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Jeudi 26 avril 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Thursday 26 April 2007

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*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Is a quorum present?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is a quorum present?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Deputy Clerk: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Fonseca, if you could move your motion.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario affirms that its commitment to students in the public education system is so strong that it opposes any attempt to take public money and hand it over to private schools.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Fonseca has moved private member's notice of motion number 58.

Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Fonseca, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Fonseca: I bring forward this resolution because I feel that publicly funded education, like publicly funded health care and many of the services that we provide through taxpayer dollars—these are the cornerstones of our Ontario. If we all work together, Ontario is that much stronger.

My fear here is that if we do not continue along the path that we have over the last three and a half years to increasingly fund our publicly funded education system, we may find ourselves where we were prior to coming to government, where we were closing schools, where we were underfunding our schools, where we had strife and instability in our public school system. I know the people of Ontario don't want to go back there. Because of this, if we did change the way that we are funding our public school system and the way we are collecting our taxes for publicly funded education, we would be looking at a decrease, a take-away, of \$500 million from that system. These funds would be transferred to a private school system. That would mean less accountability in our

schools; it would mean a lack of repairs, fewer teachers and less bringing of education into the classroom.

There have been a lot of positive results with our education plan, and this plan must continue. We've worked hard to support our students, our teachers, our principals, and support staff in schools. We've done this by investing billions of new dollars in education. Because we're working together with educators, we've achieved real results. As I said, we now have peace and stability in our classrooms. Class sizes are coming down, test scores are going up, and more students are graduating.

I know the issue around the Catholic school system has come up, but it is embedded in our history and our Constitution, where Catholics in Ontario are granted the right to a Catholic education system. I've gotten many e-mails around faith-based schools and around private schools. My understanding is that 96% or 97% of all Ontario schoolchildren are attending publicly funded schools. Some have argued that we should be funding other faith-based schools. At this time, the province is in need of funds for our publicly funded education system, so we must continue down the path that we are. I think it would only serve our children if we work together, we bring people together.

I remember my days in grade school. We can talk a lot about numbers, but let's talk about some of the stories. Being in a school that was made up of many different cultural and ethnic groups, one of my best friends was Danny Galzechy—I think his parents had immigrated from Poland—and Robert Warden, a good friend. His parents had been Canadians and his grandparents had been Canadians for many years; they probably came over from Britain.

I learned much from these friends and the various groups. I think it was the first time I ate a perogy, or the first time I went to Scouts, with Robert Warden. In our school system, I remember Mr. Innes. He was one of my first phys. ed teachers. We're bringing more specialist teachers into our publicly funded school system. I remember going out and playing baseball. It's not so much about playing baseball; it's about what happened as we were playing. With so many groups coming together with diversity and tolerance and understanding and inclusiveness and acceptance of each other, we built a stronger team. We were able to learn fair play. We were able to socialize together.

Why this is so important in our communities—as I said, close to 100% of our schools are public schools—is that it makes us a better community, a better society and gives us a stronger quality of life.

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We read the news, we look around the world, and in many places there is strife among groups where they have not come together, where there is not an acceptance of new groups to countries. We've seen what's been happening in France or in the UK or even at times in the United States. I feel we are privileged and have a great model here to share with the world. I'm not saying we're perfect, but I think we are about the best it gets. What I see in our community is an understanding of each other, where we do want to work together to make our communities better. That happens a lot through the community school. It is a hub where people come together, parents bring their kids, kids are taught Canadian history, taught about our Constitution, taught about the various cultures we have in Canada, about the classroom and the community where they live and what is great about what they bring. All of this happens in a publicly funded system.

I think the impacts are enormous. Often we hear the Premier talking about what is a virtuous circle. The virtuous circle is one where the community invests in its children and in a publicly funded education system, in our schools, so that those schools are in good repair, so that those students are achieving, so that there is opportunity for all and nobody is being left behind. What happens is that those students, through that learning and that achievement, go on to good-paying jobs. Yes, they will pay taxes through those jobs that will pay for our publicly funded health care system, that will pay for our infrastructure needs, that will make sure we have citizens who have learned about the importance of the environment.

It's great to see what our students do. The environment has been really top-line news. The blue box program came through our publicly funded education system. Our kids come up with great innovative ideas that actually have upward momentum and affect their parents, affect the entire community, affect business etc. From these initiatives, we have seen them move into regional, national and international impacts in their scope.

Let's look at some of the results that have come about: Test scores are up, graduation rates are up, class sizes are smaller. We have put in a great deal more funding: \$18.3 billion is going into our education system, and just in this last budget 781 million new dollars. We can't go back to where we were.

John Tory, in the budget of 2004, voted against historic investments in education; voted against \$2.1 billion of new funding for education, voted against clarifying the effective use of resources, student outcomes, including elementary literacy and numeracy, high school graduation rates, parental engagement, special education, the health and safety of pupils and staff. Mr. Tory voted against this. My fear is that if that's the stand Mr. Tory is taking, he's taking us in the wrong direction. We have to move in the direction that we're going. We see graduation rates going up. We see more students engaged in the learning process. We have made a tremendous differ-

ence that we can't allow to be taken away by a Conservative government.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I find this resolution to be one of the most offensive pieces of legislation ever presented to this House. I find the member's comments this morning to be crass, partisan and offensive to people who are observing this debate. We have students from Bais Chomesh High School here today, representatives from the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Faith-Based Schools and a representative from the Parents for Educational Choice. The public will draw their own conclusions about Mr. Fonseca's comments today.

I'm going to quote from the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Faith-Based Schools. Here's what they had to say about this resolution and their perception of Mr. Fonseca's intentions: "This resolution is extremely unfair and misleading since it fails to recognize that, unlike Catholic schools, the small minority of non-Catholic faith-based schools have no choice but to operate as 'private' schools. Excluding all funding for 'private' schools means that non-Catholic faith-based schools will continue to be treated as second-class citizens."

The Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Faith-Based Schools includes Armenian schools, Coptic Orthodox Church schools, Evangelical Christian schools, Greek Orthodox Education in Ontario, the Islamic Society of North America (Canada), Khalsa Community School (Sikh), the Ontario Association of Jewish Day Schools, the Ontario Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Rockway Mennonite Collegiate and others.

Representatives of the coalition, as I mentioned, are here today to observe this debate and to demonstrate their strong opposition to this resolution. Parents for Educational Choice have this to say about Mr. Fonseca's resolution: "Parents seeking the freedom to make alternative educational choices for their children have never, never sought to take money away from public schools. Independent school parents have always asked that government be committed to all students in Ontario, not just those in a particular system, and so this private member's resolution is a weak attempt to mislead the public on this issue."

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Oak Ridges, I know you're quoting, but we do have to be careful. There's a rule that you can't say indirectly what you can't say directly. I caution all members in that respect.

Mr. Klees: It was a strong view of the public.

This resolution therefore must be seen for what it is, namely, an offensive attempt to confuse the issue of funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in the minds of the public. First, not to differentiate between faith-based schools and the so-called "private" schools, as the member puts it in his resolution, given that the member is fully aware of that distinction and given the province-wide appeal his government has had for the three and a half years past to extend legislation and to fund non-Catholic faith-based schools in a fair and just way—it is unconscionable that the member would come into this

place with a resolution that leaves confusion in the minds of the public on this important issue.

Perhaps Mr. Fonseca has unwittingly presented us with the opportunity, first, to expose his government's crass, partisan posturing on this important issue and to reveal the contradiction and the inconsistencies not only of his government but of his very Minister of Education on this important issue; second, to give us an opportunity to reveal the inconsistent practices of the government of Ontario today on this issue of funding faith-based schools; and finally, the ultimate lack of integrity in the fact that he and many members of his own caucus took advantage of the privilege of faith-based education by attending Catholic faith-based education schools in this province, had the opportunity to have that faith-based Catholic education but would deny it to the 7% of students attending non-Catholic faith-based schools in the province today.

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First of all, to his Minister of Education. This is where she stood on the issue of funding for religious schools, as reported by NOW magazine in November 2001: "Kathleen Wynne says the party should have taken a principled stand in favour of funding for religious schools during the election. She says she personally urged McGuinty's advisers to do just that. 'I'm disappointed we didn't come out earlier on this. I think we could have claimed some ground.'"

That was the current Minister of Education. She was right then. She's wrong today. I don't know what has happened to her thinking on this matter, but I can tell you, it's unjustifiable. It is inconsistent with Ontario today.

We live in a multicultural society. We take great pride in welcoming cultures and diversity of religions and celebrate them. This government and this member today take a stand to say that it's all okay for Catholics, but other faiths should have no room—in fact, he's saying the government doesn't have money to extend that kind of funding. This government has \$400 million to put into the casino in Windsor for retrofits but does not have the money to put into faith-based education that would help parents, families, those who consider it not an option that their children attend a faith-based school but consider it a requirement and an obligation; in fact, if they're consistent with their religious beliefs and convictions, they have no choice. Those very parents continue to pay public education taxes, support the public school system and, in addition to that, have the burden of paying tuition for their children to attend the faith-based schools.

I find an unconscionable contradiction in this. What I say to the member is that he should take a very careful look at his own life and ask where he got his education and whether or not the children sitting up in the galleries today shouldn't have exactly the same opportunity as he had to get a faith-based education and help develop the character, the conviction and the depth that faith-based education affords. For him to suggest that somehow John Tory and the PC Party are in any way intent on undermining the public education system is equally as dishonest and unconscionable.

The Deputy Speaker: I think we're going down a road that leads into some danger. You also know that the standing orders say you cannot attack another member. Please, try to keep this debate on a level that's higher than I think we're going.

Mr. Klees: Speaker, I am finding it very difficult. I take your caution, but I suggest to you that I'm lowering myself not even to the point that the member did when he drafted the resolution.

The Deputy Speaker: Please, I just ask that we not do this. I think all members in here can express themselves in a parliamentary way and still get their point across as strongly as they might want to make it. Please.

Mr. Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I will attempt to do that. I'm having a difficult time today doing that, I must admit.

I want to point out the attitude of this government towards the issue of faith-based education. Thousands of petitions have been read in the Legislature over the last three and a half years coming from well-meaning parents and stakeholders challenging, asking and appealing to the government to extend funding to other faith-based schools. It is unconscionable what members in this Legislature did in response to that. A number of petitions were drafted and read into the record here opposing that, and it's very consistent with this resolution.

I want to just read this: "We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support Premier McGuinty in his commitment to giving our children a ladder to success through excellent public education and not spend taxpayer dollars to benefit the few who can afford private school tuitions."

Here is what is unconscionable about this. These petitions that were presented to this Legislature were signed purely by Liberal MPPs. It is a concoction. It was an intention to use a legitimate parliamentary tool to send the message, wrongfully, that the public was somehow opposed to this. It was Liberal MPPs and their staff. I have the record here, and I intend to bring a point of privilege to the Speaker's attention, because this is a crass abuse of Parliament. To be so politically partisan on this issue, to try to confuse the public on this most important issue—I suggest to you, Speaker, that if anyone should be brought to order in this place, it's Liberal members of this Legislature who are abusing their authority, abusing their power and trying to divert attention from what they're not doing.

Speaker, I'm going to have to stop because I will become unparliamentary yet one more time. I'll rest my case. At the end of the day, the people in this province will judge this member and this government for their actions.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Just to follow up on the comments of the member for Oak Ridges, it is always interesting and ironic when one politician accuses another of political posturing. We have to be very careful that as we accuse another political party of posturing, we ourselves aren't then engaging in the same thing. It's a caution to us all in this regard.

I understand that there are strong feelings. I do. I have strong feelings on this as well. I support this particular resolution before us. We have debated this before. New Democrats have stated their position very clearly: We support a public system, which 95% of our students attend. It works relatively well. I will challenge some of the opinions stated by the member for Mississauga East in this regard, but the system on the whole works well. It can work better. I acknowledge that there are strong feelings and that there are supporters here in this House today and outside who would want us to expand our support to other faith-based institutions and other private institutions. I have to say, I do not support that. We have been very clear, and I remain committed to the idea of a public system. But when the member for Mississauga East talks about where we were and where we are and makes a case that where we are is a much stronger place to defend public education, I disagree with the member.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: There's a lot more to do indeed, but where you have gone and where you're going is not where we want to be, because I'm telling you, you are undermining the public system, and I'm going to tell you how. I'm going to tell you how you Liberals are doing that as well.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): You're opposed to higher test scores, I guess.

Mr. Marchese: There are three areas mentioned by my Liberal colleagues, one by the member next to me, from Scarborough Centre—

Mr. Duguid: And a massive capital investment in schools.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Marchese: It's okay, Speaker; I don't mind listening to him.

Mr. Duguid: He likes it.

Mr. Marchese: I do like it, but if you don't, Speaker, you call him to order. That's okay.

So the member for Scarborough Centre says, "Marchese is against"—what is it? Class sizes going down?

Mr. Duguid: Smaller class sizes. You appear to be against that.

Mr. Marchese: They made a promise that they would cap class sizes by the end of this year in all of the primary grades. The member for Scarborough Centre is not listening, but that's okay. The case I make is to those watching, not him, because he's not listening.

Mr. Duguid: I'm listening.

Mr. Marchese: Well, you didn't get it. I'm going to repeat it for you. Your promise was that you would cap class sizes in the primary grades to 20. That is a promise you did not keep, could not keep, that you meant to solicit support for. You are spending a whole lot of money and you haven't capped anywhere near half of the classes in the primary grades across Ontario. That's a fact that you yourself—

Mr. Duguid: A significant number.

Mr. Marchese: Oh, significant. It's a promise you made that you could not keep and that you are not keeping.

The other thing they talk about is that scores are up. They manipulate the test. The Tories create testing, and the Liberals continue with that testing. They started manipulating the test. The Liberals continue, and the member wouldn't have a clue about this—

Mr. Duguid: That's not true. It's international standards. It's set by international standards.

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Mr. Marchese: He's mumbling. I don't know if you hear him, but what he's saying is that he and his colleagues have created better test scores. What I have said in this House is that they have manipulated the test scores. Speaker, you may not like it, but that's what your government has done.

What have you done? You have increased the length of time in which the students can write that test from six hours to as long as they need. Students can write the test for as long as they want, take as long as they want. That means you no longer have a time period in which to do the test; you have the liberty to take your time. You're manipulating the result. Do you understand, Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: In fact, I don't. I think "manipulation," again, is imputing some motive. Please, there are ways to express this if you don't agree with the test. I just like to keep the level of the language on a debating plane, that's all.

Mr. Marchese: I've said this on a number of occasions. I'm surprised you stopped me with my comments. I really don't—

The Deputy Speaker: You asked my opinion, and I gave it to you.

Mr. Marchese: The test has been manipulated. Students can use calculators in the classroom. That's a fact. They could not use calculators before to calculate mathematical questions; they can now. That is a fact; that's not imputing motive.

Mr. Duguid: All over the world.

Mr. Marchese: All over—he's mumbling, without having any knowledge of what it is that his government is doing and what it is that I'm talking about. Of course test scores go up. You politically manipulate the test—that's what test scores are all about—and you're proud of that.

Graduation rates are going up, and they introduce Bill 52, which will force the graduation rate to go up. Why and how? Students are now forced to stay in high school until age 18 if they haven't completed their degree. Bill 52 now allows the Liberal government to farm out programs to any Tom, Dick, Harry and Mary. Teachers will not be the ones teaching the program; anybody can teach them. And why are they doing this? To save money. Why are they farming out programs to anyone outside of the educational system? So that they can create a better result, so that people like the member for Scarborough Centre can say graduation rates are up. They will create the result that they want to produce.

Mr. Duguid: You're paranoid.

Mr. Marchese: Paranoid? So silly.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Don't egg him on.

Mr. Marchese: What else, Mr. Ruprecht? I'm looking forward to your comments as well.

Look what's happening with ESL. We have more ESL students coming into Ontario than we've ever seen, yet we have fewer ESL teachers than ever before—fewer today in the Liberal regime than we did in the Conservative regime. How does that undermine public education? It forces teachers who don't have the skills to teach ESL to now absorb that as an additional responsibility. Some will do well; some will not. They are now into regular classrooms. Is that a good thing for public education? Marchese argues it's a bad thing. You Liberals are contributing to diminishing our public education.

