and \$20 million a year for aboriginal housing. Well, I add those numbers up and they don't come anywhere near \$392 million. They don't come anywhere close to it. And I wonder about a government that promised 20,000 units of affordable housing and has built 6,000, or will have built 6,000 by the time we get to election day. They haven't built them yet. There's 2,000 built and 4,000 in the works. I wonder about that 20,000-unit commitment. I wonder about the new and built homes. I wonder when they say they feel the pain, because I don't think they do. And I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, the responses to date on this issue have been pitiful at best. They are simply spending federal dollars, and they're not even spending them all. Nowhere has this government in four years committed a single penny of their own money to building housing, not a single penny. You can spend federal money. Hell, I can spend anybody's money, and I'm sure that's what they are doing, but they're not spending any of the money that they raise generally in taxes, nor have they made this a priority whatsoever of their government.

There are 170,000 families in Ontario looking for low-cost affordable housing and who are on waiting lists. There are psychiatric survivors who have really been promised a lot more and who live on the mean streets. And then there is the whole problem of affordable housing that was downloaded.

Some of the members had the opportunity, like I did, to go and live in public housing for a couple of nights. And some of the members—and I know the Minister of Housing went into one place for at least one night—saw the atrocious condition of government housing. We are the largest slum landlord in the province, because if you go in there, what you are going to see will disgust you. You will see ceilings falling in, cracks in the plaster, cockroaches, mice, utilities that don't work. You will see urine in the halls. You will see uncleanliness. You will see broken windows. You will see roofs leaking. You will see fascia falling off. You will see leaks through the windows, and drafts and cold conditions. And that's what we expect people to live in in Ontario. We downloaded to the cities, and then we tell them, "You look after it." The city of Toronto has done an estimate and says there is about \$300 million that needs to be spent just to bring those units up to snuff.

And what did I find in this budget? I found the \$127 million, but that has to be thrown in not only to new housing, but to fix up some of the old.

We have the whole thing about the balanced budget, and I saw every single person on the Liberal side stand up and applaud the balanced budget. But how did they get there? First of all, they got there on the backs of municipalities by not paying the \$3.2 billion. But they also got there by reducing the contingency fund. Ever since I've been here, and for a lot longer than that, contingencies have run at around \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion, and those contingencies have been used and are necessary. Without those contingencies, we would have been in a lot of trouble during the SARS crisis. Without those contingencies we would have been in a lot of trouble with the great blackout. Without those contingencies governments have a huge problem whenever there is an ice storm or any natural catastrophe. Just ask Kingston or anywhere else. Without those contingencies the cities and the province would have been in great difficulty.

But here we have a budget that's balanced by taking the contingency to the lowest it's been for a long time, from \$1.5 billion down to \$800 million, which is the smallest contingency in the history of this province, as far as I can go back. That's what it is. So you are taking a huge risk in your budget and applauding yourselves for balancing it by having no contingency for an emergency, or next to none. I hope everything goes well. We all hope nothing happens. But it certainly makes me a little uncomfortable.

Mr. Hudak: They should thank Jim Flaherty too.

Mr. Prue: Well, most of the money they got came from the federal government.

Okay, I've got 36 seconds. In conclusion, we don't think this is a very good budget. We think the finance

minister has tried the best he can, I'm sure, to do all the political things, to try to put some fingers in the dike where it was leaking really badly, but in the end he has failed the people of Ontario. He has failed the most poor. He has failed those who thought they were going to get some help for education, for the environment, for more jobs. And in the end I think he's going to have a hard time selling this next October

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I appreciated and listened carefully to the member for Beaches–East York on these two evenings in which he had the opportunity to get in the leadoff speech as the critic. A couple of more general observations: There is little, one can argue, that as government we wouldn't like to do, and more quickly, to support business, to encourage business, to reduce the tax burden. There is little we would not like to do as government to provide money more quickly to those who have the greatest need. There is little that we wouldn't like to do to make our municipal partners healthier than they might already be. But there are realities within which we work.

If we increase the expenditures more rapidly for service functions, if we increase the expenditures more rapidly in uploading those services that were downloaded, if we increase more rapidly payments through the Ontario child benefit, if we provide additional monies beyond what's already there for the city of Toronto, that puts quite a stress on the capacity of the system to function within our economic means. If at the same time as we're increasing those expenditure levels more quickly than is currently planned for, we expedite the business education tax implementation and expedite further corporate tax reductions and don't use the capacity in the mining industry to acquire some revenue stream—and there's some further discussion around that—we reduce our capacity to increase the revenue stream to pay for the things that we all want to do.

We have this juxtaposition of problems, and that's the balancing act: finding a balance between setting out a planned, structured program to support communities, individuals and families who are in need and at the same time providing opportunity for business growth in Ontario.

Mr. Hudak: I'm pleased to rise and comment on my colleague from Beaches–East York and of course the New Democrat finance critic, Mr. Prue. Mr. Prue is obviously well researched and made some eloquent comments this afternoon, as well as the last time this bill was before the assembly, which was Monday, two days ago. Mr. Prue and I don't always see eye to eye on some issues; on others we do.

He and I have found common ground on assessment reform issues and we're similarly skeptical about the government's new-found religion, their recent conversion six months out from the election on changing the assessment system. Of course, assessment averaging does nothing to control skyrocketing property assessments. It simply means that instead of getting stabbed all at once, they

stab you four times. If your assessment was to go up 100% over four years, that means it goes up 100% over four years, 25% per year.

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Mr. Prue makes the right point as well on the government's other conversion on the road to Damascus, so to speak. The minimum wage was one of the least believable commitments in the budget for a long time. As I said, at least the NDP had campaigned on a \$10 minimum wage for some time. I disagree with the policy, but at least they've been consistent in that regard. Dalton McGuinty's government opposed it, as you know. Then, all of a sudden, he came out of cabinet one day and said, "You know what? I found this quarter. I'm going to up the ante: \$10.25." There was no study behind that, there was no indication where that number came from. Simply, it was to try to up the ante by a quarter, and I honestly don't believe that Premier McGuinty has any intention whatsoever of following through on that policy, particularly where it came from.

I guess I'm running out of time. The last thing I'd ask—maybe the parliamentary assistant will be rising in debate—is that I still have not heard an explanation as to the \$50-million grant given to Magna university, a private university, without any explanation. I hope we'll have that this evening.

Ms. Horwath: It's my pleasure to make a few remarks on the speech by my colleague from Beaches–East York and say that I respect very much the issues and points he has raised in this debate. The members of the government who were heckling and screaming out different kinds of phrases as the member was making his remarks simply need to take some time to listen to the people in their communities and to read local papers to understand that it's not simply people like the member from Beaches–East York and myself—I'll be speaking to this bill in a very short time, later on this evening—who have real concerns and problems with the new-found consideration this government purports to have when it comes to dealing with some of the grinding issues of poverty and the effects they have on communities and families across this province.

I say that coming from a particular riding that has significant experience, let's say, with that grinding poverty. I would hope that members of this assembly would take the time to read the actual comments of people from communities who have been vitriolic in their criticism of this government in the way they are content to leave working people on minimum wage below the poverty line this year, next year, the year after that and the year after that. They're quite content to have that happen, just as they're quite content to continue to have children living in poverty this year, next year, the year after that and the year after that; just like they're content to have families unable to access decent child care for their children this year, next year and the year after that.

It's quite frightening to think that these members of the government side actually think this is a budget to be proud of. I think my colleague reflected very carefully on

the reality of what this budget doesn't do for working families in this province.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to join the debate. In my own riding and community of Oakville, I was on council there for close to 20 years. I don't ever recall a media conference being held to praise a budget that involved the regional chair, Mayor Burton of Oakville, Councillor Tom Adams and Councillor Allan Elgar. It was full-page coverage. Pooling was ended.

Mike Harris brought in a system where every year the people in the region of Halton had to send \$45 million, \$48 million, \$43 million to the city of Toronto so that they, who were unable to control their own expenses, ended up spending it on social services. The people in my riding could not meet the same standard. We did not have the same level of social services in the region of Halton as the city of Toronto did, and yet we had to pay a portion of the bill.

We put an end to that. We put an end to that with property tax reform. We put the property tax reform in place. What this means is that 1.3 million children in Ontario who got nothing from the previous Conservative government, less from the previous NDP government, will now get the Ontario child tax benefit.

Interjection.

Mr. Flynn: No, they didn't get anything before; they're getting something now. One hundred and fifty-five thousand injured workers who got nothing from the previous government, got nothing from the NDP, will now get assistance from this government.

When you look at a balanced budget, that's hard to understand; I understand that. You told us we had a balanced budget last time. We had a \$5.5-billion deficit under the Conservatives. Who are you going to trust, someone who helps the kids, someone who helps the injured workers, or someone who gives this hogwash that they just can't pull through on, people who know that they make promises—the NDP—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member from Beaches—East York, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Prue: I thank the members for their input, their comments: the member from Pickering—Uxbridge—Ajax, the member from Erie—Lincoln, the member from Hamilton East and the member from Oakville.

I was disappointed, I have to say. The parliamentary assistant talked about balance because I think that's what this government is trying to spin. It's all about balance. It's all about, "Can't do it, but wait. We're going to try to do it over three to five, seven to 10, 12 or 15 years, depending on which provision it is of the budget you're looking at, and that's our balance." I don't buy that, and I was hoping you would talk about some of the very real issues that were brought forward: property tax assessment and how that's going to work. I specifically asked. We didn't hear it.

The member from Erie—Lincoln: We don't always agree, but he's absolutely right. Assessment reform has been really neglected in this budget, and a four-year

rolling average will do absolutely nothing for most people. It will actually, in the end, hurt municipalities, or hurt taxpayers who are forced in the interim to pay the extra monies. On the minimum wage, he's right as well.

The member from Hamilton East was correct when she talked about poverty and the phase-ins. They're just too long, and we're forcing people not to get the kind of support and help that they need right away.

The member from Oakville was quite bizarre when he talked about, "No wonder the 905 is happy; they're getting millions of dollars back in taxes." I don't agree with that, because everybody would have been treated fairly in the province if the download had been uploaded. Every single municipality would have been helped, but this is a bizarre thing because the only municipalities who are being helped are in the ring around Toronto. No one else except that ring is being helped, and I don't know why. The government must be worried about those seats in the 905 to do what they did, because they're only doing right by about 10 municipalities and wrong by the other 470.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in support of Bill 187. I will be sharing my time with the member from Sault Ste. Marie.

There was a significant amount of stuff to celebrate in this budget. I'm going to highlight some of the high-level pieces, and then there's one specific area that I'm going to address this evening.

First of all: balanced budgets and five-year surpluses; Ontario child benefit to support 1.3 million children in poverty; property tax review and reform; no new taxes; a tax cut in business education tax; and a \$325-million green fund, with climate change policy coming. That's some of the high-level. There was also long-overdue help and support for injured workers, who were ignored and done in by two previous governments, and we have started to move in a very significant way on a number of fronts for them.

There is also money to build six residential hospices across this province. This year alone, six hospices will be opening across this province because of this budget. In addition to the fact that people would rather be at home in that last leg of the journey of life, in the last chapter of their lives, they want to be at home, but often they can't, for a number of reasons: because they are becoming too ill to stay at home or the family isn't capable of providing the support. The only option before has been to go to a hospital, and that's not where people want to be to die. They want to be at home or in a home-like setting, and these residential hospices will be providing that.

From a dollars-and-cents standpoint, it's very logical, because if you have, in a community, perhaps a 10-bed residential hospice, the residential hospice is fairly inexpensive to operate compared to a hospital. Those 10 people who may be in hospital simply to die will then have a place to go in a residential hospice, and that frees up 10 acute-care beds in our hospitals, which in turn

eases the emergency-room crunch. So you have something there that is very concrete.

I want to talk specifically this evening about what was in this budget for arts and culture. I have a number of things that I'm going to run through from a dollar standpoint, but I do want to address the legislation that's in there as well.

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First of all, the government in this budget will increase its annual funding to the Ontario Trillium Foundation by \$20 million by 2009-10. That's a 20% increase. The government will increase its annual funding to the Ontario Arts Council by \$15 million over the next three years; that is a 38% increase. The government's making an investment in 2006-07—that's this year—of \$10 million to enhance the arts endowment fund. The government is providing an additional \$5 million to the Ontario Media Development Corp. this year. Another \$5 million is going to Ontario's public libraries this year.

There is an increase in annual funding for the community museums operating grants, and that is \$2.3 million starting this year; that is an 85% increase to support our community museums, and that is a very, very significant step, because they too have been forgotten far too long.

The government is providing \$1.2 million to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. The government's providing \$5.5 million to Luminato—this is in addition to the \$2 million already given by this government. Luminato, for those who don't know, is the wonderful new international arts festival that's going to be in Toronto.

The government is also investing \$12.5 million to support the Toronto International Film Festival, and we know what a tremendous draw and a tremendous support that is to our arts community, specifically our film industry.

Arts education: Just prior to this budget, we announced the program enhancement fund. We've done a number of things in the area of arts education, providing funding for 2,000 additional specialist teachers. For the first time ever, we have created an envelope of money specifically for arts—teacher training, instruments etc.—but also, the program enhancement fund provides \$35 million to help improve arts programming in our schools. So there was that, as well.

Now I get to the status-of-the-Ontario-artist legislation, which was also in the budget. I think it's an appropriate place to put it, because the goal of this is to raise the socio-economic conditions of our artists and their quality of life. From a dollars and cents standpoint, arts and culture generates \$18 billion of Ontario's GDP every year, and it provides 250,000 satisfying jobs to Ontarians. But there's more to arts and culture than just the dollars and cents aspect of this, and I'm going to talk a little bit more about that in just a moment, but I want to talk about the legislation itself.

It sets out a commitment by our government, and it conveys the importance of the arts. It will create an atmosphere in which the arts and culture can rightly take

its place as a major foundation piece, but interwoven into the fabric of our lives. It will establish the province's first arts and culture strategy, which is something that's quite necessary. It will also translate into undertakings such as training and professional development opportunities; audience development; promoting artists' health and safety; strengthening arts and culture organizations; creating forums for artists to access information; promoting local cultural tourism and municipal cultural planning. It does, as was mentioned already, declare the first weekend of June as Celebrate the Artist Weekend. But it will also help to elevate the artist to take part in trade missions that we may be undertaking and put them on a level playing field with other businesses and industries that take part in such activities already.

There's a great discussion as to whether or not government should fund things like the arts. I've heard from other people, "Oh, well, you know, arts is a frill," or "It's frivolous," or "It should be extra," or "Government shouldn't be paying for that sort of thing." Quite frankly, not only is the arts and culture industry an enormous part of our economy, but arts and culture are life. That's what we do all day every day. The arts are a primary form of communication, for starters. From the minute we wake up in the morning and our eyes open and rest on that favourite painting on our wall, and we go and we turn on the radio and music comes out of it—that's art. We get up, we cook breakfast and we read a newspaper, we get on the subway and we're reading maybe a magazine, or we're walking to work and we walk past architecture and buildings. And then we rent a movie, go out to the theatre or to a concert. That is what we do each and every day of our lives. Every minute of every day is filled with arts and culture. That is what we are.

Somebody already mentioned that it is an expression of us, but it is an expression of that intangible essential in all of us that we don't generally talk about very often in government, and that's the soul. It also provides the extension of us. To a great extent, I think we would cease to exist if we did not have art and culture to tell our stories. At the end of the day, that's all we are—stories. If there's nobody there to tell our stories, then in fact we cease to exist. Our stories are told through song and painting, they're told on the stage, they're told in a written story, in literature. Those are our stories. They're often told in our museums. This is how we continue to exist and we pass on.

I'm very pleased with what was in that budget from all those standpoints, but I'm not the only one who is pleased. I want to just read a few quotes—before I hand over the microphone to my colleague who's sitting here anxiously chomping at the bit—from the Toronto Star on March 23:

"At Least One Budget had Goodies for the Arts.

"Sorbara is one of the most arts-friendly finance ministers Ontario has ever had, and while culture was clearly not the focal point of the budget he introduced yesterday, there were several pieces of good news sprinkled in the fine print."

From the Arts Advocate: "Through this budget, the Ontario government delivers on outstanding promises in the Liberal Party's 2003 election platform on culture. Ontario's 2007 budget is a goody bag for the Ontario culture sector, delivering on various pledges to, and requests of, the Ontario culture community.

Also, we have from Sam Coghlan, a library director from Stratford: "It is refreshing, almost exciting, to have a government that seems prepared to enter the knowledge economy in accord with libraries and other cultural 'means of mass creation.... It is rewarding to be able to work with a government that supports community.

"Libraries and truly vital art organizations work of their community, and that's why we can work well within our communities. It is rewarding to be able to work with a government...."

Let's see. We have Mark Jamison, CEO of Magazines Canada: "We (want to) congratulate you for your successful effort to secure increased funding support for the OAC on behalf of Ontario's vibrant art and literary magazines, members of Magazines Canada. This long-term commitment will enhance predictable and stable approaches to funding Ontario's rich and active arts community."

I could go on, but I'm being nudged by my partner here beside me, so I will pass the microphone over to him. I was very pleased to see all the tangible support in this budget for so many people, including the arts and culture community.

Mr. David Orazietti (Sault Ste. Marie): I want to commend my colleague the member from Stoney Creek on her comments, adding to the debate this evening on Bill 187, second reading of the budget bill.

Maybe what I'll do is pick up on the theme that the member from Stoney Creek was following on, which was comments from stakeholders in the community, because we have such a wide range of feedback and have had that over the last number of weeks since the budget has been announced. Of course, it was a balanced budget, as all Ontarians know, so I want to comment on certainly what has been done by our government and compare and contrast that with what has taken place in Ontario under past governments, and I'll get to that in a minute.

The first thing I want to do is share some of the wide-ranging comments that have been made across Ontario by individuals from the health care sector, the education sector, those representing groups of vulnerable Ontarians and the like.

First of all, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce president, Len Crispino, made this comment: "The reduction in BET rates is a major win for businesses in Ontario and will lead to increased productivity, job creation and output. Over 300 communities will benefit from reduced industrial and commercial tax rates totalling \$540 million, including such places as Sault Ste. Marie, Windsor and Northumberland county. This is a big win for the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

At George Brown College, Anne Sado said: "We're pleased with the research funding and the acknowledg-

ment that colleges are playing a role in applied research and commercialization right now. We salute the Ontario government for actually making the funds available for the purpose for which they were intended."

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And a student director of advocacy, Tyler Charlebois of the College Student Alliance, said, "After 15 years of underfunding and seeing classrooms and buildings crumbling at their feet, the McGuinty government is investing additional funds to renew our learning institutions for the future"—after 15 years of underfunding.

Dr. David Bach, president of the OMA, said: "Doctors Applaud the Commitment to Expand Wait Time Strategy.

"The provincial government has made progress in reducing wait times for a number of specific procedures, and we are pleased by the commitment to measure surgical wait times."

Something we're doing in the province of Ontario that is new is benchmarking the wait times across the province so we can best determine how to allocate additional resources. I know it's certainly having a big impact in our community where we're able to demonstrate to the public, in a very transparent way, how their health care system is performing, something that has not been done in this province until recently.