Special ed: You are now allowing for block funding. You've got rid of the ISA funding, intensive support amount, that was paying out \$930 million. You have savings of \$930 million now. It's not going to special education on the basis of need; it's now going on block funding. Schools get money based on how many students they have, not according to their needs or their problems but according to how many students they have. How does that benefit public education? It doesn't. It means students are now going into the regular classroom with ESL students and the teacher has to deal with them. That's an additional responsibility for the teacher. How does that enhance public education? It doesn't; it diminishes it.

Four billion dollars of capital programs: That is the need stated by a Conservative government study that was done in 2002-03. The Liberal government claims they're spending \$4 billion—they're not. The Liberal government says it's a beginning. Sorry, if you were spending \$4 billion, it would not be the beginning, it would be the end, and you would have solved the capital problems in our school system. You are contributing to the erosion of our public system. That's what the member for Mississauga East is doing by presenting such a motion and defending public education. That's why I am attempting to challenge the arguments he makes.

According to the Toronto Star, the chair of the Peel District School Board, Janet McDougald, has announced that they're "open for business"—language we used to hear under the Tories. That business is the private financing of large projects like gyms, pools and even portables. Toronto Catholic District School Board chair Oliver Carroll has said that this will divide communities and Annie Kidder, head of People for Education, has called it two-tier education.

The minister thinks this is okay. The minister is quoted in the Toronto Star saying that it's up to the trustees to determine equity across the board. No, I'm sorry, Minister, it's up to you and your government to determine equity across Ontario, not the responsibility of trustees. Equity across Ontario is achieved by your government—by you, Minister—centrally across Ontario.

Is that helping public education, member from Mississauga East? You may not like to hear it, but it's not. It's

eroding public education. You are allowing for private financing to get into the public system. You are allowing for some boards to have access to money to fix their schools while some other school boards and schools that don't have access to rich parents won't be able to fix their portables and their schools. They won't have access to that money.

Some trustees say that's okay, because if the private sector is helping to build whatever in some schools, they'll free up money for other areas, to other, poorer schools. That won't happen, Minister. What will happen is that the government's contribution will continue to go down. That's what happened under the Tories when they increased tuition fees for post-secondary education and they diminished their contribution to the support of our post-secondary education system. The Conservative government said, "We're increasing tuition fees to bring up quality." It did not bring up quality because government support went down.

Public education is under threat, and when this government says it's okay for the private sector to go and build whatever they want, you are opening it up for business, you are opening it up to breaking our public system down.

I have strong feelings about this particular issue. Parents are raising over \$40 million of their own money. We have gone beyond the bake sale. We're going beyond the skip-a-thon. Now we're saying to the private sector, "It's okay for you to come in." Some of the rump folks here don't want to listen to that, but it's not okay. It is not okay for parents to raise more and more money every year to sustain public education. In the old days the bake sale was for some extras for their students. Now we've moved beyond the bake sale. How could that be okay for Liberals defending public education? It cannot be okay.

The member from Mississauga East says, "Ah, we're not closing schools the way the Conservatives did." Yes, you are. You've closed schools, 154 of them, while you've had a moratorium for a couple of years. You've had a moratorium on school closures, yet you've closed as many schools, if not more, than other governments—under a moratorium. How could that be good for public education when you use that argument as one of your strong arguments, saying, "We cannot go to where we were." We are there. You are there. You're closing schools as well, particularly, as you say, you have—or you had a moratorium.

You talk about underfunding and you accuse the Tories of underfunding and starving the public system. You're doing the same. You promised to reform education financing. Monsieur Kennedy, mon ami, promised to reform it; the other two ministers ahead of him promised to reform it. Your government has not reformed the funding formula. We are in trouble.

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You make claims that are never delivered. We need money in our public system to make it better. You talk about more teachers for gym. Sorry, 65% of our schools do not have a physical education teacher. You force the

teachers and the students to jump up and down for 20 minutes, yet they do not have a gym teacher. They do not have a physical education teacher.

Our system is hurting. It's in trouble, and when the public system is in trouble, you are nourishing an interest and a desire for others to say, "We can do better on our own. We can do better outside of the public system." That's what you are nourishing—unbeknownst to you perhaps, but that's what's happening. You strengthen the public system by funding it properly and by funding all of the programs properly, which includes ESL, special ed, music, art and physical education, and fixing our schools. If you want to defend public education, make sure you fund it properly. You're not doing that, member from Mississauga East.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): I'd like to return to debate on the motion from the member for Mississauga East and to support the motion he has put forward that public funding should go to public schools, not private schools.

I think when we consider the whole issue of should we or should we not fund private schools, it's important to consider the structures and the regulations that surround private schools in Ontario. The regulations, quite frankly, do not put any requirement on private schools to follow the public rules. Let me give you an example. Private schools are not required to use the Ontario curriculum. Some of my friends across the aisle there sort of pass that off, but it's interesting. I was saying—and it was picked up on TV—on one other occasion that private schools don't have to use the Ontario curriculum, and there were some private school parents who heard me say that. We had a call in my office the next day from the principal of the private school. He said that—

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I don't believe we have a quorum at this point in the morning.

The Deputy Speaker: Is a quorum present?

The Deputy Clerk: A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Guelph–Wellington.

Mrs. Sandals: We had a call from this principal and he wanted to know if it would be possible to get a copy of the Ontario curriculum, because the principal of this school didn't actually know what the Ontario curriculum was. So he didn't know how to answer the parents on whether or not what they were teaching their students had any alignment with the public policy of Ontario.

In fact, if you look at private secondary schools, they can only issue secondary credits if they are inspected. There are a number of private secondary schools in this province that are not inspected, which means that when the student graduates from that school, they cannot get an Ontario secondary school graduation diploma. That means that they cannot go on to post-secondary education—colleges and universities—in Ontario because they have no Ontario high school graduation. I don't think we should fund that.

Private schools are not required to hire qualified teachers. Teachers in the four publicly funded systems—

English public, English Catholic, French public and French Catholic, all of which are required to follow the rules—are required to be qualified. That means they have a university degree, they have gone to a recognized faculty of education, many of them have further training through the school boards and many of them have formal additional qualifications. That's not required at a private school. Anybody can teach at a private school.

Because they're not qualified, private school teachers are not required to be members of the Ontario College of Teachers, which is the regulatory board. You might say, "So what if they're not members of the Ontario College of Teachers? Why does that matter?" The reason it matters is that in the four publicly funded systems, if a teacher is disciplined or dismissed because they have abused a child, the employing board is required in law to report that to the College of Teachers. The College of Teachers then has a hearing to discuss whether that teacher's licence should be removed or restricted, therefore making it impossible for them to teach anymore, to have a negative influence on any more students in the four publicly funded systems.

Private schools are not required to do that. In fact, I personally know of various incidents where teachers who have been dismissed from the four publicly funded systems and had their licence lifted ended up teaching in private schools.

When we look at this whole issue of should we fund private schools, my answer is no. There are some excellent private schools out there that do in fact follow the rules, but there are a whole lot of private schools out there that don't follow the rules, and I personally see no reason why public funding should be spent on private schools when there is no guarantee that they are following our regulations.

I fully support the motion from the member for Mississauga East.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I am pleased to rise in strong opposition to the member's resolution today, I want to say off the top. I'm disappointed that such a sad, sorry and small attempt to misrepresent the issue of fairness to people of all faiths in the province of Ontario, as brought forward by the member of the assembly today—of all the issues he could have addressed of importance to the residents of Mississauga East, and he chose a very small pact in the assembly here today.

Certainly, I remember as a student at Notre Dame Catholic school in Welland when the decision was made to extend full funding to Catholic schools. I was the second-last class, I think, to have to pay tuition, but I remember the decision that was made and how that impacted us as Roman Catholics. In that time in the assembly in 1985, you look back at the words of Liberals, and we all have great admiration for them—Ian Scott, Sean Conway and Bob Nixon among others—who stood in the place and said it was right to extend funding to Catholic schools, not because of a constitutional necessity but because it was the right thing to do.

I don't know if my friend Mr. Fonseca was a Catholic school student; I was. Now, 20 years later, after UN reso-

lutions, after charter challenges, after almost every single province has moved to address the issue of fairness to people of all faiths in education, we find this petty motion from the Ontario Liberal Party before us today. It gnaws at me as a Roman Catholic that I was able to benefit from support, and my sister after me, while a young person today who chooses to go—or parents who choose for them to go—to a Jewish day school, to an Islamic school, to a Christian school or any other faith-based school, does not have that option. The parents don't have that option, an option that was available to me and my sister that is denied in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, one of the stand-alone provinces to set up that arbitrary border.

Imagine a family that moves here—an immigrant family. They move here from another province, perhaps, and what a bizarre world they would encounter where one faith has support, but if you're not part of that particular faith, the government doesn't recognize your decision to send your child to that school as a legitimate decision. How can we tolerate that in the world of 2007? We just celebrated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms anniversary a few days ago here in the Legislature. The Liberals wanted to wrap themselves in that document then, but when it comes to assisting families who send their kids to faith-based schools, they pull this kind of prank.

I say shame on them, Mr. Speaker. It's time that Ontario moves in the direction of other provinces. We've been called to do it by the United Nations, to have some equity for parents who choose to send their children to these schools.

The member intentionally misrepresents the kind of schools that exist in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: No.

Mr. Hudak: I withdraw that.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Hudak: The member characterizes inaccurately the kind of schools that we have in the province of Ontario. I tell you that Heritage Christian School was here just the other day from my riding in Jordan; Covenant Christian School in Smithville. You walk through that parking lot—there are far more Chevrolets in that parking lot than Cadillacs, and they're dropping their kids off. Real hard-working families, middle-class families who make sacrifices, pay their full taxes in the public system but get no recognition from the province of Ontario for that choice. To characterize them as bastions of the wealthy and the privileged alone is an egregious mischaracterization. I hope the member will apologize for that.

1050

I guess the Ontario Liberal Party believes it's okay for people of privilege—Gerard Kennedy, for example, benefited from the private school system—but it's not okay for those of modest means. I've heard the Liberals attack families who benefit from scholarships and choose to send their children to faith-based schools. They oppose that recent change in the federal budget and they want to tax those benefits.

Hiving off an opportunity, a free choice for families of modest means—I strongly oppose this. Certainly, no Sean Conway, no Bob Nixon, no Ian Scott for Mississauga East.

Mr. Ruprecht: I'd first like to welcome the representatives of the faith-based schools, educational choice, and the students who are listening to this debate.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that the present Liberal government is trying to do its best to ensure that Ontarians get the very best education. That's our interest, and I know that's your interest as well. How do we bridge that in the best way possible?

Mr. Fonseca has done his research on his resolution. He said that we've increased education by \$781 million in one year. If we were supporting faith-based schools and private schools, it would take away—that's what his research indicates—\$500 million from the pot of education in Ontario, for public schools. Mr. Marchese says that, in addition to the \$781 million that this government is already adding to the public pot, parents are asked to raise—how much?—\$40 million more; wow. Out of their personal pockets, \$40 million more.

So how do we handle this in the best way? We know that we need to have a good education, no doubt, because we have to compete in this competitive world, not only in Canada, but we have to compete internationally. How do we do that best? By providing the best education we can. Our Premier is known as the education Premier, so we try as best as we can to support him to do just that, to make our kids competitive on this international global scale and in this environment.

I have no doubt that if there was enough money, we would support faith-based schools and private schools, if there was enough money there. But there's just one other item that we should also consider and address. It isn't just the money, but what we need to do is to get these students who are in faith-based schools and in some private schools—we know, sitting here, in our hearts, that they are taught by some of the best teachers there are. And you're right here with them, some of them. We have some of the best students right here, sitting in this Legislature today. They attend some of the best schools.

My friends, we need you. We can't have you, in a way, separating them out from those who are coming to Canada. They are new immigrants. There are thousands of immigrants. I ask you, where is our tool for nation-building? Where? Is it the family? How can the family expect to be nation-building in a new immigrant home? Where? If it isn't the school, where? Is it the churches? Are they nation-building? Is it the synagogue? Is it the temple? Where is the nation-building of this country? And then we're comparing ourselves as we're Canadians. We know what the US is like and their pride, but where's the Canadian pride? We need you; we need these students. We need these students to go with other students and tell them about this. We need these best teachers. We need the best that you have to offer in religious terms, whether it's the Talmud, whether it's the Koran, whether it's the Bible. In any case, we need you to build a new

Canada. And what you are doing, in a way—and you correct me, if I'm wrong—is you're taking some of the best away to build a great country, together.

Some of these students are coming here, like Mr. Klees has indicated, from other countries. Who are they together with? As Mr. Fonseca says in his resolution, if we're taking out \$500 million from the school system, where some of the schools are literally falling apart—if we're taking that away from them, my friends, that's not the very best idea. That's what the research has indicated today.

My friends, to make a long story short, the best indicator of a successful student, a successful future, is self-worth. I know that private schools and faith-based schools are providing that. I know where you're at. You know in your heart that you want to create successful students for a new Canada; I know you want to do that. But you have to share it with the rest of us. I know that can be done.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's a pleasure to stand and speak to the resolution from my colleague from Mississauga East, and I'll speak in favour of it.

I thought about this and I thought: What happens in schools? Are we there just to learn subjects? Are we there to learn our arithmetic, our algebra, our geometry, our geography? We're not. That's certainly a part of it. A lot of what we're tested on is how much of the curriculum goes into our heads, sticks in our heads and comes out in a coherent form. But a lot of the value of education happens in what we learn about each other and how we learn to live together. In Ontario, we have an experiment called the multicultural society. It's an experiment in how to get along, how to live among one another and how to break down barriers instead of, consciously or unconsciously, wilfully or otherwise, erect them, tolerate them or see them exist. That's perhaps one of the major reasons I've seen the value in a public education system, which is, to me, the one single, shared experience that 97% of Ontario students all have. By the time they come out, they've studied, lived, played and experienced among their peers from every walk of life, from every country on earth, from every socioeconomic status, and it's something that we value in Ontario; it's something that is Ontario.

It has been a tendency in parliamentary democracies of every stripe to have four pillars of a parliamentary democracy: government, the judiciary, the media and the church. As our democracies have evolved, we have not pushed those four pillars together. We have normally moved them apart. Just like a table is more stable the further apart its legs are than the closer together its legs are, so too is our democracy. I have some problems in pushing together government and the church, especially as regards faith-based education.

I'll say this as a Roman Catholic: When I went to school—and I didn't go to elementary school in Ontario; I went in Quebec—an education was an education. It didn't matter whether you got it in a classroom that had a cross in it or in a classroom that didn't; it didn't matter

whether you got it in a public school or a Catholic school. It was your education. That's something that public education offers: It offers a shared experience.

This is not a bill; this is a resolution. This is a good time for the opposite views in the spectrum to be heard. It's not a judgment on faith-based education, as I thought I heard my colleague from Oak Ridges assert, but it is an opportunity to affirm our belief in public education. It's fine to be passionate. In fact, this is the place to be passionate. After having been sent here by the men and the women who vote in your riding, if you can't come in here and be passionate, then where can you? But to me, "passion" means "be hard on the issue but go easy on the people." There is no particular reason to cast aspersions on the motives or the integrity of the member from Mississauga East any more than on the very articulate people who spoke against him. They're skilled people, they're good legislators and, if I may say, across the party barriers, in many cases, they are also our friends.

1100

To conclude, Ontario was the first place in the whole world to make public education not merely universal but compulsory. What happens, then, if Ontario should change its mind about that? Would it indeed, as my predecessor once observed, create a crisis? What happens when students begin to leave the education system? We've seen the opposite as the education system has gotten better. People have voted with their feet. In Mississauga, where I'm from, we've seen places—and I'm just going use one example because my time is running out: Cawthra Park and Oscar Peterson. Excellent music programs; people have gravitated to them. Public education and its value has spoken for itself.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Mississauga East, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Fonseca: I'd like to thank all my colleagues in this House who have spoken to this resolution: the members for Oak Ridges, Trinity–Spadina, Guelph–Wellington, Erie–Lincoln, Davenport and Mississauga West.