The Ontario coordinator for Campaign 2000, Jacquie Maund, said, "There are a number of steps forward taken in this budget that are the key areas that we have been calling for: improved child benefit, increased minimum wage and investments in affordable housing and child care."

Hilda Watkins, president of the Ontario Teachers' Federation, said, "Teachers have been pleased to see this government's increased commitment to publicly funded education since the election in 2003. Today's budget recognizes responsibilities beyond the school playground for improving student learning."

The president of the nursing association, Mary Ferguson-Paré, RNAO, said, with respect to the budget: "That will really support us, keeping those" additional "4,000" nursing "grads here and assuring that they'll want to stay. We're very pleased with that support."

And how about this comment? I like this one, a personal favourite of mine. Janet Ecker, Toronto Financial Services, said: "The capital tax is widely understood to scare off investment. By committing to legislation to eliminate the" capital "tax by 2010, the government will finally knock down this barrier to investment. We also welcome the move to reduce business education taxes. These property taxes have added significantly to the cost of office space everywhere, but especially in Toronto, the country's capital for financial services head offices. These taxes have made us less competitive when trying to attraction new investment to the city." A very forthright and supportive comment of the progress that we've been making.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Is that the same Janet Ecker?

Mr. Oraziotti: That is the Janet Ecker, the former Conservative finance minister. Exactly. My colleagues asked me, "Who is Janet Ecker?"

Interjection: That Janet Ecker? The former Tory finance minister?

Mr. Oraziotti: Absolutely. But not only Janet Ecker made positive comments supporting our budget.

Gail Nyberg, the executive director of the Daily Bread Food Bank, said: "It's been a long time since poverty reduction measures were at the forefront of a provincial budget in Ontario. We congratulate the government for having the courage to take on this significant issue, and we expect to see a reduction in food bank use in the coming years as a result. The Ontario child benefit will reduce barriers faced by families with children who are trying to leave welfare for work. At the same time, it will help reduce child poverty and hunger."

One of the things that strikes me is the progress that we have made in many areas, in health care, in education, in supporting business, in renewing our infrastructure and also in supporting some of the most vulnerable Ontarians. This was truly a budget that we can all be proud of as Ontarians, and knowing that we have balanced the budget for the first time in a long time is also great news.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the key areas in terms of the progress that we've made, and compare and contrast some of the results over the last number of years, and to the action that was taken by past governments when they had the opportunity to move their agenda forward on behalf of the people of Ontario and point out some of the differences, because I think they're fairly telling.

The new Ontario child benefit is a remarkably positive step forward in helping to assist some of the most vulnerable in our province. It will assist about 1.3 million children when fully implemented. It comes with a price tag of \$2.1 billion, and it builds on some of our investments in this area.

We've also worked to support and increase the Ontario disability support program by 2%, for a total of 7% under our government.

The commitment to increasing the minimum wage: Each year in government, we have made increases to the minimum wage, and we're going to continue to do that. We've committed to Ontarians to do that.

We've also launched a program with \$127 million for new affordable housing. We're giving seniors the ability to unlock 25% of their locked-in retirement savings, and we're also allowing income-splitting for seniors; I know they're looking forward to being able to do that.

Increases to WSIB benefits: 2.5% over each of the next three years, which will assist an additional 55,000 injured workers. There's more money for legal aid. There's also money for a new college of early childhood educators to support the work that they do in the province.

In contrast, those steps that we are taking certainly were not taken under the past governments. Under the Conservatives, we lost about 9,000 child care spaces—

certainly not a step forward. Under the NDP, social assistance caseloads grew from 770,000 in 1990 to about 1.5 million by 1995, which is not a positive reflection of the work that was done during that time period in this province.

When it comes to education, we've made some massive investments. We've exceeded Rozanski's recommendations of \$1.8 billion. We have about \$2.7 billion flowing into education these days—as well as paying important attention to our infrastructure: a \$280-million fund, leveraging \$4 billion, for the repair of our schools, something we should all be very proud of. Primary class sizes are down, test scores are up, and graduation rates are up. We support public education; we committed to doing that, and we'll continue on that course.

There are numerous steps that we've taken in terms of health care, in terms of creating more spaces for doctors in the province and hiring more nurses, and they are in contrast to what the past governments have done in these areas. They have not been helpful.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to respond to members from the government side who make further promises with respect to what this government would pretend to do. Actually, the people of Ontario will assess whether or not they deliver what they promise—and I think that's essentially the issue that has been raised all this week with respect to the current scandal at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. Pardon me, it's actually called the OLG now, because they spent about \$6 or \$7 million to drop the "C."

Trying to get an answer from the government, in all the rhetoric we hear, is, quite frankly—the people of Ontario should be saying to themselves, "Are we any better off?" That's ultimately the question. The test at the end of it is, in your own lives, are you paying more and getting less? You see it in almost every announcement that they've made in this budget. Even today, there were a couple of announcements by three or four ministers: the ministers of tourism, health promotion, as well as transportation. You should always ask yourself the question, "Are they actually being straightforward with me?" In fact, the evidence is quite the contrary.

So the members have been given their prepared texts, which they've read. One of them actually read the news for one of the TV stations.

This is a spending spree budget—the evidence is clear that the economy is declining—in fact, it would be like a bunch of pirates given shore leave with a purse full of money. Quite frankly, it's discouraging. When you talk about the budget and you're talking at the same time about a Liberal budget, you've got to question whether or not they're spending your money to buy your votes.

I'm disappointed in the comments made today.

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Ms. Horwath: It's my pleasure to make a few comments on the remarks of the member from Stoney Creek and the member for Sault Ste. Marie, who split their 20

minutes to speak a little bit about their government's budget.

I wanted to remark on one of the things they both spoke about in their remarks, and that was the changes to the WSIB. I have to tell you, the injured workers I'm speaking to are extremely disappointed with the fact that the government has not addressed the ongoing need for them to come cap in hand after 2009 to beg for money for indexing of their WSIB payments. They certainly don't want to be in a position of biting the hand that feeds them, but they are extremely disappointed with the fact that the government refuses to acknowledge—and I see somebody in the back there, behind the Speaker's chair, nipping his head out. Some of that former member's remarks are being quoted as well, when he sat as a Minister of Labour and made some commitments back in the 1980s to injured workers around indexing of their pensions. In fact, the government members can come up and talk proudly about their accomplishments. All you need to do is peel it back a tiny little bit to find out that the very people they claim to have singing their praises in fact are extremely disappointed. I talk specifically about injured workers.

I also wanted to remark about the lack of status-of-the-artist legislation. Particularly, I recall when the artists came around lobbying. Of course, in Hamilton we have a very strong and vibrant arts and cultural community. One of the things the artists talked about, when they were speaking to me, anyway, when they were lobbying this Legislature, was the boom-and-bust cycle of an artist. You could be on top of the world one year, and then the next year basically be making peanuts. That has not been addressed, nor has the issue of child performers particularly, which they raised at that time. It's unfortunate the government couldn't solve those problems.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I want to thank the members from Sault Ste. Marie and Stoney Creek for their comments on Bill 187. I also rise to support Bill 187, and I thought what would be relevant this evening is to talk about what this budget represents for the riding of Huron–Bruce, because I know the members across the way are anxious to hear it.

Interjection: Good news for Huron–Bruce.

Mrs. Mitchell: More good news for Huron–Bruce, in case you missed that line.

There is a savings of more than \$250,000 for Huron–Bruce businesses on business education taxes, \$1.5 million for low-income housing, \$1 million for connecting links, and \$6.5 million for rural infrastructure. One of the other things I would like to raise that I have mentioned in the House is \$600 million for transmission. That is from the Bruce-to-Milton line. Also, for the first time ever in the riding of Huron–Bruce, we now have access to post-secondary education. That is in Kincardine. I can tell you that this has been very well received, not only the post-secondary education available, but at the Bruce training centre we have co-op programs for millwrights as well.

What does the rural infrastructure represent? For many of the communities, it has been outstanding water, sewage, bridges, roads—numerous works that are able to go forward. I can tell you that they are over the top with receiving the money and are really looking forward to moving projects forward that have been six years, seven years, eight years—that's how long some of these projects have been on the back burner that now are able to go forward.

That's what the Ontario budget represents—just a small part of it—for the riding of Huron–Bruce.

Mr. Hudak: I thank the members from Stoney Creek and Sault Ste. Marie both for their comments, but the member from Durham is right: This is a \$22-billion spending spree extraordinaire. Drunken pirates on shore leave would show more restraint than Dalton McGuinty and his gang, and they'd do less damage to the Ontario economy. I'm telling you, you could count on your Omega watch \$750,000 more in spending every hour that Dalton McGuinty has been in office. There's everything out there. Your cat, Chausette, probably got some grant from this last budget.

In addition to giving money to your cat, Chausette, I haven't heard anybody, I have not heard a single member, boast about the \$50-million gift given to Magna corporation that wasn't even written in the budget. The minister sort of ad libbed it, a \$50-million ad lib—your Magna budget, by the way, on the eve of Magna making a multi-billion dollar bid for Chrysler Corp. The Stronachs, no doubt, close to the Liberal family, are real happy with that \$50 million, but there's nothing for grape growers down in Erie–Lincoln, no money set aside for the mid-peninsula corridor, and no break for working families and seniors in Ontario.

I know my colleague the hard-working member for York North is going to address the status-of-the-artist legislation and such, and I'll have a chance—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: But I know that sweet Lou Rinaldi from Northumberland is agreeing with a lot of the things that I'm bringing across.

If I can, since I have all my colleagues' rapt attention, I want to introduce two guests in the assembly today. The hard-working research and communications director for the Canadian Snowbird Association, Mike MacKenzie, is joining us, and, if I'm correct, his girlfriend—can I say that?—his special friend, all the way from sunny California, Michelle Regal. It's her first time in Canada here tonight.

The Deputy Speaker: Response?

Mr. Oraziotti: It's great to hear this evening some of the comments from the members opposite. The public in this province know that the budget is now balanced. The budget was not balanced under the last government. They had a \$5.5-billion deficit. That is not going to happen again in this province.

I'm not going to get into—I mean, the NDP is a disaster waiting to happen: four consecutive budgets with \$10-billion deficits. We saw the disaster in my community

first-hand for many years: youth out-migration, no job opportunities, no progress on infrastructure, the social contract ripping up the collective agreements of public sector workers. It's not an option in our community, because we just can't afford to go back there.

But it's very positive that we're taking these steps forward to rebuild our infrastructure in Ontario, to improve our health care, to reduce wait times, to reinvest in public education, to make the largest investment in 40 years in post-secondary education. We've got 86,000 more spaces for post-secondary students in Ontario. Let's help those people in our province reach their maximum potential by reinvesting in post-secondary education.

I know that just outside of Sault Ste. Marie we now have the largest wind farm in Canada. Our energy policy is making significant improvements. We've added 3,000 megawatts to the Ontario grid. The lights are on. The renewables are coming up in use. It's great news as we expand hydroelectricity and work to develop more renewable power, because we're all concerned about climate change, global warming and the like. It's important that we reduce our reliance on coal, and on this side of the House that's what we're doing.

There is a host of benefits in this budget for Ontarians, and it's going to be great to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak tonight on Bill 187, that bill which encompasses the many things that are enclosed in the budget.

I think the most important thing to understand is that there are some overarching characteristics in this bill, and one of them is that a simple perusal will show you just how many years out this budget is. Most of the time when people are thinking in personal terms about a budget, when you as a family have set a budget, you are thinking in very short time periods. The most would be a year. And it's kind of an interesting thing, because the budget that the Minister of Finance brought forward is of course the budget of 2007-08, but if you spend any time looking at the details of that budget, you will see that it actually extends out a number of years. So I think it's an important thing to understand that at first blush, when those numbers are put out in terms of spending, you naturally think this is something that's going to happen immediately. It will be further in my remarks this evening to demonstrate that many of these things in fact are several years out.

The second thing that I think characterizes this budget is the amount of spending. Other speakers have raised it, but it's important to emphasize that what we're looking at is a total increase of \$22.4 billion in government spending. If you were to look at that from the point of view of an average family, we're talking about \$4,500 of spending. Remember, this isn't someone else's money that we're talking about; this is the taxpayers of this province. It is money that has come out of your pocket, and it is money that the current government has decided in its wisdom how it should be spent. I think it's a fair

thing for you, as an individual, as a family, to be looking at that from the perspective of \$4,500—my money—and how it's being spent.

2010

I think it's also important to keep in mind, as kind of an overarching part of this budget, that 120,000 people have lost jobs in this province. So whenever you're talking about an economy, you've got to reduce it to the actual individuals who have lost their jobs and the kind of impact—frankly, the devastating impact—that has on the individual and on their family. That's another overarching characteristic of this budget, because of the fact that those 120,000 people have become, instead of taxpayers and contributors to the economy through their personal spending decisions and the taxes they pay, whether it's the question of PST or income tax—they have provided for the overall wealth of this province. To suddenly take them out of that opportunity is devastating in a personal way. But also something that I quite frankly think is overlooked by this government is that they are then lost to the economy. They're no longer able to afford the kinds of things that provide the jobs in their own community.

I think it's incumbent upon any government to look at the budget as an instrument for the economy. It's an instrument, because it can provide the carrots to be able to improve the economy, to be able to offer incentives, to be able to give a strong sense of community and strength and optimism. People need hope in their lives. A budget that represents an economic budget—a budget that provides those carrots—quite frankly gives hope. I think that by ignoring the issue of those 120,000 jobs that have been lost, we are taking away the carrot and the hope for those 120,000 people.

One of the other characteristics of this budget is in the area of the property tax assessment. Certainly in my riding, people are very much concerned about the issue of property taxes. I don't have time to get into a discussion and an explanation of the difference between assessments and taxes, but people understand that they are vulnerable as they see assessments increase. We, as a party, have recognized that vulnerability and offered the fact that a John Tory government would look at a 5% base on which to have any kind of changes to assessment, because 5% is significant but it's not on the order of the kinds of things we see in high-growth areas, such as the riding I represent, where there can be huge swings in assessment costs. What this government has done is simply extend from a three-year to a four-year cycle, and quite frankly that does very little. If there have been huge increases in property values over a four-year period, the property owner is still going to have that hanging over their heads as a burden when they're looking at local taxes.

As I mentioned at the very beginning of my comments, I want to look at the issue of how many years out is this budget? The government, for its own reasons, talks in glowing terms about the Ontario child benefit program. But let's just keep in mind that that is a program

that would cover five years. In year one, you're looking at an average of \$250, but it is a five-year program. When people see that the government is advertising that it's \$2.1 billion, they recognize the fact that you as an individual family are going to see \$250. It's a five-year program.

The Ontario disability support program and Ontario Works are each receiving a 2% increase, but again, this starts in November. So people who are looking at that 2% are obviously going to have to keep in mind that it will come almost at the end of the calendar year. The same thing can be said for child care: \$25 million this year, \$50 million next year, recognizing that the province had already made the decision, when they received the one-time federal funding of \$263 million, that they would spread it over a four-year period.

I think many people, certainly people in my riding, were very, very disappointed that the area of children's treatment centres was given \$4 million. There are 21 children's treatment centres across the province, and to be given \$4 million to look at the kinds of wait lists, the kinds of shortages of personnel and expertise that these children's treatment centres have is really not good news.

In the budget, the government introduced \$392 million for housing. What they didn't mention was that \$392 million—the very same number of dollars—actually comes from the federal government. So the province is then making the decisions on how it will be spent—again, over a five-year period.

Legal aid: \$51 million over three years.

The other area that certainly was looking for significant dollars is developmental services. Most people understand that being able to invest in things like children's mental health is an investment against the future; that money well spent in the early years is going to have an enormous benefit over time. Developmental services received \$200 million over four years.

I think you can see from the kinds of things I've given as a brief overview that this budget has to be seen not just as this year's. Obviously they have taken those areas I've mentioned over a number of years, which kind of takes a little bit out of the expectation for people in those specific sectors.

I think it's symptomatic of a number of government initiatives. For instance, people in my riding have talked to me about the hard cap of 20 students in a classroom. What's happening in my area is that parents are getting the phone call that says, "Sorry, your child in kindergarten is going to have to be on a school bus, because they're the 21st kid." The fact that that child's sibling goes to the same school—it's still the same; it's a cap. Families can't believe that they're getting those phone calls.

2020

Coming back to the other point I made, about the fact that this budget doesn't address issues like the economy, I think it's important to remember that this province, contrary to its historical position, was identified as dead last in economic growth in Canada in 2006, and certainly

the projections for 2007 don't look any better. We need a budget that gives people hope, gives people opportunity and puts Ontario in its rightful place as the economic engine of this country. People need to know that this government is interested in those long-term projections.

Long-term projection? One of the elements of this budget deals with GTA pooling. Many people felt that, over time, this had outworn its usefulness in terms of setting a balance between the GTA and the city of Toronto. As you will know, this was an annually negotiated relationship between the GTA and Toronto. The Liberals want to make it clear to everyone that they have saved the GTA taxpayer. But the GTA taxpayer has to understand that it will be by 2013 that this pooling will actually be off the table.

So when you look at the kinds of things that are behind the headlines of the budget, there are some very, very important cautions to be recognized: the number of years out on this; the fact that assessment is certainly not going to be any better for people where there are fluctuations in land value; the fact that this government has spent an unprecedented amount of tax dollars, and taxpayers have to have a feeling of confidence in the way that those have been spent; the fact that there aren't as many economic carrots as I think there should be, an economy that quite frankly is speaking to a high employment rate that allows people to provide income for government in taxation that allows government to be able to spend on those priorities.

Too often, people only think about the spending side of the ledger and forget to think about how that money is actually produced. It's produced with a healthy, vibrant, prosperous economy. That's the key. When we're looking at a budget, we should be looking at those kinds of incentives and those kinds of carrots.

I want to add a couple of notes here in terms of the kinds of things that perhaps lurk in the budget that need to be addressed. One of them is that in the papers at the back; it talks about the question of revenue in the area of energy. One of the key problems to that—obviously there is a lower demand; I don't want to take away from that. But the fact that the government changed its mind on closing coal-fired plants has certainly had an impact, because if from 2003 you have made a commitment that by 2007 you're going to have closed the coal-fire furnaces, people within that industry are going to be making adjustments both in terms of maintenance and upkeep and also in terms of staffing. When you suddenly, in the dying days of 2006, admit that 2007 is no longer a realistic or even an appropriate goal, there are going to have to be significant investments then. They're quite different to those when you know that it's closing.

Those are the kinds of things that lurk behind this budget and I think are most important for taxpayers to understand, that in the stroke of a pen by the government to make a decision to go in a totally different direction—of course they had expert advice, we're told, but the reality is that that's a huge cost to the taxpayer.

I want to close as the critic for culture in speaking about the Status of Ontario's Artists Act, 2007—again, something that lurks in the budget. The quote is here: “The government proposes to introduce new legislation, the Status of Ontario's Artists Act, 2007.” I haven't checked to see how unprecedented it is to have this in a budget, but it certainly seems to me that it's almost under the cover of darkness; after three and a half years of a promise that they would introduce status-of-the-artist legislation, it slides in, in the back pages of the budget. I think the culture industry understands the difference between a proper introduction of a bill and sleight of hand.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments.