This resolution is about our commitment to continuing along the path we are going with increased funding to public education. We've seen 28% in increased funding—\$18.3 billion; the fixing of our schools' infrastructure, with new boilers, roofs, windows—a \$1-billion investment has been put into that; and approximately 100 new schools on top of the 200 we had already opened over the last three and a half years.

We cannot afford to take \$500 million out of our system. What would it cost? Seven million per school board. That works out to \$100,000 less per school, \$4,190 less per teacher, and \$263 less per student. That means that what we've done in terms of bringing down class sizes in grade 3—93% of our schools now have 23 or fewer students. That means better learning, more attention, better test scores and higher graduation rates. This is where we want to go.

We can't afford, as the Conservative Party and Mr. Tory would like, to bring forward this cut to the public school system. It would cost us 7,600 new support staff.

We cannot afford this. We cannot afford to go back to lost school days, to underfunding, to an undermining of our public education system.

PROTECTION OF MINORS
IN AMATEUR SPORTS ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007
SUR LA PROTECTION DES MINEURS
PARTICIPANT À DES SPORTS AMATEURS

Mr. Ouellette moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 201, An Act to provide protection for minors participating in amateur sports / Projet de loi 201, Loi visant à protéger les mineurs qui participent à des sports amateurs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Ouellette, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I start, I'd just say so long Staucha, old friend.

I'll give a bit of background. At the start, I must emphasize the fact that there are thousands or tens of thousands of coaches and volunteers participating in activities, and they do a fantastic job. They do it because they have a passion for it and they really contribute to our community. But once in a while some things slip through the cracks, and that's what we're going to try to address here today.

I worked with Hockey Canada and they did a great job, as well as the Ontario Minor Hockey Association. I think I should start right from the beginning of what took place. For those who don't know, I coach kids' hockey and I've been doing it for seven, eight years. As a requirement for that, the hockey league, as a result of what took place with Sheldon Kennedy—all coaches, managers and trainers have a criminal investigation report, or as the police call it, a vulnerable persons check. And I didn't have a problem with that. The cost is about \$10 for a volunteer and \$20 for a paid individual at the local police department.

About two and a half years ago, an individual at the rink came to me and he said, "You see that individual out there reffing?" I said, "Yes." He said, "That person shouldn't be out there with kids." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, "I can't tell you, Mr. Ouellette, because of my job, but I have to let you know that that individual, in no way, shape or form, should be with kids and associated at all."

So I did a background check and found out that this particular referee had multiple sex convictions, as was explained to me. Then I started doing some research and found out that referees or officials did not require vulnerable persons checks in order to be out there.

Now, as a coach, I instill respect for referees. Refs don't have direct contact with kids off the ice. However, if one of those refs said to one of the kids on my team, "I

need to talk to you before this game"—and the way the arenas are set up, sometimes there are opportunities for that sort of thing—that kid would have went with that ref. Not only that, but most people don't realize that refs in hockey can start at the age of 14. So a 14-year-old could be in an enclosed change room with this particular sex offender, unbeknown to that 14-year-old.

So we started doing checks and found out, as I stated, that there was no requirement for refs. I dealt with Hockey Canada and the Ontario Minor Hockey Association and they did a great job on this. Hockey Canada explained to me that there are about 12 to 15 various hockey organizations in the province of Ontario. So we checked and the Ontario Minor Hockey Association saw the need, understood it and implemented a policy last fall to do this, so that vulnerable persons checks or criminal investigation reports were submitted by refs.

The difficulty was that when we started checking with the other leagues, we found that there was no consistency throughout the province. Some leagues responded to us and others did not, and we found out that some required coaches, managers, trainers and refs to have checks and some did not. So then I started dealing with them to see what we could do about moving it forward.

I then approached the great workers in the research department here at Queen's Park and discussed bringing a bill forward. At that time, they asked me, "Well, do you want to limit it to hockey or not?" I said, "Let's take a look and see." So through the research department, we contacted Baseball Ontario, Team Ontario Baseball, Basketball Ontario, Ontario Tackle Football, Touch Football Ontario, Alliance Hockey, the Greater Toronto Hockey League, Hockey Northwestern Ontario, Northern Ontario Hockey Association, Ontario Hockey Association, Ontario Hockey Federation, Ontario Hockey League, Ontario Minor Hockey Association, Ontario Women's Hockey Association, Ottawa District Hockey Association, Ontario Lacrosse, Ontario Ringette Association, Ontario Rugby Union, Ontario Soccer Association, Ontario Amateur Softball Association and Softball Ontario. The result was that for those who contacted us back, there was inconsistency in policy. Some of these associations required coaches, managers, trainers and officials to have vulnerable persons checks and some did not.

From that, we decided that, quite possibly in the best interests of all kids in the province of Ontario, and having had that exposed to me—as I came in here, I spoke to one of the officials here at Queen's Park who happens to be a referee as well, and he started to explain about a situation that he came across as well. When you start hearing these stories coming out, you find that there has to be some consistency throughout the province.

So we approached the legal department here at Queen's Park and we incorporated all those blanket policies, or the ones that were implementing a policy. What I mean by that is that some groups—with the Ontario Minor Hockey Association, I have to get a vulnerable persons or a criminal investigation report on an

annual basis. Some of the other ones have it done every four years. We've included that so that these associations that have a policy that says, "You only have to have one every four years"—to see that that continues on. Except for a new individual entering the process, they have to have it, and there are some timelines and guidelines for this check.

The question is, what happens or what takes place as a result of this? I had some questions from the press on this yesterday: "How does it work? What takes place?" Effectively, what happens is, a person says, "I want to coach, train, manage, referee in this particular organization." They are then instructed to get a criminal investigation report or a vulnerable persons check from the police department. They go down to the police department—in the case of the region of Durham, it's \$10 for a volunteer and \$20 for an individual who's paid—and the police would then do a criminal investigation report, mail it back to you, and you would take that to the league. The league executive reviews it and says yea or nay.

What we're doing here is—we're not going to catch all the individuals, only the ones who have been caught. But what happens is, we send a strong message to those individuals out there who are looking, who are watching, who are doing stuff with kids, like this particular individual who was on the ice at that time, and say, "We're watching you. We're going to keep an eye on you."

Since then, we've received information from a number of different organizations, such as the Ontario sport organization council. It's a provincial body that deals with sport. They've contacted us in full support, and I'd be happy to provide any of the information. But they said it doesn't go far enough. They asked about other vulnerable individuals, such as disabled individuals or seniors as well?" Our response was that we needed to start somewhere. I saw the immediate need with the research I had done on policies for everyone under the age of 18, so that it takes into consideration all the kids. And, yes, we can look at that, but once we implement this policy, quite possibly some other things like that may come into play. Not only that, but other organizations such as the directors of Basketball Ontario requested that Volunteer Canada's Safe Steps screening program become a mandate of the organization. This will require that a police records check take place of all the officials in Basketball Ontario. So there are a number of organizations that are seeing this need and working towards it.

1110

Other areas of concern are the cost and the fact that some people say that some volunteers may not be willing to participate because of this extra burden. Yes, there was an initial response when I was first asked to get this background, but quite frankly, afterwards, when you see your kids out there, aged five, six, seven, eight—and my kids; Garrett is 10 and Josh is 11 now—I don't see how we cannot do due diligence to make sure that these individuals are not participating in those sports.

As I mentioned earlier, there are a lot of other sports out there, such as hockey, where you can start to ref at

14—and soccer and some of the other ones out there. There is an exemption in there, because according to the Young Offenders Act they can't provide information for anybody up to the age of 18, which is acceptable. Some people say, "Well, it doesn't get everybody because of that aspect." No, you have to start somewhere, and we have to look at the best interests of all the kids in Ontario.

We certainly hope that this sends a strong message to those associations to look at getting a policy in place. We are receiving support from a number of organizations that have come forward and said yes. But quite frankly, a lot of people out there are saying, "You mean it's not happening already?" They didn't know that these checks weren't in place. Some people are saying, "How does it work for a house league? We are there in a house league. Rep hockey I can understand, or soccer or any of the rep sports, because they're travelling all over, but in a house league?" Well, I have to tell you, once in a while we are rushing to events, we're doing things, we're dropping kids off and leaving them in the trust of the soccer coach during the soccer game, and of the other parents who are there, in the same fashion that other parents do it with us, and it works quite well. Not only that, but a lot of times it's the same individuals who coach hockey, who coach lacrosse, who coach soccer. The one check would be applicable to those. All they would need to do would be to say, "This is how many copies of this I would need for each of these various locations." And the police provide that on a regular basis, so a one-time fee. The cost—a lot of the times in a house league, when I was with the house league team, the park actually covered the cost, and when I coached rep hockey, it was the team that covered the cost. So the cost was not an overbearing issue.

I am hoping that the House would look at this and send it to committee so that we can have these organizations come forward, because I believe this is a strong step forward in protecting a lot of the kids in the province. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's a privilege to speak to this bill. I am in support, and so is the New Democratic Party. Anything that makes Ontario safer for our children is something that we should all be supporting, and I hope that we all will this morning.

It certainly is apropos that we have children present, because we're talking about their futures and their safety. And it's certainly apropos that our pages, who are also young people, are listening to this debate. It's an important one.

I hope to speak about many ways in which we could make Ontario a much safer province for all of our children. I welcome the member from Oshawa's comments, his experience. This tightens up a loophole—wonderful work. I am happy and would urge that this go to committee.

There are just a few little flags I want to note before I go on to talk about children's safety generally, and they come from charitable organizations that already have this in place. In particular, in my own experience with it as a

pastor in a church, and as many people who work in church work and synagogues and other places will know, most of us have policies in place and require that anybody who works with children, who teaches Sunday school etc., has a police check done on them, and done at regular intervals. The problem sometimes is that, for example, in my own church, where maybe a quarter of the congregation has taught Sunday school at some point or other, this becomes an onerous cost. And most of these organizations, I know, bear that cost. So that would be one of the caveats I would like to see addressed, how we mitigate that cost that can become onerous to organizations trying to do the right thing. I know it's not particular to this event. With this bill, we're not talking about that many people who will be covered by this, and it shouldn't make that much of a difference. But I know, in living and working with the system that's already in place for many organizations, that's something that they've come across.

I'm quoting here from CharityVillage NewsWeek at charityvillage.com, a quote that I think points to the broader issue: "Roy Bergerman agrees that criminal record checks are only a part of the education and screening process. 'It's not the ones that have criminal records for abusing kids that we are worried about because they are not likely to apply. It's the ones that we don't know about, or who don't have criminal records, that we have to protect the kids from.'" And that's what I'm going to be talking about.

Before I leave that particular topic of volunteer organizations, though, and the protection of children, I do want to say that there was a recent news article, on March 13 of this year. Durham raised their fee to \$20. Again, we need some sensitivity around how much these police checks cost and who's going to bear the brunt of it. Certainly many organizations have said it is a bit of a deterrent for low-income earners to go out and get those, if they're required to do so, and it can be a deterrent for organizations. So if this bill goes to committee—and I hope it does—please look at that issue.

Onward in terms of the broader issue of safety for children in this province: There was a recent study done by children's aid societies, and they asked people across Ontario—it was a fairly large sample—how many people would report child abuse if they knew about it going on, and 87% of them said that they knew it was their duty to report child abuse. So I hope anybody listening to or watching this knows that, that it is the duty of every adult and, for that matter, every young person to report child abuse if they know that it is occurring.

The problem came in how many said they actually would report the abuse, and then that figure dramatically declined to just over 50%. The reasons given for not reporting it were that often they knew the person who was the perpetrator, and they wouldn't report on someone they knew. There were also genuine concerns for the children, who often were dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. That was another concern. And, finally, they didn't know who to report to. They didn't know

where they should go with this information, who to call with this information, who would do something about it, or what the ramifications would be on them. Many of them did not know that you can do this anonymously. So that's really important information, and important information that we need to put out there.

It was interesting. One of the things I did in researching this was that I went on a website and I said, "I am being abused," just typed it in, thinking, "What would a child do if they were being abused and they wanted to reach out for help?" Interestingly enough, BC came up, a wonderful website—bang. Kids Help Line came up; kudos to them. That was it. And then there was tons and tons of information that a child would never be able to get through. There was no immediate help available on the Net, and we know that most of our children are now Net-savvy.

The other problem is that of course most of the abuse that is perpetrated upon our children is done by somebody they know, and know well. That's the problem. Of 8,800 charges in the 2002 study that was the most extensive I could find, a third of them involved family members, direct family members. Only 29% of those attacks upon children were non-relatives or were not close family friends; 81% of them were upon young girls. And I know that as an adult woman, when you start talking to your other women friends, the incidence of abuse, of course, is usually twice as high as that which is reported and twice as high as that which is prosecuted. So we're talking about a huge number of abuse cases across this province and across this country. This is a shame.

Again, how do we keep the children of Ontario safer? That's what we're all concerned with here. One might suggest that a way of doing this is to make the reporting easier. Those front-line early warning detection people like parents, teachers, other parents, other children—we have to inform them much, much better than we are doing now as to what to do when this is happening, and give them easy access to those systems and people who will be able to help them. So, again, just to call out, because there is a huge problem and we are not addressing it in this province.

How do we want to make Ontario safer for children? An even bigger problem. Campaign 2000, a wonderful organization formed in 1987—all the federal political parties signed on to it. They wanted to make child poverty history by the year 2000. All of the political parties signed that agreement. This is now a black mark upon us all.

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There is no doubt, because here we are in the year 2007 and child poverty in this province is worse than ever: One in six of our children are poor; 15% to 17% of people in the province of Ontario are poor; 38% of those children who are poor come from working families. We know that poverty is one of the red flags when it comes to all sorts of other problems that plague children's lives. If we have children who are using food banks and their parents are using food banks, these are vulnerable

children in precarious situations. That is the situation in this province.

We are overlooking a way of making Ontario safer for children in not dealing with child poverty, not having a structure to deal with child poverty. We have not ended the clawback of the national child supplement. This would give those who are on social assistance—many of them single women, many of them working single women with children—an extra \$122 a month immediately. We haven't done that. In fact, the \$250 that they got in this Liberal budget isn't enough to pay for the Minister of Finance's shoes as he stood up and announced it. They cost \$256. I love that little factoid: \$250 for the poorest children, \$256 for the Minister of Finance's shoes.

We don't have housing for our families. We have 122,000 households waiting for affordable housing. This makes life precarious for our poorest children. There is a way of making Ontario safer for children: actually building the housing that was promised in 2003. We have a resolution: Build the 20,000 units of affordable housing. Have we? No, not even close. Even by their own estimates, not even a third of that number.

Of course—my favourite—we could raise the minimum wage now to \$10 an hour, not three years from now, because that's the low-income cut-off. Below that, you are poor. So if we actually paid a living wage to those who work, then maybe their children wouldn't be left with strangers, wouldn't be left in precarious situations, wouldn't be at risk as much as they are now when we are not paying a living wage.

Talking about child care, there's something we could do to make this province safer for children. The \$25 million that was announced for child care is actually a quarter of what this government gets from the federal government for child care. It's certainly way, way less than the \$300 million that was promised in 2003. If we had good child care, our children would be safer. As I visit homes in my riding, I visit apartments where two families are living in one bedroom, where one mother will take all the children in from a number of different apartments and the child care consists of sitting and watching the television all day. That's all the parents can afford. These are children at risk—and there are thousands of them across this province. We are at fault—all of us—in not making sure that that happens.

I call upon this government to do the right thing: to make Ontario safer for children by addressing that very real risk factor in this province which is child poverty.

Early warning systems—teachers. Where do we first see children at risk? Well, right now there's a wonderful system of detecting children at risk early, that is, before they start into the regular school system. Those are called, in my riding and in others, the parenting and family literacy programs that are part of our school system now.