Ms. Horwath: I'm pleased to make a few remarks on the budget speech by the member from York North. I have to say, I liked her description of the things that are lurking in the budget. I have to say I really like that word “lurking,” because the things that are lurking, of course, are very, very long timelines. In fact, they're lurking at length in terms of this government actually taking action on some of the major issues that are of concern to the people of Ontario. That means a long, drawn-out time frame for everything from addressing issues of child poverty to issues of workers who are not being paid decent wages to be able to make enough money to come up to the poverty line. This government is prepared to continue to allow those people to lurk towards sustainable life at some point in the future, although by the time we get there, of course, we will know that they will be no further ahead, because the commitment of this government is to maintain this group of people who are underpaid and undervalued. I don't know what benefit that has. I guess they think it has some benefit.

I also want to commend the member from York North for talking about some of the children's programs that she raised, and the lack of commitment of this government to really appropriately fund the services that need to be funded to help our kids. Particularly, the member raised the issue of children's mental health. I have to tell you, I'm on the same page with her when it comes to that issue. We know very, very well that if we invest those dollars in helping the younger members of our community, children and youth particularly, in mental health crisis, then not only will we save billions of dollars in the future of their health care, but also they will be contributing members of our economy; they will have healthy and secure lives, and they won't be stuck in the mental health system or the criminal justice system. That's an investment we need to make in this province. It's shameful that it hasn't been made until now.

2030

Mr. Arthurs: I'm pleased to add a few comments as well in respect to the member from York North's speech on the budget and Bill 187. The principles, I think, of her comments, if I can gather it in my own mind: The government has seen an increased expenditure over its mandate in the range of \$20 billion-plus, all invested in key priorities for the people of Ontario: in health, in education, in the economy and in the environment. But she's

concerned that things like the Ontario child benefit, OW, ODSP, child care, children's treatment centres, legal aid, developmental services and pooling are all taking far too long to implement.

Budgets are about statements of values and statements of principles as well as a financial document. You can do what kids do sometimes, when they're 18 or 19 and looking for their first car. They'll say, “I'll buy a beater. I'll buy that cheap car that is going to keep me going for a year or so until I can buy something a little better.” We can plan the economy and the province in that way and plan our values around buying a beater. “How do we patch this thing together?” It's what the Tories did the last four years in office. They tried to patch it together enough to get through an election. It didn't work then; it won't work this time.

Our value principles, our value statement is: We believe in the Ontario child benefit for young people, those of the working poor and those who are on assistance. We believe in support for OW and ODSP. We believe in support for child care. We believe in support for children's treatment centres, two years in row. We believe in legal aid treatment and developmental services. We're investing in them this year, and we'll invest in them on a going-forward basis.

I would ask the member opposite, the member from York North, what won't you do? What of those would you dismantle if you were to form the government? I dare say I don't think there will be too many, but I'll be interested in hearing what they're prepared to dismantle, if they should form a future government, among the principles that we've sent out.

Mr. O'Toole: The member from York North brings knowledge and passion to the debate, and I believe truthfulness as well, which is refreshing, in her role as the culture ministry critic.

I want to remind members of this omnibus bill, the budget bill, Bill 187. It is huge. For those members listening and for the audience, the people of Ontario, I'm speaking directly to you. It's 275 pages. There is a lot of ink here. There are 41 schedules.

Our critic for the Ministry of Culture had, under the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture Act—I would say that you'd need to look at schedule 24. This is the obsequious language. It says, “The minister may establish and charge fees to recover the costs of any services that are provided by the ministry.” There it is: more taxes in the form of user fees. So she's on the right track.

We've seen the drunken sailor budget. We've seen \$22 billion in increased spending. The people of Ontario should ask themselves continuously, “Aren't we paying more and aren't we getting less?” That's the ultimate acid test. It's really the ballot question. I hate to politicize this debate, but you are paying more and not just in culture and recreational issues. You're going to be paying more for water. You're going to be paying more for electricity. You're going to be paying more municipal tax. You're going to be paying the health tax. You're going to be paying more, and are you getting more? It's fundamental-

ly a question. Read the number of pages. The budget is even as large; it's a very colourful red book. You want to be aware that if it's got the colour red, you know you're going to pay more and get less.

In his remarks in this budget, the minister promised to reduce taxes. It takes 11 years for some of these promises to help vulnerable families and children.

Mr. Milloy: I listened with great interest to the speech by the member from York North and some of the comments that have been made. I think the best way to respond, perhaps for those who are watching at home, is to do a little bit of a compare and contrast. A number of years ago, in 1995, we had a government come to power that was faced with a huge deficit, a huge, chaotic financial mess that had been caused by our friends in the New Democratic Party. What did they do? They cut and they slashed and they burned. They cut in health care, they cut in education, they brought in tax cuts that we couldn't afford, and they added billions after billions to the province's deficit.

Let's move forward to 2003, when you had the Liberal Party come into power. What did we do? We inherited an economic mess created by the Conservatives: a \$5.6-billion deficit that they had tried to hide from voters, that we discovered. We had an education system that was drastically underfunded, and we had a health care system that was in trouble. What did we do? We came in in a step-by-step, incremental approach, and we started to make significant investments in terms of public services. We started to take a look at some of the problems in the environment, a ministry they had cut in half. We've continued those investments over four years and at the same time we've paid off the deficit in this province. We've brought forth a small surplus and we've had a balanced Liberal approach.

What it means is that as we enter in—and let's face it, this is the final budget of a four-year cycle—as we take a look at it, we look at it with pride because we've started to restore public services in this province, we've started to restore some integrity to the environment and we've started to think about those who are less fortunate. I'm very, very proud of our record as a Liberal government.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for York North, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Munro: I appreciate the comments from the members for Hamilton East, Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, Durham and Kitchener Centre.

I want to first of all respond to the member for Kitchener Centre: If you were to say that in my riding—there's almost \$100 million worth of investment that came into the hospital in Newmarket in the period of time you referred to. The fact that we saw a hospital, for instance, that moved from being simply a local hospital to a regional cardiac centre and a regional cancer centre has meant that the very best people have come to medicine at Southlake in Newmarket. That comes from the kind of investment you described as a cut.

I look at the proliferation of schools that came about as a result of the new formula that allowed boards to

create their priorities and then respond to them—so, just in the areas of health and education, many more examples.

But the other thing that I think is important is to go to the member for Hamilton East, and certainly we share the kinds of concerns around the importance of making investments in the early years and recognize that those investments not only provide an opportunity for people to lead useful, productive and happy lives, but it also means, from the standpoint of the community, that they are not a dream.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Horwath: It's my pleasure to have about 20 minutes or so to talk about the ominous, lurky, omnibus Bill 187—just some of the adjectives that have been used to describe this budget bill.

I'll tell you this right now: I have a number of different issues that I want to raise. There are a number of real concerns I have with the budget, and I sure hope my papers don't all slide off the end of my desk, which tends to happen from time to time. I'm really glad my friend from Trinity–Spadina isn't here, because I tend to take up two desks when I'm doing these speeches and he sometimes gets a little sensitive about that.

The first thing I want to talk about is just some reflections on the way my community in particular received the budget. I've got to tell you that they are not happy. They have not been happy, no matter what kind of person you talk to, whether it's somebody who's an elected official, whether it's somebody who's a bureaucrat at the city, whether it's an anti-poverty activist, whether it's an environmentalist, regardless of whether it's an artist. Regardless of whom you're talking to, people see through this budget for what it is. It's the very disturbing reality that people have come to that this 11th-hour budget of the dying days of this government sends a few crumbs here and there and tries to pretend that if you just snuggle up and be their friend, in three years, five years or seven years you might actually get some attention to the issues you've been trying to fight for that for their entire term in office have been soundly ignored.

The first, very critical issue that faces my community is the fact that they were left out of a permanent downloading solution, and that's something my community simply no longer can sustain. The city of Hamilton has come, cap in hand, year after year to this government, asking for some financial assistance to deal with what has been colloquially described as the social services deficit or the social services funding gap. We all know that the downloading cost to the municipality in Hamilton is closer to \$30 million than it is to the \$17 million that they asked for this year, of which the government gave them \$12 million. Again, they want to say, at least the members from Hamilton—not including myself but the government members from Hamilton, whom I will not name, but they know who they are—“Gee, we should be thankful.”

2040

In fact, the finance minister told me yesterday, as I repeated today to a bunch of workers outside of city hall who are facing the loss of their jobs within a couple of short weeks, whose look of despair, anxiety and outright fear was something to behold—and some of you members across the way need to look at that and acknowledge the fact that we need to save some of these jobs in the province and not simply be happy to watch them walk out the door. Nonetheless, when those workers were told that the finance minister told me in question period yesterday that Hamiltonians should be thankful—thankful—for this budget and thankful for all that this government has done for Hamilton, the jeering was deafening. The people of Hamilton know very well that this government has done very little to solve, and to even sit down and work on solving, some of the systemic concerns that city has. Those systemic concerns are everything from grinding poverty—and I have to tell you, I represent a riding with the lowest per capita income in the entire province. There are people in my riding who have said to me, “We don’t like it when we get described in that way.” Of course people don’t like to have that description put upon them, but the bottom line is that it’s the reality.

When the finance minister was talking about his budget in his leadoff speech and said something about invisible poverty—holy smokes, come to Hamilton East. You don’t have to talk about invisible poverty, because it’s very visible; it’s right there, staring you in the face. Maybe that’s what the finance minister and the cabinet need to do. They came to Hamilton, to the centre core, sat in our convention centre, had a little meeting and thought that that was going to say they’re hearing what’s happening in Hamilton. Do you know what? There’s no way that a finance minister can say that poverty is invisible if he actually visited Hamilton centre, because it ain’t invisible. I’m telling you, this budget does nothing to help with that systemic problem in the city of Hamilton.

Another systemic problem that has not been resolved by this government, notwithstanding the fact that they solved it for the 905 region, not including the 905 part of Hamilton—but for York, Halton and Peel they solved the downloading problem. For those well-off, newer communities, they solved the downloading problem. But Hamilton has to go cap in hand again next year and hope they get at least a portion of the deficit of social services that they’re paying, that they simply cannot afford. Today I spoke to our mayor, as a matter of fact. Do you know what our mayor said to me? Our mayor looked in my face and he said to me, “We cannot continue to be in a situation where we’re sending every year the request, the begging, to the province for them to help us with social services.” With fear in his face, he said, “The economy has been doing well these last few years.” And of course we all know that although the economy is doing well, there are very few people who have been benefiting from that good economy.

It’s shameful, shameful that government members can get up and talk about increased social services going through the roof from 1990 to 1995. Of course they were going through the roof. There was a frigging recession in the economy. How were social services costs not going to go through the roof, when we were in a recession? But where is the excuse for having an excellent economy for the last dozen or so years? You know what? We should call them the dirty dozen. Do you know why we should call them the dirty dozen? Because of the dirty, nasty tricks that were played at the lowest echelon of the economy. That’s low-wage workers, whose wages were never increased and whose minimum wage still is not going to get them above poverty in some five years, when the government finally decides to get around to getting them above \$10 an hour. It’s a dirty, dirty dozen years when the child poverty rate in this province continued to escalate under the Liberal government and the Tories before them. It’s a dirty, dirty dozen years when you see women workers and immigrant workers still not being able to make ends meet. And it’s a dirty dozen years when we didn’t see any movement at all towards positive investments in things like child care. So, yes, it was a dozen years of bad times for the lower echelons of the economy, what we call the working poor. Do you have to put labels on them? We’ll call them the working poor; we’ll call them the children living in poverty. We can slap any label on them that we want, but the bottom line is that it’s a shame in this province that when we have a decent and good economy, the only people who benefit from that good economy are those at the top. And that includes the members in the House, who got themselves the 25% pay increase and didn’t even deign to look at the fact that they’re only flipping a quarter to the people making minimum wage in this province. It’s a disgrace and it is shameful. So, no, I’m not very happy about this budget and I’m not very happy about this Liberal record for four years, and I can tell you that the people of Hamilton see things more my way than they do the way of the government members across the way, who like to pretend that they’re doing such a great job.

I have to tell you, when I was in my community today, the big issue was job loss. It’s another issue where people cannot understand why the government is content to watch good-paying manufacturing jobs walk out the door. I have to tell you, in a community like mine, that means that people who used to make 24, 25, 26, maybe even 28 bucks an hour, who had pensions and who had good health benefits, no longer will have those. They’re going to go to an unemployed help centre and they’re going to go to a worker adjustment centre, if they’re lucky to have access to one, and if they’re really, really lucky, they might be able to find a job for 14 bucks an hour or 12 bucks an hour—no benefits, but at least they’ll have a job. Then they’re going to have to tell their kids, “Well, sorry, we were going to try to make some contributions towards your post-secondary education, but guess what? That’s not going to happen now. So you’re going to have to hope that by the time you get to college

age, by some miracle tuition is affordable,” and we know that’s not likely to happen. “But at least hopefully, when you get to that age, you’ll have a credit rating that will allow you to grow a big, huge debt on your back so that once you start working, you can worry about paying off your debt. Maybe by the time you’re eligible for a pension—oh, if there are pensions in the province of Ontario by then—you’ll have paid off your student debt, never mind raise a family.”

The issue of jobs in my community is a significant one. In fact, just a quick tally today: We have 360 jobs that are being lost at Hamilton Specialty Bar. That’s what the rally was about in my community today. We know that there are hundreds and hundreds more, some 600 to 800 other jobs, where at least layoffs are happening at a particular plant called National Steel Car. So that’s another couple of hundred jobs—I think it was 600, although I can’t remember the exact figure; maybe it was closer to 400. Nonetheless, there’s another plant just down the highway that closed for another couple of hundred jobs. So there you go: Just with a quick tally of what’s happening today, a snapshot, over 1,000 jobs are being lost in my general community.

What does that mean for the economy of that community? It doesn’t mean good things; it doesn’t mean good things at all. So jobs are a big issue that has been ignored for four years, good-paying manufacturing jobs and the lack thereof, and the inability of this government to really get serious about trying to maintain those jobs, never mind create new ones. That has been significantly problematic as one of the systemic issues that face the city of Hamilton.

There are a couple of other things that I thought it was really important to get into, in terms of my remarks around the budget. Again, there are many that I’m not going to talk to in great length, and those include some of the concerns I’ve had for many, many years in the time I’ve spent, first as an activist and then as an elected official in my community, one of which is affordable housing. But I know that my colleague from Beaches–East York already talked about that a great deal, so I’m not going to delve into that.

What I do want to remark about a little bit is the issue of the workers’ compensation, WSIB. The government is patting itself on the back, and in fact the minister was in—go figure—Hamilton trying to sell the bill of goods of all the wonderful things they’re doing for injured workers. I have to tell you, injured workers in my community are basically saying that the government has provided nothing but crumbs, and the crumbs they delivered have a stale-date on them, and the stale-date is 2009, at which time injured workers, who only asked for a few things—one was some retroactivity to acknowledge the fact that they have not been getting indexation; they have not been getting a cost-of-living increase for a very, very long time in this province. So they wanted a little bit of retroactivity to acknowledge the fact that they have been losing ground economically under a system that doesn’t allow them to go after their employers one

by one. They have to be part of the insurance system. The insurance system was put in place to try to give them some coverage on their wages if they were injured on the job, and that’s unfortunately a system that is not working for the injured worker; let’s put it that way. So, no, they didn’t get retroactivity. What did they get? They got an increase this year of 2.5%; the same for next year; the same for the year after that. Then it’s up to the government. The way it’s written is that the government can then make ongoing adjustments as they see fit, in any calendar year from there on after, or some such.

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What injured workers are being told is, “No to the retroactivity, and yes, you’ll get a little bit of an increase this year and a little next and a little next, but after that, you have to do exactly” what they have been doing for quite some time in this province, which is to come back to this place and lobby, come cap in hand, begging for enough of an increase to just cover off inflation so that they’re not having their benefits reduced every year by inflation.

Do you know what? I think every single party in this Legislature, over time, has spoken about the need to really give a fair shake to the injured workers, and I think it’s time that we do that. Although the government is going to be patting itself on the back saying, “We’re helping out injured workers,” the reality is that injured workers are saying things like this:

“What did we get? No retroactivity (not even when this government took power) and only a fixed percentage (2.5% versus 25% for MPPs?) until January 1, 2009. I guess this is nothing to scoff at when you’ve had nothing, but what will happen after January 2009? Cap in hand again, and the faint hope to please the powers that be. Precisely what we were supposed to avoid.”

Certainly the injured workers are very, very disappointed with the government’s lack of attention to their issues. There are other, more specific issues around deeming that they’re not happy with. Once again, the government has ignored the Brock Smith report. People in this province may not be aware, but some 30% of workers in this province are not even covered by WSIB. There is no acknowledgement whatsoever about the need for some presumptive legislation, in terms of firefighters particularly, and other workers who are exposed to toxins on the job and end up with cancers and other conditions as a result of exposure to these kinds of workplace toxins.

The one thing that they did do was increase the size of the board by four members. Maybe that’s for these Liberals who are not going to get re-elected come October 10. Maybe those four positions are so that four of you who don’t get re-elected can be appointed to the WSIB board. Perhaps that’s what that was all about.

Nonetheless, injured workers are again not pleased with this budget, notwithstanding the fact that the government members are being told that they are.

I want to finish off with children’s issues overall but two specific pieces, one being the child benefit and the other being child care all together. I’ve got to say that on

the child benefit, again, it is just not acceptable that children living in poverty are being told that they have to live in poverty for another five years. That's what they're being told. That's what the budget says.

It's interesting, because the parliamentary assistant said that this budget is "a statement of values." Well, congratulations. If your values are balancing the budget, which they keep talking about, on the backs of poor children, then shame on you. If it's about balancing the budget so that you can give a capital tax break to banks and insurance companies while children remain living in poverty in this province for the next five years, then shame on you. If those are the values of this Liberal government, then I can tell you, I'm very proud to not be sitting over there and to be sitting over here, because those are certainly not my values. It's pretty scary when you know that at a time of economic growth in this province, the values of the government are ones that keep children living in poverty.

Yes, they put together this child benefit, but people who are not actually aware of the details of that need to know that it's not even the same amount of money as it would have been if they had gotten rid of the clawback that they said they were going to get rid of in the first place. Over the next couple of years, eventually, the clawback will go, although that was a campaign promise: It was supposed to go three and a half years ago, and it didn't. So what would that be? I guess it would be eight years; eight years before the clawback is finally ended, if in fact this government can get the support of the people for another term of office. I certainly hope not, because this government has shown its colours, and its colours have got nothing to do with the dignity of children and their ability to have a decent quality of life and a decent fighting chance for the future.

I want to end by talking about the government's horrible track record, if you want to call it a track record at all, on the child care issue. I have to say, I was absolutely floored. I really was expecting—I don't know why I was; I guess it was naïveté on my own part—that this government would finally invest provincial dollars in child care. Especially when Fraser Mustard came out with the Early Years 2 report and when he described Best Start, which was—if I recall, that was one of the major planks of this government when they were running for office: There was going to be a child care program in the province of Ontario. They were going to invest \$300 million on an annual basis in a child care program. Why? Because study after study and empirical evidence after empirical evidence show very, very clearly that the early learning and care of children is pretty much the only thing where we can make sure that if we invest in that, it's going to bring this economy to where it belongs. It's going to make sure that the kids of the future are going to be able to compete with jurisdictions around the world that are already far, far ahead of us in terms of early learning and care.