These are open to families with children, new immigrants, others. Many, many poor families use these centres. They're wonderful. During literacy week, I had

the marvellous opportunity to go and visit and read to the children in all of the centres. I want to mention the ones that are in my riding. There is one at Indian Road Crescent Junior Public School, there's one at Queen Victoria Public School and there's one at Parkdale Junior Public School as well. All of these parenting and family literacy programs are at risk under this present government.

What do they cost? They cost one salary—\$35,000 a year—for each centre, and a free room provided by the school. They are such a little part of the budget and yet they are all at risk. I have delivered a stack of letters from people who take part in parenting and family literacy programs to the Minister of Education. I don't believe she's answered one of them yet. These are threatened with closure by the end of this year unless some funding comes their way. So there's an early warning detection system for abusive situations that we are about to lose. Every teacher will tell you this—anybody who has been in the educational system will tell you—that they're often the first ones who are privy to the knowledge of abuse happening in the home. We're taking this valuable resource away.

You heard in the prior debate a great deal of talk about funding the public school system, and of course that's part of it. We need enough teachers and educational assistants, enough people, to be able to get to know the children in the public school system so that they might know what's going on in their lives in a real, real way.

Just to recap, do I support Bill 201 and the member from Oshawa? Absolutely. I'd support—and so would we in the New Democratic Party—anything that makes this a safer province for our children. I know there are limitations upon what you can do with this, but it still needs to be done. It still needs to go to committee. We can make it stronger and tougher in committee, and we should do that. Then we should do so much more. We should have a system, a simple system, for children to access on the Internet. Might I even suggest to the government, famous for their websites, that they do a good website where children, if they're being abused, could immediately find help on the website? If someone was looking to help a child being abused, they could immediately find help there. An early warning system like that would help.

Keeping our parent and family literacy programs open so that children have access to the educational system and their parents and friends of their parents have access there, at the earliest stages; and child care: if we had a publicly funded child care system so that parents didn't have to leave their children in precarious situations—parents who don't have the money to find better child care and who have to work. These are the children most at risk—poor children. They are children at risk, indeed, across the province. We could also provide families across the province who live in poverty, and therefore their children live at higher risk, with a decent income, a minimum wage that they could sustain themselves on and pay the rent and feed themselves on. We could build the

housing units that these children need, which were promised in 2003 but never delivered. We could end the clawback of the national child supplement; \$122 dollars a month to the poorest children—it goes directly to the children in this province—is being clawed back by this government, and it hasn't ended with this budget, much to the ballyhoo to the contrary. That's something we could do to help our poorest children.

We could have an anti-poverty strategy in this province, just like Ireland does and many other jurisdictions, to combat poverty once and for all. I'm happy to support this bill. I would be happy if our children across Ontario were not at risk, but I fear that under the current administration they are very much so. This bill, although a small step, goes at least a small step in the direction of making them safer.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I'm going to do something a little different, and I beg your indulgence on this. I want to talk directly as our young kids are leaving. Guys, I want you to make sure at all times that nobody touches you improperly. You know this. You've been taught this. Do not allow anyone to say anything or do anything to you that you know you're not supposed to have happen to you. You are the people we are talking about today. I want to thank all of you for coming. I also want to thank the teachers, the sports coaches, the referees and the people who take care of our young people. The very vast majority of them love you very much, but there are some who do not. There are some who are called "predators." These predators are really tricky people. They're sick. They do tricks to you. They try to convince you that it's okay to do things; it's not. So I'm going to ask you to remember those wonderful people who are surrounding you with love: your parents, your family members, the coaches, those people who take care of you. They are trying to teach you ways to keep yourselves safe.

That's what we're talking about today, that bill. This wonderful bill that's being presented to us today in private members' time is to make it even better; it's to try to improve it even more to keep you safe and secure. But you are the front line. You're the ones who can tell these predators, "No." Remember that. Thanks very much for being here, guys. Take care of yourselves, okay?

1130

Mr. Ouellette, I want to thank you very much for bringing this bill forward. It's the right thing to do, it's appropriate, and so I support your bill. I think it's a great bill. It talks to us about exactly what you've had to experience as a coach and what I have experienced as a coach over 25 years in various sports. The unfortunate issue is that we're talking about predators. That's whom we're talking about, very specifically.

It's unfortunate that one of the members here has decided to say that the glass is empty instead of half full, at least. Let's make it three quarters full together. Let's work together on making sure our kids are safe. That is what we're dedicated to do. That's what our challenge is.

What do you want to do in this bill? You want to do in this bill a very simple step, and I think you would

acknowledge that it is a simple step, but we need to engage this into our community. We need to entrench this into a normal practice. The normal practice is to ensure that those people who are charged with taking care of our children, and the good ones—the good ones, and I know you will agree with this, will welcome the checks. They welcome the ways. But do you know what else happens? It's the trickery. It's the knowledge base that we have about how these predators operate. They're very, very crafty. They're sneaky, they're devious and they're wicked. Unfortunately, they're still infiltrating our system.

I compliment the member for taking the steps to do exactly what I know he's asking us to do: to consider the next steps of how we lock the door on these evil people. The things that they do are evil, and we need to make sure that we send that message loud and clear. We're coming to get you, we're closing the door, we're locking it and we're throwing away the key, because we don't want our children subjected to the things you want to subject them to.

So the message should go out loud and clear, and I want to compliment all of the organizations that have from time immemorial—and I have been involved in coaching for 25 years and a little bit longer than that, actually, that those steps are engaged in as often as is possible.

I do agree with the member when he talks to us about—you know what? Most of the organizations will pick up the tab on that. They don't want to put the extra burden of cost onto the individual. Of the organizations that I have been involved with, they've all picked up the tab. I think it has escalated a little bit. If I'm not mistaken, the average cost is somewhere around \$20 to \$25. In some areas it's a little bit more, but it's between \$10 and \$25. If it has to come to this, yup, you have to pay it out of your pocket, because I want those kids safe. But on the good side to this, most of the organizations pick that up.

I want to compliment the member for bringing this subject forward. I personally think, because it is private members' time and it's not time to take a whack at anybody other than to say, "Is this a good bill or a bad bill?" that this a tremendous bill and I thank the member for bringing it forward. I thank him for his dedication in coaching and to the many people in this House who dedicate themselves to coaching and working with young kids too.

Quite frankly, our First Nations people say is very brilliantly: seven generations. We're working towards presenting our future for seven generations, and what we do today is the signal to whom we talk about seven generations from now. We want to know that the people in this room supported that bill, and we want to know that the progressive thinking that's happening in this House during private members' time, particularly with this bill, is taking place.

I compliment the member and I will be supporting him 100%. Thank you very much for bringing the bill forward.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline (Burlington): I want to thank my seatmate and member for Oshawa for bringing this forward, and also thank the previous two speakers for their support on this bill.

This is such an important issue. It's one that seems to have slipped by some very clever people who are conscientious in their community and people who are aware of the need to protect children. Yet I think it's something we all took for granted and thought it was happening anyway. As a parent, and I would like to say as Mrs. Coach for many years, probably 25 years, I too thought that anybody coming in contact with our children was screened. I didn't realize that the screening happened at different levels and that different organizations and municipalities did their screening in different ways.

I think this is a breath of fresh air, that it's come forward, and that we have the opportunity to make something right, something even safer for our children. There is no guarantee in life on anything. But when we're faced with the ability and the opportunity to make something better, it is our obligation and—in fact, I think the member from Parkdale–High Park used the words—our duty to do so. That's what we can do with this bill.

As many risks as we can reduce for our children, we add to the success of their future. Growing up is an increasingly difficult thing to do today. Young people are faced with more violence, young people are faced with more isolation, and it is an environment that presents many challenges. Sometimes our children react in a way that they gravitate towards actions that look like acceptance. With this bill going forward, it removes yet one more way in which kids at risk feel they can be accepted by a predator.

Our children naturally look to adults as their role models, especially adults who have authoritative positions. They place a lot of trust in them, and it's blind trust. They really think that because there is a coach or there is a referee, that is the person they look up to: teachers, doctors, parents. Whatever we can do to ensure that that trust is well placed is what we must do. We must ensure that all adults who come in contact with children through sports organizations, through any organizations, are screened in a way that reduces the risk and takes away the opportunity for these kids to be hurt.

We thought we had it covered, but obviously we didn't. Our residents look to us to ensure public safety in every way, and especially for one of the most vulnerable segments of our population, a segment that, as I said, blindly trusts us on a daily basis. We are nurturers of our children. We look after our children. We provide for the success, the happiness and the health in their future. This bill is a logical progression of what exists today. What it will also do is create some predictability and evening out of the playing field across all organizations.

A tightening up of the screening that already takes place is something that is a wise thing to do. We shouldn't just accept that what happened 10 years and 20 years ago is still relevant today. The bill moves towards filling in the gaps that exist in screening across these

various organizations. Given that there is no financial consequence to the organizations, there are opportunities for corporations to want to sponsor programs like this, to say that XYZ corporation sponsors the screening program for the baseball organizations in a particular community. I think that's something that could catch on very quickly.

We have an opportunity today to safeguard yet further our children and help them understand that they have a responsibility in the future to safeguard future generations. We ought to accept our duty, our obligation and our responsibility. We have the authority to do it and we should move forward.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It is indeed a pleasure to stand up and support my friend from Oshawa on this important bill that he brought forward. I could make my speech really short by saying "ditto" to all the non-partisan comments that were made in this House. Some of the stuff is going to be repetitious, but that's not a bad thing, because the more we talk about it, the more we instill what we believe in.

First of all, I think it's an opportune time to congratulate and thank not only the member from Oshawa but all his coaching friends across this province, across this country, and when I say "coach," I mean all those folks involved in minor sports, whether it be a trainer, a referee, a volunteer, or a fundraiser who gives a lot of their time. For a number of years, my wife and I lived in an arena; I thought that was our home. I coached maybe not as long as my friend from Oshawa—I think it was four or five years—but I helped out driving kids to hockey games and to soccer. So that sometimes becomes not our second home but our first home. And I must say, I enjoyed every minute of it and I kind of miss it, but I'm picking it up with my grandkids. I have three grandkids—well, I have seven grandkids, but three are of the age when they start playing sports, and it brings back some great memories.

1140

Back to the bill: I too wonder what the other 37 Parliaments before of us did. Why didn't one of them realize that this wasn't the law in the province of Ontario? I'm sure they cared about kids as much as we do, but it just makes you wonder how these things fall through the cracks.

I heard this morning some comments that this creates a cost. Well, if I was involved—and I know many people are involved in minor sports. If we have nothing to hide, what's 10, 20 bucks? What is \$10 or \$20 in today's world? If you've got nothing to hide, let's make sure that the people we want to help become better citizens are protected.

I come from a small community, and we know most of the people, so that's the other argument: "Do we suspect somebody?" I mean, we know. Our families grew for years in those communities, at least in small, rural communities. But I too must confess that sometimes, while sitting in one of those arenas or on the sidelines of a soccer field or waiting for the kids to go up to bat, some-

body will whisper in my ear, "Did you hear that so and so might be?" I'm sure it's just a rumour, but it instills that thought in your mind so that when you go home, whether it's your kids or the kids you are coaching, the next time you're on that playing field or that arena, you stare at that person. Wouldn't it be nice if we didn't have to worry about that? Even if they are squeaky clean, it's just the thought, and then if a rumour spreads within your hockey team or your soccer team, it's even worse.

So, yes, it is a small step, but I'm not sure that—how can I put it? Every needle in the haystack makes a difference. It doesn't matter how small it is. Even the fact that a person who could be a predator has the knowledge that we're watching—it's just like when I drive down the highway every day and I know there's a police cruiser down the road: I look at my speedometer. It's not that I'm speeding, but I look at my speedometer. So just knowing the fact that there is a law, there is a rule, there is somebody watching—I think that in itself plays a big role.

When the time comes today, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to tell you that as a parent, a grandparent, and someone who's been involved with kids all my life, we need to act on anything that protects vulnerable kids, so I'll be more than happy to support this bill.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I want to say that I support this wholeheartedly. Mr. Ouellette, the member for Oshawa, brings forward a private member's bill that looks to protect our most vulnerable: our kids. We must make sure that they are in safe environments, that they are protected.

Having been involved in sport all my life, as a participant, as a coach—and actually being married to a coach; my wife is the head coach of the Oakville Aquatic Club and the president of the Canadian Swimming Coaches Association—I find myself immersed in sport. I always think about sport as a great place. Sport and recreation is a place where kids, young adults come to play, come to learn, come to participate, and they do come in a very open sense. They see it as a non-threatening environment—an environment where they are passionate about something, enjoy something, the camaraderie with their friends.

When we discuss coaches, trainers, people who are around our kids, those relationships can be very close. I know I've had very close relationships with all my coaches, trainers, helpers, volunteers, judges etc. who are involved in sport. You have two individuals who are very passionate about what they're doing when we look at hockey or swimming or track. In sport, there's often very close contact. You look at gymnastics: A trainer, a coach, has to be right there with their athletes. They have to be observing for many reasons—to make them better, for improvements—but they also have to be there for the safety aspect when they're doing particular moves or flips or whatever it may be. We want to make sure that those people who are there working with our kids, who are giving so much of their time—we also have to commend the coaches, the trainers, the volunteers, everybody

who gives up hundreds of hours of their time to the betterment of our communities and those kids.

At the same time, Mr. Ouellette, the member for Oshawa, brings up a private member's bill that addresses a hole that we have in our system, where we have to do background checks, we have to do criminal checks. I know in my wife's club, within their policies and procedures, they do checks on all their volunteers. Everybody who works with the kids has to go through a check.

I did speak to the provincial sport organization body. They did bring forward some of their comments and said that they are in support of this bill, but they would like to see it furthered, even bettered.

I'll talk about the criminal checks. The criminal record checks often do not provide an accurate assessment of someone's suitability or provide a complete criminal history, and that's what we want: a complete criminal history. They bring about that a criminal record check from the local police detachment may only capture criminal convictions within that particular jurisdiction. If a person moves from town to town—and we know these predators are very savvy—they would leave a trail of convictions that may not be disclosed. We have to make sure that we close that hole also, I say to Mr. Ouellette.

Bill 201 also does not require a criminal record check that includes the CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre, a check that would capture all criminal convictions cross the country. I think this would be very important because we do hear about cases where somebody has been hurt by another in a sport or recreational setting and it is somebody who has moved from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Also, criminal record checks do not capture dropped charges, investigations of criminal behaviour or other such areas that are captured by vulnerable sector checks.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm pleased to join in the debate with respect to Bill 201, An Act to provide protection for minors participating in amateur sports, from my colleague from Oshawa.

This past year I was involved in my son's hockey in the Barrie Minor Hockey Association and was a goalie coach. We were required to obtain not only the licensing you require and certificates from the Ontario Minor Hockey Association, but there are information sessions with respect to a code of conduct for that organization, and also the mandatory police record check, for which the individual pays. So in the Barrie Minor Hockey Association, they certainly have a policy of ensuring that background checks are conducted, and I have first-hand experience of that.

1150

I want to talk about the bill because I'm just looking at it from a legal point of view, and I think this might be instructive to my friend in terms of what my thoughts are. I think it's more of maybe a philosophical point of view, in terms of when I think these things should be done, as opposed to anything else.

First of all, looking at section 2 of the act, which is a punishable offence under this legislation, and section 2 is under "Obligations; requirement for criminal record

check.” The requirement for that criminal record check has a time frame that my colleague has put out.

First of all, 2(1)(a) says, “no earlier than four years before the day on which the program begins and no later than the day on which the program begins,” the organization “has requested in writing a copy of the criminal record” check. So there’s a request in writing.

Then you go to (b). It says, “no earlier than four years before the day on which the program begins and no later than 90 days after the day on which the program begins, has obtained....”

I guess my issue on that is a matter of drafting and also timing. I would think that in terms of protecting young children—my son was eight when he played last year, and there are younger kids who get involved in organized sports; they get started in the Barrie area as young as four—you would require that that police record check be done, in terms of a request form, and obtained before that program begins. That would be my suggestion in terms of making sure that this is done and making sure, before any person gets involved in that program, that they’ve done their police record check.