These Liberals, when their Liberal buddies in Ottawa finally were forced into making commitments on child

care by Jack Layton and then all of the sudden that government went down the tubes—they used the Conservative government of Harper and his tearing up of those agreements as an excuse to pull away from child care. I say, shame on them.

In Quebec, some 60% to 70% of kids have child care in that province. What is it in Ontario? It's 10%; 10% of children in Ontario have access to child care. That is an absolute shame and a disgrace. I have to tell you that when I found out that not only did they not make good in this budget on that \$300-million commitment—we never saw it in their term of office; we know we will never see it; and now they're admitting that they're totally backtracking and have totally ignored the calls by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and others to make good on that promise. Instead, what they're doing with the \$100 million that Harper has announced in his budget—this government has decided they'll spend \$1 out of every \$4 on child care, and the other \$3 is going back to their statement of value to cover off the deficit in the budget. So they're going to suck that money out of child care and use it to make their budget non-deficit; \$1 out of \$4 is going to go to child care. Not only are we not getting the federal dollars invested in child care and we're not getting the \$300 million invested in child care—and I've got to tell you, that's a shame in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): I want to begin by first of all complimenting my colleague from Hamilton East. I've got all the time in the world for her passion and her concern for the community. We served together for some time on Hamilton city council and we fought many of the issues that she has identified.

Having said that, I want to just point out a couple of things that need to be pointed out. The issue of coming cap in hand is one that I think we all recognize is a folly and needs to be corrected, and that's why the good Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing recommended to our government that we move forward with the joint fiscal and service delivery review, I think it's called. It's actually, across the province, a \$3-billion issue—the so-called previous government's revenue-neutral down-loading. I agree with the member from Hamilton East: It is a shame and it needs to be fixed. I'm confident that this government, working with the partners to actually get a fix that works, is going to make some good things happen there.

I want to say also that it wasn't easy to come up with \$100 million in support for Stelco and the pensioners there. That was something that all of the members from Hamilton, including the member from Hamilton East, fought for, and we were successful in getting that.

I've received a lot of e-mail traffic in the last little while from the chamber of commerce about our business education tax, from children's mental health advocates, from the developmental sector and from the hospice sector, all praising our budget to the hilt. I read an editorial

earlier in response to the opposition day motion. The poverty task force has also said that we need to take a multi-dimensional approach.

The social justice advocates that I relate to in the city think quite highly of this budget.

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Mrs. Joyce Savoline (Burlington): My concern with this budget is that perhaps the government has run out of promises to break and has, in this budget, just listed more new promises so that there's a new stash of promises that can be broken.

The people of Burlington will have paid, by the time this year is over, \$105 million of health tax—it's not a premium; it's a tax—and they have received no benefit from that. The hospital has received \$1.5 million to do some design work for planning for a new part of the hospital. But that hospital is not on any priority planning list. So there's a promise in there somewhere, but the people of Burlington cannot take that to the bank because there is no guarantee that this hospital will ever get the expansion that it deserves and has been waiting for. The people of Burlington have been neglected.

It is not fair to keep critical issues in the province of Ontario at bay when this government has collected \$2.5 billion in the health tax and some ridings have absolutely nothing to show for it. In fact, some assessments that have been done show that Liberal ridings have benefited from this health tax far more than any other ridings in the province. Party politics need to be parked at the door.

With respect to the budget, the people in Ontario are paying \$1,800 more per person in taxes since this government—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I can't help but wonder what the people out in television land must be thinking. On the one hand, we've got the Tories saying, "You've spent way too much money." We've heard that a number of times tonight. On the other hand, the NDP is saying, "You aren't doing enough; you aren't spending enough." So the first question that I have is to the Tories: Where are you going to cut \$2.4 billion out of health care, like your leader has promised to do?

To the NDP: I too agree with Mr. McMeekin here, that I admire your passion about the issues. But let me just tell you what we're doing in housing. Why don't you talk about that? One hundred and twenty-seven million dollars were sent to all the municipal housing service providers just at the end of last week for housing purposes in our municipalities clear across this province, to be utilized by the municipalities as they best see fit.

Secondly, we are providing 27,000 families—27,000 families—with housing allowances. To put that in perspective, that means that in each one of our ridings, on average about 250 to 300 low-income earners will be helped with their rent payments with the housing allowance program that will go into effect later on this year. I think that is a tremendous benefit to those individ-

uals who are paying way too much of their money currently for rent. We realize that no one should be paying more than 35% of their income towards rent. What this budget is doing is helping the low-income wage earners who have children within their families with a housing allowance that I think they deserve and this government can be very proud of.

I would want you to talk about some of the really good things in this budget. You know that they're there; that's why you never raise them during question period. You haven't for the last couple of weeks, but the people of Ontario know that this is a good budget for the vulnerable people in our communities.

Mr. O'Toole: Quite frankly, the member from Hamilton speaks with passion and very much a commitment to the issues of vulnerable people and others. I give her credit for always being consistent and true to her word. As she said, she's glad she's not on that side of the House because she'd be disappointed.

I was quite impressed with the member for Burlington and her passion. I've noticed, sitting beside her, that her passion for her community and for her region is apolitical. She's quite frankly aware of the deficit from this government for her area. The broken promises that she alluded to on health care are a good start. Not unlike Durham, they've put them on a string and they're dangling them, the people in Burlington and the region. And there's a promise, a promise that could be broken in a moment by both Premier McGuinty and Minister Smitherman, and that's the security that the people of Ontario are missing. It's this trusting in government's promises, whether it's in health care or even in the budget. Remarkably, I think some of the promises in the budget are well-founded, but the problem is, as the member for Hamilton East said, some of these promises take to 2014 to be implemented.

The national child benefit is a perfect example. I think she'll probably address that in her two-minute response.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: That's fine, and we would support the initiative of the flow-through of those federal dollars. But what the Liberals have done is taken four years to implement it and they're going to take another seven or 11 years to actually take it from the measly \$200 to the \$1,100 those families are entitled to.

I support the member for Hamilton East. She's consistent, she's an advocate and I trust the things she says on what this government—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Member for Hamilton East, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Horwath: I want to thank the members for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot, Burlington, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the member for Durham for their responses to my remarks.

I want to start by saying that although my friend from the Hamilton region, or Hamilton city now, is quite defensive about some of the things he thinks have been a success in terms of the budget, I can tell him very seriously that—I know he was starting to talk about

social justice activists—although some of the leadership in those organizations have been told to play nice and to be good and not be too critical of the budget because, goodness knows, they don't want to have anything reversed on them if this government should happen to get a second mandate, in reality, they're very disturbed by the lack of commitment to the poverty issues that are here.

The minister likes to say that it's either you spend too much or you don't spend enough, and so we're doing great. What I've got to tell you is budgets are all about priorities, and I don't disagree with the parliamentary assistant who said earlier that they are value statements. I value our children much more than I value a tax break for banks and insurance companies. Sorry, those are my values. That's the kind of thing I would have thought the Liberals would have finally gotten around to in this, their very last budget, in their dying days of government. Unfortunately, they never did. That's something that I think the people of Ontario are going to have to make comment on come October.

I want to end with a quote from the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. They say that there have been no new provincial investments in early learning and child care in over 10 years. "Child care in Ontario is more fragile and unstable than ever, mainly because the provincial government has failed to make good on its election promise to put more provincial funding into the system." That's from the Ontario coalition. We really need to turn around the ship here and get to the priorities, which are our children.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): I'm privileged and honoured to stand up and support our budget bill. It's a great budget. I've been listening for the last couple of hours to the opposition, to the Conservatives and the NDP, talking badly about the budget.

I'm wondering why the opposition, during question period, didn't ask our ministers, our government, about the budget. I never heard any questions about the budget. They got caught up in talking about gaming and gambling and all this stuff and never talked about the budget—the most important budget ever in the province of Ontario.

I guess if you go back to our record since we got elected, the first budget talked about health care and how to fix health care. The second one talked about post-secondary education. The third one talked about infrastructure. This budget was talking about the social infrastructure of our communities across the province.

I know we have to do more on different elements: supporting child care, building more housing and building more roads, fixing the hospitals, building more schools and spending more money to create more child care spots. I wish the member opposite from Hamilton East was able to convince the federal NDP leader, Jack Layton, not to collapse at the federal government, because we were close to having \$1 billion invested in the

province of Ontario that was going toward the children in our province.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

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Mr. Ramal: I know that since we got elected, we have been committed to dealing with the poverty issue. To deal with the poverty issue, we increased the minimum wage to \$10.25. If you want to add the supportive housing and if you add the other support for the working poor, it will be almost \$12 to \$13 per hour. That's our strategy to support all the people who want to work. We believe in supporting the hard-working poor people, because we on this side of the House want everyone to be able to work and also put food on the table, and also to deal with the economy. I want to tell you something very important. We believe strongly that we as a government, as people of Ontario, have to give a lift for the vulnerable people among us, because we believe strongly we have to all walk together in order to have a prosperous province. This is our strategy—to give a lift to the poor among us, to lift the hard-working poor among us, because it is the only way we can have a prosperous province.

Interjection: Opportunity.

Mr. Ramal: Of course, we have to give them the opportunity. Without opportunity, we cannot get ahead in the province of Ontario. And unlike the government of Harris-Eves, who slashed 25% from the social budget, who clawed back and took the money away from the poor people, in this budget we've invested more than \$2.1 billion in the social structure to help the vulnerable people among us.

Besides all the spending on the social infrastructure—more support for education, more support for the universities and colleges, more support for health care—we balanced the books, we balanced the budget. Nobody balanced the budget in the past. I know the Conservative government before us had to sell the Highway 407. They had to sell many assets of our government, our crown properties, in order to balance their books. And also, before we got elected, they had a forecast of a \$5.6-billion deficit, and they thought, "We balanced the books." You know why they said they balanced the books? Because they were going to sell the LCBO. That's what they counted in their account book. That's not the way to build the economy.

To build the economy, you have to continue to invest in business. In order to build the economy, you have to invest in the roads and highways. In order to continue to invest in the economy, you have to invest in research and innovation. That's what we do on this side of the House. I'm proud to be a part of a government who believes strongly in investing back in the small municipalities, in the rural area, in the larger and small urban societies, because there's no way a small city by itself or a place by itself can run the government or can run the province. We have to make a balance from the south to the north, from the west to the east. All the elements of society and all

the parts of the province have to work together in order to create a great province, a strong province.

I know that demand is great and so many different issues face us, and this budget was so great in terms of supporting the poor children among us. We have to look after our vulnerable people, to invest back in health care. We have to invest more money in mental health issues to support many people facing that dilemma in our society. I think it's the commitment of our government to not forget our vulnerable people. That's why this budget came strongly to support those people and to make a difference between the people who work to make ends meet and the people who don't want to work, and also to make sure that all the people who are able to pay taxes are able to pay them, and we invest them in a good element of our society. That's why this budget came: to create a balance among all the elements of society.

I know that the Conservatives don't like our budget because this budget was great; it tackled all the issues. We've increased the minimum wage, and the other time invested more money in different elements of our society—supporting factories, to be able to maintain their existence in Ontario.

I will give you an example. We have a young factory in London, a great factory, Diamond Aircraft. Diamond Aircraft builds small planes in London, Ontario. This factory is looking for support, and our government, our Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, came up with a strategy to give them some kind of support. We gave them a \$10-million loan to be able to compete on an economic level and also on an international level. Besides that, we invested \$1 million to train skilled people to work in that factory. This government believes that this is a vision and a strategy to help other companies to come to Ontario and invest more money in Ontario.

Our strategy in the auto industry: We've invested so many millions of dollars to attract many great factories to come and open in Ontario. I will give you an example. Toyota in Woodstock, Hino and many other factories are expanding because of our investment and our trust in them. Ford Motor Co. in Oakville and many others like our strategy, because we believe strongly that by supporting those companies, they can come and open in Ontario. They can feel comfortable because we're providing not just financial support but we're also providing the workers with health care protection, with health care services. We have strong public education. Besides all these elements, we have colleges and universities that can invest and give workers the skills they need badly in order to continue to produce at a high-quality level. This is our strategy on this front.

I was listening to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing talking about investing money in municipal housing. More than \$127 million can be divided across Ontario to help many poor people who cannot afford to pay for rent. We are also investing in 27,000 allowances to support people who cannot pay full rent. This is our strategy. We have not forgotten anyone in our society.

Besides that, we've invested more money in injured workers who hurt themselves in their work to build this province, to build our economy. We gave them a 2.5% increase for the next three years. I know it's not a lot, but we have to work within our budget. We have to make it balance. It's more than the Conservative Party paid them in their last eight years, and more than they invested in anything.

In the meantime, we continue to support legal aid, to create a legal department to support poor people who have no one to talk on their behalf. I think it's a good strategy. It's our strategy.

We continue to talk about good things in the budget. We also invested more money in the north, because as you know, the north faces some difficulties. By investing more money, by facilitating so many different businesses and services in the north, we can keep them functioning very well, because without the north, we could not survive. We have to have the investment go to every part of the province of Ontario.

Also, we don't want to forget the seniors among us who worked hard during their lifetime to provide us with good economic growth, to give us the joy we have right now in Ontario and the economic growth that we enjoy. Those seniors worked hard when they were young. They worked in the factories; they worked in the offices. They did their best to provide us with what we have today.

I think it's a great budget. Let's talk about education. We've invested more than an extra billion dollars in education, because we believe strongly that without investing in education, we cannot have an educated community and society. The only way we can compete on an international level is by educating people, by innovation and research. That's why we have a commitment to many research facilities in Ontario. I was proud and honoured to be with the Premier and my colleagues Chris Bentley, Deb Matthews and Steve Peters last week when the Premier came to London to invest \$23 million to support the John P. Robarts Research Institute. Everybody knows the Robarts institute and the great job it does in Ontario, and what it did in North America by creating so much different machinery to help in health care. This is our commitment.

Also, we're not going to stop there. We invested \$5 million in London–Fanshawe as a part of our strategy to provide London–Fanshawe with a facility, a centre, to train many people in the London area to provide the factories, like Ford, CAMI, Hino and Toyota, with skilled technical people. This strategy came from our government. That's why we have a vision, not for one or two or three years; we have a vision for 10 or 15 years.

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In this investment, we haven't forgotten about the environment. We created the greenbelt. The greenbelt was the greatest mission and thing that has happened in modern history: 1.6 million hectares, which is a great area to create a good environment and also leave the area around cities green, which we enjoy on a daily basis.

Also in this budget were two million trees to be planted across the province of Ontario. I thank the Minister of Natural Resources for giving me 1,000 trees to be planted in London. We did that last year—5,000 trees.

All of this is because of our support, not just for a single thing in our economy, not to one area of our economy; we have to make it balanced. That's one of the great things about the budget: This budget talks about the whole element of our society, the whole element of our daily life. It's important, when we deal with a certain issue, that we have to remember others, because all get together and create the wave for growth and economic prosperity.

We didn't forget, in this budget, to invest more money in the environment and also to invest in clean energy. We in Ontario at the present time are the leaders in clean energy in Canada by supporting many different outlets: windmills or solar or bio-methane or this company trying to produce clean hydro. All these innovations and research will be supported by our government. We'll provide them with services they need, whatever possibility to link them with the grid. It's a great investment. It's a great way to attract more investment in this area, because we believe strongly in the environment and in ways to protect the environment.

We hosted a post-budget meeting in my riding of London with my colleagues Deb Matthews and Chris Bentley. We held a session with the social activists: the people who care about poor people, about the homeless, about legal aid, about women's issues, about mental issues, about many different elements. They all came to the breakfast and told us that it's the greatest budget that has ever happened in Ontario.

This budget is truly a Liberal budget. Liberals talk to the people—all classes, all the sectors of our people. In the past, people got used to seeing a budget—just talk to people who have money, people who influence the government. But this budget talked to all the sectors of our social mosaic in Ontario. It talks about everything: about education, health care, housing, seniors, small communities, large communities, cities, transit, transportation. It talks about everything. This budget is great.

And with all the spending in the budget, we also balanced the books. A few minutes ago, the member was talking about spending and how Liberals like to spend like crazy. But I want to tell them that they are the Conservatives. They think they are conservatives in terms of spending, but when they were the government, a \$5.6-billion deficit. What kind of fiscal balance did they have? And prior to the \$5.6-billion deficit, they used to balance the books by selling assets of the government, from the 407 to crown land—many different assets. Now they get lessons from our great Minister of Finance on how to balance the books and continue spending to support our public education, our public health care and our public infrastructure—

Interjection: The economy.

Mr. Ramal:—and also the economy. We created more than 327,000 net jobs. I know the member from Hamilton East was saying that we lost 125,000 jobs. It's a norm of life, of the economic cycle: sometimes we lose, sometimes we gain. But overall we've gained 327,000 net new jobs because of our public education, because of our public health care. We strongly believe that by supporting any company coming to Ontario, providing them with good service, with roads they need to be able to commute fast and quick, to connect them with the United States, to eastern Ontario, to northern Ontario to southern Ontario—this is our commitment. That's why we are attracting great investment. We believe in a strong economy in order to generate more taxes. The only way to generate more taxes is to support our public infrastructure, to support—

Mr. McMeekin: You can't do child care without money.

Mr. Ramal: One hundred per cent: You cannot do child care without money. You cannot support public education without money. You cannot support hospitals without money. You have to invest to get more investment.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Investment in people.

Mr. Ramal: Invest in people, and do you know what? It will pay you back in the future.

Interjection.

Mr. Ramal: My colleague from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot is talking about investment in people. It's a very important issue. If you invest in people, people will believe in you and pay you back in the future and keep that investment growing and growing by—

Mr. McMeekin: Investing in kids.

Mr. Ramal: Investing in kids, investing in families. The only way we will have a strong province and a strong community is with strong people, right? It's all about community.

Mr. McMeekin: Strong people build strong communities.

Mr. Ramal: Strong people build strong communities and a strong province. It's the only way we can continue.

I think we have a great budget. I hope that in the end the Conservatives and the NDP will see the light and are convinced, for the sake of the people of Ontario, to support it.

I would like to talk more about the good things in the budget, but I think my time is almost over. In the end, I wish that all the people in this House—all the Conservatives and the NDP—see the light and support the budget, because it's good for the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 10 of the clock Thursday morning, April 5.

The House adjourned at 2127.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. James K. Bartleman
Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown
Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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

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Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L) Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L) Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Toronto–Danforth	Tabuns, Peter (ND)
Ottawa–Vanier	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Trinity–Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Parkdale–High Park	DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Waterloo–Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Parry Sound–Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Whitby–Ajax	Elliott, Christine (PC)
Perth–Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L) Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Prince Edward–Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Sarnia–Lambton	Di Cocco, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (L) Minister of Culture / ministre de la Culture	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Ferreira, Paul (ND)
Sault Ste. Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)		
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse		
Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)		
Scarborough–Agincourt	Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L) Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux		
Scarborough–Rouge River	Balkissoon, Bas (L)		
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)		
Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St. Catharines	Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L) Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, government House leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement		
St. Paul's	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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

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

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