It’s not a very difficult process. You go down to the police station in Barrie, you fill out the form, you give them the money and it’s done fairly expeditiously because they know it’s a serious issue. They know that it needs to be done for the sports program to function smoothly and make sure that all the parents are comfortable with whoever’s chosen to be on the coaching staff of that organization.

Certainly, there are stringent rules within the Barrie Minor Hockey Association in terms of access and dealing with a child. It’s frowned upon and prohibited for you to be alone with a child without there being another witness, whether they’re in the dressing room or outside of the rink or whatever, in terms of if it’s involved in the activity of that club. So, those types of restrictions are important—not only that there’s a witness there but, as everybody knows, a policy is fantastic, but if it’s not followed, then it’s a problem.

That’s another aspect of the bill that I want to deal with, because I think my friend is being fairly generous in terms of his requirement for this test to be done. That’s under section 3, which again is a punishable offence. Section 3 is “Frequency for criminal record checks.” What has been put under subsection 3(1) is that the organizer may participate at least every four years in this process. But my friend goes on to say that in subsection (2) they can request a copy of a criminal record check more frequently.

I would think that I would be looking to change that, to require that this is done annually—whenever you’re going to get people involved in the program and they want to be involved in the program, that record checks are done annually. I don’t think it’s satisfactory to say that you can do it every four years. Responsible organizations would see that it should be done. We’re putting out prescriptive law here with respect to the frequency, and I think it should be tightened. I think it should be much tighter. I think it should be done annually. I think if

you want to be involved, then you get your police record check done, because things happen. I think it’s important.

There’s one gap here in the bill which has not been addressed: What happens if you go get your police record check done and you pass it and you get charged after that during the year and you get convicted? How does that reconcile with respect to what you’re trying to accomplish here? Or if an individual is charged after the fact and convicted, and maybe just minimally charged, how do we deal with that? Obviously, that circumstance has changed. I don’t know how organizations deal with that. I know my friend Jerry Ouellette is very knowledgeable in this area. What is the policy? How do you deal with an individual who has been criminally charged and convicted during the time that they are in the process of coaching your children? There must be a policy in place. Maybe that’s something we should be looking at too, because this gives you the clean slate, saying, “Okay, you can go forward.” What happens if, during the time that you are in that program, something happens to you in terms of your criminal record?

The other part that I wanted to point out, because I think my friend is being a little bit too nice in this particular area, is section 9, “Offences.” Under subsection 9(2), it says that you commit an offence under sections 2 or 3 or subsection 6(6) of the act if you knowingly refrain from getting that record check. That imputes knowledge, and I think the standard should be higher because we’re dealing with our children here. Negligence may not be an appropriate standard, because organizations get all kinds of information in and someone might have missed something. But to impute knowledge where the organization should be organized and able to do this, allows them to be sloppy, in my view. Gross negligence might be too high a standard also. There has to be some kind of level of standard for conviction where the organization knows that they have to do their job and that if they have a system in place and they do their job, they can be able to say, “Listen, we did everything that we possibly could to make sure. We did the record check. We had the systems in place. Don’t look at us as an organization.” You may be able to point your finger at an individual and say, “that individual.” That may be the test for an individual in terms of their knowledge, but for an organization—it’s a big organization. My friend may want to look at the Occupational Health and Safety Act, where they have language in there in terms of what constitutes an offence, where the defence of due diligence is available for an organization to defend themselves. In other words, if it happens that the record check wasn’t done, then that’s what we call the actus reus; they’ve done the act. That’s the first test in what the crown would have to prove that the act occurred. But the defence would be not pure mens rea, which is knowledge. It would be something lesser in terms of the defence of due diligence in saying, “Listen, we did what we had to do, and this is our defence to the fact that we didn’t get that record check done.”

I look forward to this bill going to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Ouellette, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ouellette: I want to thank the members for Parkdale–High Park, Brant, Burlington, Northumberland, Mississauga East and Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford for their comments. I think I'll start at the last speaker and see what time I have.

This morning I was volunteering at the kiss-and-ride at the school. Last night, before the volunteer awards night, I was at the rink with my son in hockey. The member for Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford brought up a couple of issues about the 90-day aspect and the delayed period of time. The reason for that was because I found that last year at the Durham Regional Police Service, there was about a 60-day time frame where they couldn't get the information back to somebody, so we allowed a small grace period in there so that somebody applying—and for those teams that try out in the spring for the fall, it's okay, but for those kids who come out in the fall and they need coaches right away, they needed a bit of a grace period, so that's why we put in that time frame to make it allowable.

The reason we went every four years was because there were some organizations that had a policy in place. The Northern Ontario Junior Hockey League had a policy in place already where every four years—and it was working quite effectively. That's why I allowed for that. In some organizations—yes, the one I'm involved with—it's on an annual basis, but there are some in place already.

The member from Mississauga East spoke about the CPIC check. I dealt with the police—my father was the chief of police. I was under the impression that when they do that check, they run it through CPIC, and that's why I took the 60 days in the region of Durham to get all that information. If it's not, that's one of the inconsistencies that needs to be worked out.

The member from Parkdale–High Park spoke about the cost and, yes, there is a cost in there. However, as the member from Brant mentioned, a lot of the leagues in all of those areas were willing to pick up the cost. Those same checks could apply—because it's a lot of the same people doing hockey, soccer, lacrosse, baseball—and they could be used; they just ask for various copies.

I thank all the members for their comments today.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

EDUCATION FUNDING

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall deal first with ballot item number 2, standing in the name of Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Fonseca has moved private member's notice of motion number 58. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it. The motion is lost.

Interjections.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): You guys haven't learned the rules yet?

The Deputy Speaker: Just by way of explanation, you don't just half stand and look around at each other; you stand if you want a division.

PROTECTION OF MINORS IN AMATEUR SPORTS ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LA PROTECTION DES MINEURS PARTICIPANT À DES SPORTS AMATEURS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 3, standing in the name of Mr. Ouellette.

Mr. Ouellette has moved second reading of Bill 201. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I would ask that this bill be referred to the standing committee on social policy.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall the bill be referred to the standing committee on social policy? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business now having been dealt with, I do leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1202 to 1330.

WEARING OF PINS

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek the consent of the House for the members, in recognition of the injured workers' day of mourning, to wear the pin signifying the event.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VICTIM SERVICES AWARDS OF DISTINCTION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): It was an honour and a pleasure for me to nominate Moonie Ali for the Victim Services Award of Distinction. Today, Moonie and four other individuals received one of these awards in a special ceremony at Queen's Park. I wanted to share with members of this House what inspired me to nominate Moonie.

On August 4, 2003, Moonie's son Terrence was beaten to death in Toronto at the tender age of 15. Left with two children to raise, Moonie chose to transform her anguish, pain and sadness into positives by establishing the Terrence R. Ali Memorial Foundation and working to ensure that one of the three individuals convicted of her son's murder is moved from a youth to adult correctional facility to complete their sentence. Moonie also still finds time to help others who have lost children to senseless violence.

Moonie approaches each and every task of helping victims with great energy, compassion, dedication and conviction. She deserves to be recognized with this award for her selfless efforts on behalf of others, for relentlessly fighting to keep her son's memory alive and for her courage and strength in single-handedly seeking justice for her murdered son. She is a model citizen to all those who have suffered similar tragedies in their lives.

I congratulate Moonie and the other award recipients: Jo-Anne Hughes, Rick Goodwin, Brian Weller and Lynn Zammit. You all help put a face on justice and remind members in this House that in the search for true justice, victims must come first and never be forgotten.

RIDING OF STORMONT-DUNDAS- CHARLOTTENBURGH

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): Each year I have the privilege to report on the progress that my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh has made and how we have steadfastly remained focused on our future. I'm proud to share that this optimism is still being realized and rewarded. Our region is feeling steady growth in all sectors of our community. People are seeing results and businesses are consistently prospering.

I would like to profile a community business that embodies the will and the drive of our community. Benson's Autoparts has been supplying consumers throughout the riding and throughout Ontario with quality products and service for many years. They have recently announced the expansion of their warehouse in Cornwall by 70,000 square feet and will be hiring 160 new employees. Not only is this great news for this particular business, it is a perfect example of how the riding is flourishing and continues to showcase its prosperity. Businesses, both large and small, are feeling the benefits both monetarily and also from the support of the citizens and the community organizations they support. In the spirit of this community support and with the success of their business, Benson's has been a proud sponsor of the Children's Treatment Centre in Cornwall, a facility we're all very proud of that is dedicated to assisting victims of child abuse.

We as a government have provided businesses with the encouragement and tools necessary to prosper and be successful in our urban and rural communities. They continue to build, realizing that much more can be done. Benson's Autoparts has a proven track record of growth, expansion and success, and I certainly commend them. The community joins in wishing them the best in the future.

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): This morning in the public accounts committee, our party brought forward a motion to have the auditor investigate the McGuinty political slush fund. Liberal members voted it down.

Instead, under the motion they forced through, the Minister of Citizenship will investigate the organizations getting the money and report back in six months, after the election.

The people of Ontario aren't that easily fooled. The questions should have been asked before the cheques were written. That's the problem here—how the money was handed out. The McGuinty government is blaming the organizations that got the money, but the organizations aren't the ones at fault. It was the McGuinty government that didn't have a fair and open application process. It was the McGuinty government that used taxpayers' dollars for a political slush fund. If Dalton McGuinty has nothing to hide, he would want the auditor to investigate. Our motion was fair.

As a member of the public accounts committee, I know how effective the work of the auditor can be. Remember the fraud and mismanagement he found under the ministry for children? He found the trips, the expensive restaurants and the SUVs.

We aren't getting the real answers here. We need a fair, impartial investigation into how the money was handed out. If it isn't a political slush fund, why won't Dalton McGuinty let the auditor investigate?

Even today's Toronto Star editorial supported the auditor investigating. It said, "Taxpayers deserve a complete and immediate accounting of how their money has been used." We agree. That's why we want the Auditor General to investigate this political slush fund.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I'm speaking in support of the parents of children at Palmerston Avenue public school to express our dismay at and disapproval of the budget cuts that the Toronto District School Board is being forced to make for the 2007-08 school year due to the lack of funding from the McGuinty government.

The budget cuts have reduced the number of education assistant assigned to work with special-education students. In some Palmerston classes, as many as four children are in need of educational assistance and their needs can no longer be met with the reductions.

The loss of educational assistants will be detrimental to all: detrimental to the many children who require in-class assistance, detrimental to the other students and, ultimately, to the teacher, who will be under more stress trying to meet the needs of all of the students without the necessary supports.

"To put a human face on this issue, let us give the example of Madame France Serianni who has worked as a full-time education assistant in special education at Palmerston for 16 years. She is hugely qualified, she knows the students well and has been able to track them, year after year, through their time in school. Perhaps more important, she is fluently bilingual in what is a dual-track school."

And yet her position is being cut.

The parents of children in Palmerston Avenue public school are deeply concerned about the continued decline of the public school system. The parents of Palmerston school are not alone. Our children have the right to the best education the province can provide. The province has a responsibility to properly fund that education.

ASIAN HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): This weekend starts Asian Heritage Month. We look forward to the opening parade on Saturday, complete with a 70-foot dragon as it inches down University Avenue.

Since its inauguration in 1993, Asian Heritage Month has paid tribute to the rich history of Asian Canadians in Ontario and Canada. Asia is a massive and diverse continent. This celebration welcomes people from all areas of Asia, about 30 countries, most, if not all, of which are represented throughout Ontario. Diversity is our great strength in Ontario. Asian Heritage Month is a chance to learn about the history of Asian Canadians and to celebrate their contributions. Asian Heritage Month offers something for everyone, from the third annual education round table at the Asian Institute at the University of Toronto to a Chinese folk art show.

As Senator Vivienne Poy has said, "This month is about the internationalization of knowledge because fostering intercultural understanding in Canada is the first step to creating a truly cosmopolitan Canadian individual who is ready to take on the world."

I want to highlight how valuable the Asian communities are to enriching our social fabric, and particularly so in Willowdale. I urge all of you to join me in participating in these events.

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): Today my colleague from Leeds–Grenville filed the following motion in committee:

"Pursuant to sections 16 and 17 of the Auditor General Act, the Auditor General shall conduct a review of the payments made out of the so-called year-end reinvestment fund with a view to explaining how the specific grant decisions were made; to determine whether an undocumented, off-book grant program meets generally accepted accounting and accountability practices in the absence of any formal notice, codified application process, or even a written record of applications; to probe whether or not payments made out of this 'fund' demonstrate a pattern of political favouritism to the partisan associates of the governing party; to determine if the payments made out of this fund contravene the rules prohibiting the use of public funds for political purposes; to make any other determinations or findings the Auditor General feels are appropriate."

This motion was voted down by the Liberals today and, as my colleague just referred, they put forward their

own shameful resolution that is a slap in the face to the hard-working taxpayers of Ontario.

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We're going to remind everyone in this province that Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals don't have the courage to answer questions and are trying to bury this issue until after the next election.

Liberal David Dingwall summed up the Liberal philosophy best as: They simply feel they are entitled to entitlements, even if it means that the good people of Ontario are picking up the tab for the self-named entitled ones across the way. This is an absolute disgrace to the people of Ontario, and I congratulate my leader, John Tory, and my colleague from Leeds–Grenville for showing the leadership that Ontario needs and not that Dalton McGuinty has.

DESTINY ZAHRA-BOWLES

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): There are only a few people who can honestly say that they have been solely responsible for saving another's life, and to be able to do this at the young age of four is truly amazing.

Her name is Destiny Zahra-Bowles, a resident of my riding of Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale. One day when she and her mother, Mellisa, were home alone, her mother fainted and crashed head-first into the floor and was left unconscious. Little Destiny Zahra remained calm and went straight to the telephone. She remembered those three magic numbers, 9-1-1. She told the operator what had happened and remained on the line until Brampton firefighters arrived and were able to revive her mom. Mellisa did not want to leave her daughter alone, but Destiny knew her mother needed immediate medical attention, so she reassured her mother that she would be okay.

That's a perfect example of how it's never too late to teach children about emergencies. Destiny might be only four years old, but it was the education she received about the importance of situations like these and how to respond that ultimately saved her mother's life. The simple act of dialing 911 saves lives, no matter what age you are.

I'm honoured to stand here today to recognize Destiny Zahra-Bowles and her mother, Mellisa. They are a symbol of how early education can lead to emergency prevention. I congratulate them on being a great example to the rest of us.

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to recognize Mellisa Zahra and her grandfather. They are here.

VICTIM SERVICES AWARDS OF DISTINCTION

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): I rise today to inform members of this House that this week is National Victims of Crime Awareness Week across Ontario. It's important for us to recognize service providers across

our province who are committed to helping victims on their road to recovery. The thousands of volunteers and professionals who provide support, compassion, advice and information to victims and witnesses of crime in our province give our communities a broader sense of purpose and provide individuals and families with much-needed help during a very traumatic time in their lives.

Today the Attorney General, Michael Bryant, announced the recipients of the inaugural Attorney General's Victim Services Awards of Distinction honouring individuals or organizations that are dedicated to the support of victims and provide victim services. These awards also recognize victims—individuals who have courageously forged a better future for themselves, their families and communities.

As well as providing a well-deserved thank-you to outstanding leaders in the victim services community, this award program also encourages the sharing of innovative ideas and best practices among victim services professionals across the province. The Attorney General's awards of distinction support Ontario's reputation as a national leader in providing meaningful assistance to victims when and where it is needed most.

I am pleased to welcome the recipients to the gallery today, if we could recognize them, please. Moonie Ali is from Scarborough. Brian Weller—yes, you may stand—is from Markham. Rick Goodwin is from Ottawa. And two people from my area that I'm very proud of: Jo-Anne Hughes, who works with child witness support, and Lynn Zammit, who works with restorative justice in youth at risk. I'm familiar with their work, and I'm sure all the others are just as wonderful.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I rise in the Legislature today to talk about the McGuinty government's commitment to fighting global climate change and to continuing to repair the damage the previous government left behind.

While we've been working hard to phase out coal plants in Ontario, the leader of the official opposition remains silent on the issue when discussing his climate change plan. I use "his" in quotations, because there were some very familiar initiatives that were first seen in our platform, such as replacing government vehicles with vehicles that use alternative fuels, introducing energy efficiency into government buildings, and improving building codes to make homes more efficient. So we thank the member opposite for his endorsement of our plan.

We've already reduced our reliance on coal by one third, which is the equivalent of taking two million cars off the road. The previous government increased emissions from coal by 127% and slashed the Ministry of the Environment budget.

The leader of the official opposition wants to wait 13 years before even beginning to reduce greenhouse gases,

and we would then have to wait another 30 years for any other significant change.

We can't afford to wait on the issue of climate change. The McGuinty Liberals have been continuing to push forward with real reforms for Ontarians, and we won't back down, regardless of the opposition.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery Senator William Doyle from Vermont and Assemblyman Robin Schimminger from New York state, representing the Eastern Regional Conference of the Council of State Governments. They are joined by Mr. Alan Sokolow, director, and Mr. Wendell Hannaford, deputy director of the Eastern Regional Conference.

Also in the Speaker's gallery, I'd like to introduce Mrs. Bernice Hurd and Mrs. Gillian Anderson. Mrs. Hurd is the mother of our Clerk and Gillian is her sister.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SPIRIT OF MANDELA WEEK SEMAINE SPIRIT OF MANDELA

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I rise in the House today to recognize the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board in their celebration of the second annual Spirit of Mandela Week, which is currently taking place from April 23 to 27.

Cette semaine spéciale, qui a été lancée l'année dernière, permet d'inviter les élèves, le personnel, les familles et les membres de la communauté des deux conseils scolaires à se renseigner sur le leader fascinant et sur les défis que les enfants doivent relever en Afrique du Sud.

As part of the weeklong celebration, a Toonie Day is held to raise funds to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and youth in South Africa, in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund (Canada).

In South Africa, more than a million children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. The funds being raised by the students will help support many child and youth-centred programs and development projects.

I can think of no better way to honour the spirit of a man—one of the most important fighters for democracy, freedom and justice in the 20th century—than by coming together to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and youth.

In 2001, Mr. Mandela came to Toronto to mark the renaming of a school in his honour, Nelson Mandela Park Public School. During that visit, he spoke to the students about the importance of education and stated that their success need not be predicated on race or status.

« Nous savons que vous êtes les leaders de demain— pas seulement à Toronto, pas seulement au Canada, mais dans le monde entier, » a-t-il déclaré.

And I agree. We in the education system in Ontario have a great responsibility to live up to the spirit of Mr. Mandela. We have in our hands the future of not just our city, not just our country, but of this planet, and it is our job to provide the opportunity for our children to embrace their potential, seize opportunities and become citizens of this global village. That is why our government is reforming and rebuilding education in Ontario, so that we can reach every student. They are our future.

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Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” It is that sentiment that we are celebrating during Spirit of Mandela Week, and we should all keep in mind these powerful and poignant words as we celebrate Education Week next week.

I congratulate the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board, their students, staff, families and community members on starting and supporting this initiative and reminding us of a man whose spirit and determination did not just change a city, not just a nation but the entire world.

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

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On behalf of John Tory, leader of the official opposition, and the PC caucus, I rise to speak about Spirit of Mandela Week, the man it honours and the causes it supports.

This week marks the second annual Toronto District School Board Spirit of Mandela Week, during which all TDSB staff, students, families and community members are invited to participate in Toonie Day. Funds raised during this week will be donated to help improve the lives of disadvantaged children and youth in South Africa, in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund. These resources will assist numerous child- and youth-centred programs in South Africa, including those focused on supporting orphans and early childhood development projects.

The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund (Canada) was founded in 1998 and is dedicated to promoting and realizing Nelson Mandela’s global vision of social justice for children and youth through providing financial support to assist the children of South Africa. The fund also strives to share with all Canadians the inspirational life story of Nelson Mandela, the history and culture of South Africa, and the challenges faced by the children of South Africa, especially poverty, hunger, homelessness, illiteracy and sickness.

South Africa has the world’s highest total number of people living with HIV/AIDS, which causes 40% of all child deaths under the age of five. More than one million children have been orphaned by AIDS in South Africa. More than a million school-age children do not attend school due to malnutrition, distance from schools and lack of resources. The number of children living in institutions or on the streets is also increasing dramatically.

Spirit of Mandela Week takes its inspiration from, and particularly honours, Nelson Mandela, the first President of South Africa to be elected in fully representative democratic elections. As the leader of the African National Congress, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Through his 27 years in prison, much of it spent in a cell on Robben Island, Mandela became the most widely known figure in the struggle against apartheid and an international icon of freedom and equality.

Following his release from prison in 1990, Mandela’s policy of reconciliation and negotiation led the transition to South Africa’s multiracial democracy. Since the end of apartheid, he has been widely praised, even by white South Africans and former opponents.

In 1993, Nelson Mandela received the Nobel peace prize. The people of South Africa fondly refer to him as Madiba, an honorary title of the elders of Mandela’s royal clan, the kings of the Thembu people.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Toronto District School Board for this most excellent initiative that undoubtedly teaches our students the enduring values of volunteerism, community service and self-sacrificing heroism undertaken in a just cause.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I’m very happy to celebrate Spirit of Mandela Week. As the minister said, this special week invites students, staff, families and community members from both boards in Toronto, Catholic and public, to learn more about this inspirational leader and the challenges facing the children of South Africa. I hope it’s also a week that invites governments at all levels to reflect about the challenges that children of colour face in Toronto, Ontario and Canada as well.

Yes, we are happy to celebrate and to be part of the celebration of Toonie Day, which is held to raise funds to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and youth in South Africa in partnership with the Nelson Mandela children’s fund. We think this is great. God knows so many children in Africa need a lot of economic assistance and social assistance from the rest of the world.

But there’s a lot that I think we can and should do in our own borders, in our own local places. I agree with Nelson Mandela when he said that education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world. As I reflect on that, I think about so many of our immigrant kids who come from so many parts of the world and who don’t have ESL teachers. I think about special education and how so many of our kids—yes, many who come from people of colour—don’t have the special education services they need for them to have the opportunity to be able to change the world. I think of the thousands of students who have been suspended across Ontario, and particularly in Toronto, who are suffering the problem of discrimination, as the Human Rights Commissioner indicated years ago when he said that thousands and thousands of our kids are being suspended and expelled, and many of them come from people of colour, students of colour. Something is wrong with that.

Something is wrong when working people of colour are sometimes first to be fired and last to be hired. Something is wrong when people of colour generally earn less than the rest of us; something is wrong with that.

So as we twin to talk about what we can do to help kids in South Africa and other parts of the world, what is it that we can do as governments here to help children of colour, to help parents of colour, to help working women of colour? What could we do to help our aboriginal communities, First Nations kids who have tremendous problems in our system?

Let's commit ourselves to that as governments. Let's commit ourselves, as political parties, to do that and to deal with that. Once we do that, then all these other initiatives make sense. They do make sense. For us to focus our energies on what we can do to send a toonie to South Africa, in my view, is good, but we can do more as political parties, and we should do more. This is an urgent call to every political party, every politician at all levels—municipal, provincial and federal—to do more, because racism does exist, even though many would like to hide the fact that it exists. We have it. It is around us, and it's good to acknowledge that it exists. Once you acknowledge that it exists, then you can do something about it. So let's deal with that problem here in our own borders in the spirit of Nelson Mandela Week and deal with inequities and deal with injustices and deal with discrimination and deal with racism. When we do that, we can feel better with ourselves as people, as individuals, and as politicians. That's what I urge of us all in this chamber.

DAY OF MOURNING

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I believe we have unanimous consent for all parties to speak for up to five minutes to recognize the day of mourning for fallen workers.

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

Hon. Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker and members of the Legislature, Saturday marks the 23rd day of mourning, a day when we remember and honour those who have died, been injured or become ill as a result of their job. The Canadian Labour Congress declared April 28 the Day of Mourning in 1984 as a day to remember our fallen, injured and ill workers. Most importantly, it is a day to look to the future and for each and every one of us in this House to reaffirm our commitment to safe and healthy workplaces.

Thanks to the commitment and dedication of those who fight for workplace health and safety, injury rates continue to decline. From businesses to our communities, in hospitals, in schools and in the government, health and safety advocates work hard every day to ensure the health and safety of workplaces here in the province of Ontario.

1400

Despite these efforts, though, too many men, women and, most unfortunately, young workers continue to lose

their lives or suffer injuries or illnesses on the job. In 2006 alone, here in Ontario there were 101 work-related fatalities and a recorded 83,179 workplace injuries and illnesses that resulted in lost time at work.

Behind these numbers, we need to remember that these are real people and real lives that have been forever changed. These tragedies are alarming and unacceptable. That's why our government is committed to do more—to continue to raise the bar for workplace health and safety.

We must work together to prevent these needless deaths, injuries and illnesses. We have the knowledge and resources to prevent them, and we must make sure that every workplace has access to the information and tools they need to improve workplace health and safety. We must hold those in positions of responsibility to account, and that includes every one of us assembled here in this Legislature.

Today we remember those who have been touched by tragedy. We will honour their memory if we take action to ensure that no further tragedies happen tomorrow.

One of the things that has struck me as the Minister of Labour for this province is that every couple of days my BlackBerry goes off with a message from my ministry informing me that somebody in the province has been killed on the job. Think about it: That man or woman or young individual left home in the morning, said goodbye to their family, and everybody assumed they would be coming home. They're not coming home. They're never coming home. That table is going to have one seat that will never be filled. That happens far too often, and we need to think of that.

So it's important that all of us rededicate ourselves to prevention. Let us take action today so that tomorrow we do not have to remember what we could have done. As elected representatives, we have a duty and a responsibility to lead by example and make safety a priority every day in our lives.

I hope the honourable members will mark the day of mourning at memorial events in their own communities on Friday or Saturday this week.

Very shortly we will observe a moment of silence to remember those who have died, been injured or become ill as a result of their jobs. I ask each of us to think about what we can do to prevent future deaths, injuries, and illness in the workplace.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): Today I join my colleagues on all sides of the House to speak on behalf of our leader, John Tory, and our caucus as we commemorate the International Day of Mourning for Workers, which, as the minister has said, will be remembered. Services will take place throughout our province on Friday and Saturday of this week, and many of us will be participating.

It is on this day of mourning and today that we remember the many workers in this province who have suffered injury, illness or death while in the workplace. Again, these are individuals who left their homes and went to work and never did anticipate that that would be the outcome.

Today is the day when we are also reminded of the terrible human, social and economic toll that workplace illnesses, accidents and fatalities can take. Today is an opportunity for us to join with workers, with employers, and with all others to express our sincere condolences to the families and the friends of those who have been killed or injured in the workplace.

I also believe that this is a very important day for us in this House. It is a day for us as legislators to affirm together—all parties—our shared commitment to the prevention of illness, injury and zero tolerance for fatalities. We all share a common responsibility to move forward, to do what we can collectively and personally to prevent illness, death and injury.

I know from personal experience, having worked with my colleagues on all sides of the House, that all three parties have in the past, and will in the future, commit to do what they can to make safety a priority and improve health and safety in the workplace.

As a former Minister of Labour, I have experienced, as the minister today expressed, the sadness and the sorrow that the news of each workplace death brings, and you know the impact it's going to have on family and friends.

In fact, one of the very first situations I encountered, which has made an indelible impression on my strong commitment to health and safety, was a visit that I received from Paul Kells and his family shortly after they lost their 19-year-old son, Sean. He had been killed in a workplace accident just a few days into the job. In speaking to Paul, he had a desire to do something about the tragedy that had come to him and to his family, and he set up a foundation. Today, we have the Safe Communities Foundation that was set up by Paul Kells. He eventually moved from his volunteer work and from his business career, in 2002, to devote his full-time energy to his dream for a widespread health and safety culture shift, not just in Ontario, not just in Canada, but throughout the world. He was inspired to share his vision to do what he could to eliminate the pain, the suffering and the cost of needless, preventable injury.

I've also met with another champion for health and safety, Rob Ellis, who lost his son and is devoting himself to ensuring that no other young person loses their life.

I've met with many unions and certainly many labour councils, and I've met with employers. They all share that commitment to do what they can to make their workplaces safe.

However, despite the work of many, many dedicated people, whether it's unions, employers, labour councils or individuals, each year there are those who become injured, who suffer illness, and who die. In fact, on April 23, there was an accident in the subway. I think we all know that one man was killed—a loving father, a husband, a son—and there were two others injured. We need to make sure, in remembrance of these individuals, to continue to develop the programs, to provide training that will prevent death, illness and injury.

At this time, I particularly want to encourage us to do what we can for our young people. Many of them are going to be going into the workplace for the first time. It's important for them to know that they have the right to say no, that they're not going to do unsafe work. It's important that our children know they have rights. We don't want to put anybody in a position that could cost them their life.

So on this day in this House, I would encourage each one of us to renew our personal commitment. There truly is a lot we can do in order to ensure that we support the efforts of all of those who are devoted to the task of eliminating illness, injury and death in our workplace.

1410

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): People don't go to work imagining that that day is going to be their last. Tragically, our health and safety laws and employer practices fail to protect every worker from fatalities and debilitating injuries.

As we mark the April 28 day of mourning, Howard Hampton and Ontario's New Democrats convey heartfelt condolences in memory of the Ontario workers who lost their lives on the job in the past year.

I'm thinking of the hundreds of workers who still should be alive today, people like Antonio Almeida, 38, a dedicated husband and father of two young children, a model Toronto Transit Commission employee who perished just this week, early on Monday morning, in a subway tunnel tragedy; and Mike Damiano, who lived with his wife and 11-year-old son in St. Catharines until the 44-metre crane he was operating fell over and crushed him at Port Weller Dry Docks on March 13.

Regrettably, there are hundreds more Antonios and Mikes who won't be seeing any tomorrows. We express sympathy to the families for their loss, to friends, co-workers and communities who were forced to say early goodbyes to those whose lives were taken by the dangerous work they do. We mourn their lost dreams.

Eighty-three years after Ontario passed the first Workers' Compensation Act in 1914 and 65 years after that the Occupational Health and Safety Act in 1979, our province continues to be marred by workplace deaths and injuries. According to the WSIB and Ministry of Labour statistics, as the minister has already noted, there were 101 work-related deaths in 2006 and 83,129 work-related injuries or illnesses. This is unacceptable and I think everyone in this House would agree. Ontario ranks fifth highest in Canada for lives lost on the job. According to the Centre for the Study of Living Standards, in Ontario there are 6.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.

New Democrats believe that Ontario can do better. New Democrats stand in solidarity with injured workers and labour organizations who work tirelessly to "fight for the living." We recognize, applaud and support the dogged efforts and hard work of injured workers' groups in communities across our province. The Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups and the Industrial Accident Victims' Group of Ontario are some of the partners that are fighting this fight on a daily basis. Their voices

and ours collectively will spur the kind of change Ontarians want and need to see.

As a commemoration day, April 28 is more than a symbolic day to remember the victims of the past. By highlighting Ontario's workers who continue to be exposed to risk of injury or death, the day also serves to symbolically transform sentiments of mourning, loss and suffering into positive action for dialogue and change. For this reason, April 28 is forward-looking, a day for action as well as a day for mourning.

On the action side of the equation there is much we can do at little or no cost to government. For example, all workers should be covered under the WSIB. Currently, 1.3 million Ontario workers are excluded from that coverage. After comprehensive consultation and hearings, a government report recommended universal coverage for Ontario workers back in 2003. Let's get on with that change. Workers who fall seriously ill with cancers and heart disease from their exposure to toxic chemicals should be receiving automatic compensation and not left with the insult of being tossed on to the WSIB scrap heap. We need presumptive legislation in Ontario.

Investigations and enforcement must be effective and penalties severe where employers have failed to protect their workers from harm. All workplaces need joint health and safety committees with certified worker reps on them making sure that the work is safe and that workplaces are not going to cause injury or death to their co-workers. We must ensure the dignity of injured workers today, with a system that is sensitive to their suffering and responsive to their needs. Why can't their compensation payments be directly deposited into their bank accounts, for example? Instead, they have to worry that the cheque is going to come in the mail. All of our other systems are direct deposit, but injured workers are just never sure if that cheque is going to show up. This is a technology change that can easily be implemented and needs to happen.

Why has the promise not been kept to provide retro-active cost-of-living increases and annual indexing for injured workers to stop the financial slide injured workers find themselves on through no fault of their own? Why is there not an express law to control workplace harassment, a problem that has resulted in employee injuries and deaths even to this day? There are many, many other issues that we speak about regularly in this House, whether it's through private members' bills or other initiatives. Or whether it's on days like today, when we're talking about our annual day of mourning for injured workers.

The time is now. There are many changes that need to be made and we need to recommit ourselves, as others have said, to make sure that those changes are made in Ontario for the injured workers of today and to make sure that we don't have further injured workers in the future.

The Speaker: I'd ask members and our guests if we could rise for a time of silence to remember fallen workers.

The House observed a moment's silence.

VISITORS

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd ask all members of the Legislature to welcome some guests who are watching the proceedings today: Mr. Gerry Donnelly, from the Alberta Building Trades Council; Mr. Wayne Peppard from the British Columbia and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council; Alex Lolua, from the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario; and Mr. Patrick Dillon, from the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Would you please, on behalf of this chamber, determine if the latest McGuinty exercise in communication has been submitted to the Auditor General for his approval? I'm providing you with a copy of it now. Having it delivered—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Props are not in order.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It gives me great pleasure today to introduce some guests from the riding of Peterborough. Loyola and Lorraine Moloney, and their son Dennis Moloney, who's a high school teacher at Adam Scott. Two years ago, Dennis received a commendation from the then Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy. Dennis's quick action saved a student's life at Adam Scott, a student who had experienced a potentially fatal accident. I welcome them today here from Peterborough.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth—Middlesex): I'd like all members to welcome His Worship Mayor Dan Mathieson, the mayor of the city of Stratford and Pat Shantz from the city.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Niagara Centre will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The Minister of Northern Development will come to order.

It's now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ATTENDANCE OF MINISTERS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds—Grenville): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As you know, questions surrounding a political slush fund for friends of the Liberal Party has been a significant issue in this place over the course of the past few days. We've been advised by the government House leader that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration will not be here until at least 3 p.m. today. All of our questions are devoted to this and I ask for unanimous consent to suspend the business of the House until the minister arrives.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Runciman asked for unanimous consent to suspend—I heard a no.

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Interjections.

The Speaker: It's now time for oral questions.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Order. You're wasting time.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka will come to order.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Standing order number 1 indicates that, "The purpose of these standing orders is to ensure that proceedings are conducted in a manner that," amongst other things, "respects the rights of members ... to hold the government accountable for its policies."

When the government refuses to have its Premier here, when the government refuses to have a minister here who is at the eye of the storm in terms of one of the most notorious scandals to hit this government or to be witnessed by a Parliament, Mr. Speaker, I say to you, with respect, that you are charged with the responsibility to ensure that the opposition is able to hold this government accountable, and I call upon you to recess this Parliament until such time this afternoon as the Premier and/or the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration appears. What are they afraid of?

The Speaker: I've heard your point of order—

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker: Mr. Kormos has referred to item 1 in the standing orders with respect to the ability of the opposition to hold government members and cabinet ministers accountable. Premier McGuinty is not here. There has been one, single minister who has been the focus of questions for several consecutive days because of the Liberal slush fund.

This minister would know full well, Mr. Speaker, that the questions would be directed to him in the Legislature today. There are ongoing questions about the political nature of the grants doled out as part of the slush fund by that minister. Certainly at the federal level, with the cousins of this Liberal Party, we saw the likes of Guité, Galliano, among others—

The Speaker: We're starting to debate. I'm prepared to rule on the point of order.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I'm prepared to rule on the point of order. The members are right. The opposition does have the need to be able to hold the government accountable. But I look over at the government, and the government benches have a number of ministers who could answer questions.

Mr. Hudak: Where's the coward minister?

The Speaker: I ask the member for Erie–Lincoln to withdraw that remark.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member for Erie–Lincoln, will you withdraw that comment?

Mr. Hudak: I withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you.

It's now time for oral questions.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In looking at—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Tory: I was just looking for the section here and I actually found it while we had the short break there.

I wanted to refer you to section 1(c) of the standing orders, which provides that "in all contingencies not provided for ... the question shall be decided by the Speaker or Chair," and that you should base your decisions "on the democratic rights of members referred to in clause (b)." That, of course, is a reference to rule 1(b).

In this instance, you just made mention a moment ago, sir, of the fact that the government benches have people there who are prepared to answer questions. But the fact is, we want to put a question on behalf of the people to the responsible minister, and the responsible minister is not here. The only other provision that exists here is what it says in section 36(e): "A minister to whom an oral question is directed may refer the question to another minister who is responsible for the subject matter to which the question relates."

Well, there is no other minister. That is the point we're trying to make, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter that we want to pursue on behalf of the taxpayers of Ontario. We are trying to assert the democratic rights of this place. You render meaningless the role of the opposition if the minister can stay away from this House, if there is no other minister we can ask the question of and no one they can refer it to.

We're asking to you rule on behalf of the people that we have the opportunity to have this House stand adjourned for a period of now only half an hour. We were originally told this minister would be here at 2:45. Now we're told it's 3 o'clock. In a few minutes it'll be 3:15. They are deliberately avoiding presenting this minister to be held accountable, and I would ask you to rule, pursuant to standing order 1(c), that this House should stand adjourned for at least 30 minutes from now, if not for 45 minutes.

1430

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker: In my capacity as Deputy Premier I'm very prepared to assist honourable members in answering their questions, and remind members of this House that Minister Colle has a 94% attendance record at question period.

The Speaker: Members would know that the Speaker has no ability to compel the attendance of any minister or any member. The Deputy Premier is here.

Mr. Tory: Speaker, on a point of order: I did not ask that you compel the attendance of any minister. We

merely ask that the House be adjourned for a period of time so the minister—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Oral questions.

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP
AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): [*Inaudible*] a woman in the Chair.

Mr. Tory: Someone, anyway; somebody in the Chair.

My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and it concerns the political slush fund.

I just want to state our extreme dissatisfaction at the fact that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration—the Deputy Premier points out with such enthusiasm that he has a 94% attendance record. Isn't it just interesting that he chooses today to be away? Isn't it just interesting that this great attendance record is such a coincidence?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The standing orders make it out of order for an honourable member to draw attention to the absence of another member.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I need the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the remark made to the member opposite.

Mr. Tory: All right. So we'll ask the Deputy Premier—

The Speaker: I ask you to withdraw the last remark you made.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I ask the Leader of the Opposition if he will withdraw the remark about the Deputy Premier.

Mr. Tory: Withdrawn, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: We have today, on the slush-fund scandal, the government having refused a reasonable request from the opposition to delay the proceedings of the House for 45 minutes so that we could ask the responsible minister, and that follows this morning, at the standing committee on public accounts, the McGuinty Liberal government using its majority to shut down and close the door on any investigation of this matter by the auditor.

My question—and if I have to ask it to the Deputy Premier, I will—is: Do you know if the minister let it be known to the Premier's office that he wanted to have the Auditor General come in and clear his name and clear the air on this matter and that in fact it was the Premier's office that ordered this matter shut down at the standing committee on public accounts?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: In his question, the honourable member suggested that the Auditor General doesn't have the potential to do such an investigation, but his own letter dated recently to the honourable member

says differently, from the Auditor General to the Leader of the Opposition. "Also, since April 1, 2005, as a result of the Audit Statute Law Amendment Act that amended the Audit Act ... my office has the authority to audit how grant recipients ... have used grants they have received. The amendments expanded my authority under section 12.2."

So it has been made very clear by the Auditor General himself in a letter to the honourable member that he has the potential to do those things.

On the matter that is at hand, my colleague the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made statements in the Legislature on Monday that indicated of course that while we recognize that this is an area long since underfunded, there are ways to improve the process as we go forward. We're dedicated to those, and we're open to all ideas that people might have about the focus of such reforms.

Mr. Tory: That answer had only a passing acquaintance with the facts, because the facts are that the auditor went on to say in the letter—if you want to read the whole thing into the record—that in the event we wanted any kind of expeditious review of this, it could happen in two circumstances: (1) if the minister himself asked for it—and we've repeatedly asked the minister if he will do this, and he hasn't as yet—and (2) if the standing committee on public accounts asked for it. There's a third option, which is if the entire assembly asks for it. Of course, we know there's no point in asking the entire assembly because the McGuinty Liberal government will use its majority to slam the door shut on anybody taking a look at this.

Let me just quote what Murray Campbell wrote in this morning's *Globe and Mail*: "If the Premier blocks an opposition request being made formally this morning to have the Auditor General investigate, it will not look good."

I certainly agree, and I think most people out there, most taxpayers agree with Mr. Campbell, because now it looks even worse; that what's happening is, we're trying to shift the onus to the groups themselves. Will you agree to get the auditor in? You could stand up and do it, if you want, as a minister. Why don't you stand up, then, as Deputy Premier and ask the auditor—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I've had the privilege of being a member in this place since 1999, and I've had the opportunity to witness the operation of the Auditor General in the time since then. He's an independent officer. As his letter goes on at greater length than even those sections that I quoted, he has the authority to make determination about how the resources of his office are used, and he said clearly that he has the chance to orient himself towards this file if that is his choosing. That's an important point.

But also, as I've said, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has indicated, of course, that there are ways this process can be approved and that we've taken note of those. But what I find intriguing about the honourable

member is that he has a disdain for this particular form of contribution to community groups in our province with a determined need that's very obvious to everyone and where there's agreement around it. Why is it that—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm having much difficulty hearing the minister complete his response. I need to be able to hear it. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: So I pose a question to the honourable member: Why was it that, in the course of private conversation over the course of the last few weeks, you've lobbied me to actively engage in finding one-time money for an organization in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Tory: I'm happy to answer that question, but I don't answer questions here. I'll answer questions out there.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Now I need to be able to hear the question. We all know how this place works.

The member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough must withdraw.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): Withdrawn.

Mr. Tory: Maybe I will answer and say, first of all, that the minister should go out and wash his hands after that. Secondly, I'll be happy—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Halton will come to order. Order. I will be warning members once, and then I will be naming them.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Consider yourself warned.

Mr. Tory: I'll be happy to explain to the media outside exactly the circumstances in which that discussion took place, Mr. Speaker, but the minister should be ashamed of himself.

The motion passed by the Liberals at the public accounts committee to ram that through and shut down any attempt by the auditor to look at this on an expeditious basis reminds of the words of Judge Gomery, who said, "Good intentions are not an excuse for maladministration of this magnitude." Two days ago at the standing committee on estimates, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health said, "We believe ... the Auditor General should have more range to do the work to give Ontarians the information they need, and to give legislators and those in government the opportunity to do an even more effective job at all times with the investment of resources." Obviously the Liberal members who sit all around you didn't get the message.

All we asked today was for either the assembly or the standing committee on public accounts, which the McGuinity Liberals control, or the minister to get the auditor in to look at this now. You only have a passing acquaintance with the facts when you suggest that it wouldn't speed this up by getting the minister to agree to do it now. Why won't you agree to have the auditor come now, which he said would if asked by the committee on

public accounts or the assembly or the minister? Why won't you do it? What are you hiding?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: My acquaintance with the facts on the issue of Mr. Tory's—I'm sorry, the Leader of the Opposition's—very direct lobbying of me for the delivery of resources to albeit a very good organization in my own riding is directly in contradiction to all the words the honourable member has offered about the sheer necessity of supporting community-based organizations in the province of Ontario.

I ask the honourable member, why is it possible, in quiet conversation, for you to have one standard about one-time grants? Why is it okay for you to lobby me about a one-time grant and then bring to the floor of this Legislature nothing but disdain for the similar practice?

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Leeds–Grenville has been warned. The member for Simcoe–Grey has been warned.

Interjection: [*Inaudible*] time for the Minister of Health to do his sleaze act.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I name the member for Leeds–Grenville, Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Runciman was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: New question. The Leader of the Opposition.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Tory: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, and it concerns the slush fund—

Ms. DiNovo: We need a woman Speaker.

The Speaker: Order.

Ms. DiNovo: We need a woman Speaker.

The Speaker: Order. I will not warn the member for Parkdale–High Park again.

Mr. Tory: Here's a quote from the Toronto Star editorial today, entitled "Let the Auditor Probe Provincial Grants." It says, "Currently, it is almost impossible to find out from Queen's Park what the money was spent on, how the organizations were selected, who chose them, and what steps were taken to ensure the money was spent properly. This ad hoc distribution of tax dollars is inexcusable."

I point out to you, who should go out and wash your hands, quite frankly, that the discussion I had with you concerned submissions that are already made in writing, which is more than was the case of any of these grants we're talking about here. For you to misrepresent those discussions in that way is inexcusable.

Today, your party covered up—covered up and voted down and used your majority to vote down today in the standing committee on public accounts—an attempt to do exactly what the Toronto Star said needed to be done, which is to clear the air, to look at what was done here where there were no applications, no paper, no nothing—just handed out money to your friends, people associated with the Liberal Party in some cases; others of them,

you've stained their reputation by having them become associated with this when they do good work. Will you ask the auditor to come in and investigate this now—

The Speaker: The question has been asked, but before you answer, I've expressed my concern on a number of occasions with the language that's being used in here. It needs to be—and we all recognize this—at a level of civility and in the tradition of this place. So I would ask members on all sides to remember where we are and why we're here and respect both the institution and the people who have sent us here to do their work.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: In that spirit, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for all of the advice that he's offering with respect to hygiene in the province of Ontario. This is indeed an issue that's been well associated with the necessity of clamping down on the spread of infectious disease, so I want to thank him very much.

I want to refer to the letter from the—

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): It's all very funny, eh, George? It's very funny.

The Speaker: I will not warn the member for Erie–Lincoln again.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You're making all the jokes for everybody right now.

Just to have a chance—

Mr. Hudak: You still think it's funny.

The Speaker: I will name the member for Erie–Lincoln, Mr. Hudak. You've been warned.

Mr. Hudak was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: The Deputy Premier.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I know that the honourable member, the Leader of the Opposition, has now offered a standard, which is that it's very, very okay to be lobbying vigorously on behalf of big cultural organizations, but when it comes down to the Korean Canadian Women's Association and the need for some modest resource to renovate their facilities to be able to provide services, the honourable member finds great distinction around that. I want to—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I need to remind members that I need to be able to hear, as all members need to be able to hear, the response of the minister.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I had completed that answer. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Tory: This minister obviously has no standards whatsoever in terms of any kind of—it's just an absolute disgrace.

The Toronto Star editorial today goes on to say, "McGuinty should turn the books over to the province's Auditor General for a thorough examination. As disturbing questions about this program continue to percolate, it is time to shine a bright light on how Queen's Park doled out this money." All we're asking about all this—and you have to respond with all of your low-brow, low-down, disgusting kind of tactics. All we're asking is, rather than have the minister stay away from the House, rather than you get up and use your low-down tactics, why don't you just get up and say, if there's nothing to

hide here in terms of these grants that were made without application, without interviews, without a process, without an audit of any kind after the fact—why don't you just get up; what are you hiding?—and say you will agree right now to have the auditor examine these things, as the Star said, as the Globe said, as the people are saying? Why don't you have enough guts to get up and do that?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The minister in question has a very good record of attendance. He's been here all week, he will be here later, and he's been available to the media. I think to hear all of this manufactured hysteria on the part of a partial absence from one question period is interesting.

1450

The honourable member questions my standards, but he hasn't answered to his double standard—the double standard which says it's okay for him to lobby for resources to be provided to an organization without an application process, but quite altogether inappropriate that a community-based organization like the Flemingdon food bank might receive a very modest amount of resource in order to support the program that they run, which is so essential to communities.

We acknowledge, as the minister did on Monday, that we have to do a better job with respect to this process, and that action is being undertaken. But we believe fundamentally that it's necessary that our government and the province of Ontario build on these kinds of initiatives to better support people in local communities. Why is it okay for the honourable Leader of the Opposition to lobby for—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Tory: There's never been a question raised by anybody in this House—in the NDP, in the PC Party or anywhere else—about grants to organizations that help newcomers in terms of the work they do. What we've been asking questions about over and over again is the process pursuant to which that money is allocated.

In the event I had suggested to you that there should be a grant issued to any cultural organization without an application form, without an interview, without anybody looking at it, and that it be done in a way that you have a quick check to make sure in some cases that it's done, because the campaign chair of the Liberal Party or websites registered to the ownership of the Liberal Party or donors to the Liberal Party might be the ones that get picked out of all the groups that could get picked—if I'd ever made any suggestion like that to you, I would get up and apologize for that, because you know what? That is conduct disrespectful of the taxpayers, it's disrespectful of the taxpayers' money, and it is absolutely an abdication of responsibility that you have to safeguard that money. You should be agreeing right now to let the auditor come in and look at this and clear the air and show some respect for the taxpayers, even if you don't want to respect this place. That's what you should do.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Perhaps it's because the honourable member didn't have the forbearance to write

a personal note of apology to those individuals that he smeared earlier in the week through his mistaken research that he can now pretend in this Legislature that he hasn't been out there bemoaning the support that is on offer to these community-based organizations. What other conclusion can be drawn from the work that he has done through the course of this week and before to make it seem as if it isn't important to be able to support the work of the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples?

We acknowledge the necessity of supporting community-based organizations. Our minister, himself of immigrant stock, has learned about the necessity to support people in immigration settlement. We acknowledge fully, as we did on Monday, that there are efforts that must be undertaken to enhance the quality of the processes. Those are under way. We look forward to being a government that finds even greater capacity to support the people who have come to our country from other places and who need a little bit of assistance at the community level.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm seeking unanimous consent, based on the advice that the Minister of Citizenship will be here at 3, to hold down the lead questions, please.

The Speaker: You're asking to stand down both lead questions?

Mr. Kormos: I'm seeking unanimous consent, based on the advice that the Minister of Citizenship—

The Speaker: [*Inaudible*] can actually stand them down.

New question? I think the new question would be back over here with the opposition.

Interjection.

The Speaker: You stood down your lead question, so the rotation now goes to the official opposition.

Member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, I would ask, since the Minister of Citizenship is on his way and will be here, I guess, in three minutes now, to stand down my question to the minister—and ask for unanimous consent.

The Speaker: I would just inform the member that you would need to ask for unanimous consent for a question to be stood down.

Mrs. Witmer: I would ask for unanimous consent, since it appears that in about two or three minutes the minister will be here, and I would like to ask my question to him. So I will ask for unanimous consent to stand down my question until such time as the honourable member does arrive in this chamber.

The Speaker: Mrs. Witmer has asked for unanimous consent to stand down her question. Agreed? I heard a no.

New question. The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I'm going to ask my question to the Deputy Premier because maybe he can answer this. Nobody else has been able to answer anything.

Yesterday I asked the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration whether he was aware that an organization that

you and your party have flowed funds to is officially registered on the Internet as the Mississauga West provincial liberal riding association. He seemed to be completely nonplussed, unaware, unknowledgeable; hadn't a clue.

I'm sending you across—the page has just given it to you—a copy of the association's return to the chief electoral officer. I wonder if you could note the name of the chief financial officer and explain to this House exactly who that person is.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for his question. I believe the question that was raised yesterday had to do with the fact that on a voluntary basis a member who is now a member of the Legislature, who was in the business of computer technology, was involved in helping to register a domain name. Domain names last for five years. To the very best of my knowledge, associated with that domain name, the name of the honourable member for Mississauga West came up—further evidence of his commitment to community-based organizations. I believe that as the organization five years hence re-registers its domain name, it will be updated with the appropriate current officers. That's the information, to the very best of my knowledge.

Mr. Prue: It's just like yesterday: They're afraid to read out the information because they know how bad it is. Let me help you, Minister. The name on the association return list is one Jennifer Berney, who is a staffer and a staff officer at Liberal Party headquarters in Ontario. That is the person who files the return. The Mississauga West Liberal association has been run by the central party of the Ontario Liberals for over a year. Meanwhile, they're also the registered domain holder, by virtue of the law, for the community organizations receiving grants from your government. You should have known, your minister should have known, your Premier should have known, because this is centrally registered right out of your party headquarters. What is going on here?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: What's going here is a whole lot of manufacturing. A whole lot of manufacturing is going on. The—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I cannot hear the minister.

Minister.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The riding association of Mississauga West was, for a point in time—and I don't have all of the information before me—in trusteeship, which means that the central party plays a more active role in helping to make sure that all the filings and stuff are provided appropriately.

The honourable member for Mississauga West, in 2002, when he was involved in private enterprise, was involved in helping to register the domain name for an organization. Five years subsequently, that domain name is ready for renewal and is appropriately registered to the organization that holds it. This is obviously a carry-over

which relates to work that the honourable member was involved in.

Furthermore, after these matters were raised yesterday, the member has been in touch with the Office of the Integrity Commissioner, advised him of the activities they've been involved in. A written judgment should be forthcoming. But a verbal assurance was offered that there was nothing untoward in the involvement of the honourable member except goodwill towards community-based organizations well before the honourable member was elected.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of Labour. As you know, this Saturday, April 28, individuals across Ontario and across this country, in fact around the world, will come together to remember those who have died or have been injured or have become ill at work. April 28 is now internationally recognized as the day to mourn victims of workplace accidents and illness and is marked in approximately 80 countries on the plane. It is also a day when we renew our commitment to improving workplace safety and health, and all of us in this House would agree that one occupational accident, illness or death is one too many.

The suffering experienced by an injured worker is a shared suffering, a suffering that includes the family, friends, colleagues and entire communities. It's not just physical or mental, but it's also emotional and has to do with self-esteem and self-worth. Governments are responsible for helping to reduce that suffering, and I would like to ask the Minister of Labour to explain for us what it is that his government has been doing to help in that regard.

1500

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): As we heard earlier, April 28 is a very important day. It is a day for each of us to remember those who have been killed, injured or have suffered from workplace illness. We all collectively need to work towards that goal to reduce and one day eliminate workplace incidents.

I can say with pride that our efforts have helped to reduce those numbers, but we do have more work to do. We recognized, as a government, that we had to make investments in health and safety. We had to make investments in occupational health and safety officers. That's why we've moved forward with the hiring of 200 additional health and safety inspectors.

When we took office, Ontario unfortunately had the lowest ratio of health and safety inspectors in Canada. We moved forward with an ambitious plan, and that is to build a culture of prevention in this province and save lives. In order for us to achieve that goal, we needed to strengthen enforcement. Since we've begun, we've seen 30,000 fewer lost-time injuries—over 15,600 fewer in the last year alone. We're well on track to reaching our goal of 20% fewer lost-time injuries by 2008.

Ms. Mossop: Thank you for sharing some of those statistics with us. We've discussed this issue a number of times in the House and I've said it before: I've worked very closely with the injured workers in my riding and throughout Ontario to help bring about some changes—long overdue changes—and I have been gratified to work with a team and a minister that has moved strongly in that direction.

One of the areas that has been moved in is the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and changes to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, which our government recently proposed through our budget. I would like him to reiterate those changes, because they marked a very important first step. They were structural changes that removed a lot of barriers and set in motion the ability for our injured workers to move forward in a way that they have not been able to in a very long time.

Hon. Mr. Peters: I thank the member from Stoney Creek for her advocacy on behalf of injured workers not only in the province of Ontario, but more specifically in the Hamilton area. I'm proud that her advocacy work, through her private member's efforts—we were able to see her private member's bill incorporated into our work to assist injured workers.

We recognize that it was very important to enhance benefits for more than 155,000 injured workers and to provide those injured workers with their first real increase in over 12 years. Our proposal for three 2.5% increases over the next 18 months will more than double the increase that injured workers have seen over the last 12 years. Further, we're going to be providing flexibility to allow the government to provide fair increases without the necessity of making legislative changes.

We're investing in the Office of the Worker Adviser; we're changing the definition of deeming; changes to lock-in; lump sum payment; changes to the board size. We're listening to what the injured workers are saying and we're going to work with injured workers in this province.

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION GRANTS

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. I understand he is here now. It does regard the Liberal Party slush fund. I want to go back and ask this minister a question that my colleague the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke asked yesterday and the day before.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Perhaps the member for Kitchener–Waterloo would like to begin again.

Mrs. Witmer: My question regards the Liberal Party slush fund. I want to go back to a question that my colleague the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke asked you yesterday and the day before and that you have refused to answer. You are quoted in the Toronto Star on April 20 as saying that this money “has to go through

[the] other ministers”—the Minister of Finance, who is the Liberal Party campaign chair, and the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal—“and ultimately, I guess, by cabinet.” Now, these are your words; they’re not my words. Will you, Minister, please tell us what direction you received from the Liberal Party campaign chair as to who was to receive this money?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I thank the member for her question. I’ve answered the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke that I have been advocating on behalf of newcomers, I have been advocating on behalf of unemployed foreign-trained doctors and engineers that that government ignored, and I have been advocating on their behalf to all the ministers on this side, to all of the members, because they’ve said that for too many years nobody did anything for them.

Mrs. Witmer: The minister insults this House. During the term from 1995 to 2003, under the leadership of our government, we increased the number of foreign-trained professionals, doctors, by 130%. We have all worked on behalf of newcomers, and you insult us all.

The minister said this: You had to go through the Liberal Party campaign chair before it was approved. We just want to know, Minister—it’s very simple—how did it work, especially when it appears that one of the people connected to one of the groups had made donations to the Vaughan–King–Aurora riding association? We just want you to clear it up. Did the Minister of Finance tell you where the money should go?

Hon. Mr. Colle: Mr. Speaker, you know, it’s astonishing that that member stands up and talks about their party’s sad-sack record on helping newcomers, especially the foreign-trained. We never, ever heard them talk about helping newcomers. All we heard from them was a complete silence when it came to newcomers—zero. We on this side, Minister of Health, are now investing \$53 million in an international medical graduate program. We now have over 210 places in our IMG program. We now have a new law, Bill 124, which means that for the first time there will be fairness in Ontario.

I’ll compare our record on helping integration of foreign-trained professionals and helping newcomers get jobs with their record any day.

Mrs. Witmer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would suggest that the minister apologize. Yesterday and the day before—

The Speaker: That’s not a point of order.

New question. Just so we can be helpful, this is your lead question. Leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship. Minister, today Dalton McGuinty denied working families across Ontario accountability and transparency in their government when government backbenchers voted against the Auditor General conducting an immediate investigation into the McGuinty government’s year-end slush fund. This is an insult to all those community organizations and cultural organizations that didn’t have a chance to apply

because they didn’t know about the fund. It is also an abdication of the government’s responsibility to ensure that money is spent properly.

My question is this: Why is the McGuinty government so afraid of the Auditor General making public a report on your slush fund before the next election?

1510

Hon. Mr. Colle: This is the same leader of the third party who called organizations we invested in, like the Afghan women’s association, which received some support, or AWIC, the Bloor Information and Life Skills Centre, the United Jewish Appeal, SISO in Hamilton, fly-by-night organizations.

We on this side are very proud of the fact that we’ve had a strong partnership with all of these organizations, large and small, that have helped newcomers, that have enhanced citizen participation. Those organizations have been working with no help for the last 20 years. We are now helping them, along with federal money that is coming for the first time. They are more than worthwhile organizations.

Mr. Hampton: Well, Minister, I think it’s the McGuinty government that is insulting those hard-working organizations, because many of those hard-working organizations were never told that you were giving away some \$20 million. They were never given an opportunity to apply. That’s the problem here, and that was the issue before the public accounts committee. The public accounts committee wanted to bring the Auditor General in to look at this year-end slush fund, and Liberal backbenchers—every one of them—voted against it.

My question again is this: Why is the McGuinty government so afraid of the Auditor General conducting an investigation of your ministry’s slush fund and making public a report before the next election? What does the McGuinty government have to hide from the Auditor General of Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Colle: The member opposite knows full well that it was this government that expanded the powers of the provincial Auditor General. He knows full well that that office can look at any ministry any time it wants. And he knows full well—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I’m having difficulty hearing the minister.

Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: He knows full well that the investments made this year—the names of the organizations, the amounts—are posted on our website, such outstanding organizations as the United Jewish Appeal, which he calls fly-by-night, organizations like SISO, which he calls fly-by-night, Frontier College, which offers help—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I will not warn the member for Hamilton East again.

Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: Such organizations as the Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre he calls fly-by-night. Quinte United Immigrant Services he calls fly-by-night.

The Sudbury Multicultural/Folk Arts Association, the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association, COSTI—all these organization he claims are not accountable. We've had incredible experience working with them and partnering with them.

Mr. Hampton: The people who are not accountable are members of the McGuinty government, and that's why we have the Auditor General. That's why the Auditor General comes in and looks at ministries that funnel money out the door with no application process, no criteria, no audit and no stated expectation of what's supposed to happen. And, lo and behold, a lot of the money falls into the hands of people who are well connected to the Liberal Party.

Minister, there are only a couple of ways the Auditor General can have this kind of special investigation. One is by the public accounts committee voting for it. Members of the McGuinty government took care of that today when you voted it down. Another way is for you to call for that investigation. So, Minister, if you're really interested in protecting the integrity of the groups you've referred to and making sure they are not tarnished with some of the other organizations that are so clearly connected to the Liberal Party, will you call for the Auditor General to immediately come in and conduct an investigation of your year-end slush fund and report before the election—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: The member opposite still has not apologized to a card-carrying member of the NDP who asked him to have the guts to stand up and apologize for the fact that he said that somehow she was connected to the Liberal Party when she's a lifelong member of the NDP.

He also is saying that these organizations, like Frontier College—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I will not warn the member from Niagara Centre again. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: He's saying that organizations like Frontier College, which provides all kinds of services throughout northern Ontario, and that organizations like United Jewish Appeal are dominated by Liberals. We have not looked at whether they're Liberals, NDP or Conservatives. We've looked at the outstanding track record of these organizations. Most of these organizations that we've funded have been funded by the Conservatives, the NDP and by this government because they have shown that they are part of the community and deliver important services.

The Speaker: New question. This is a lead question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Minister of Citizenship again: Minister, maybe you should hear what the Toronto Star has to say about how the McGuinty government is conducting itself: “[I]t is almost impossible to find out from Queen's Park what the money was spent on, how the organizations were selected, who chose them, and what steps were taken to ensure the money was spent properly....

“That's why McGuinty should turn the books over to the province's Auditor General for a thorough examination.”

Minister, my question is this: Why is the McGuinty government so afraid of Ontario's Auditor General conducting an investigation of your slush fund and making a report before the next election? What do you have to hide from the Auditor General, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: If you look at one very outstanding project we invested in and partnered with, it's with Frontier College. It has established literacy camps across northern Ontario to provide incredible opportunities for people from southern Ontario to engage in teaching our First Nations children about the love of reading. We've also invested in the Hellenic centre by the Greek community, an organization that has been in existence for about 100 years that is building an incredible new centre at Brimley and 401. If the member ever goes there he can see the great success they've had. The building is almost three quarters up. That's because of the partnership with the federal government and us. That is the evidence of the partnership that we're proud of.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, the McGuinty government's refusal to bring the Auditor General in to see which grants were legitimate and which ones went to Liberal partisans is tarnishing groups like the Frontier organization.

Again I want to quote the Toronto Star: “This ad hoc distribution of tax dollars is inexcusable. Taxpayers deserve a complete and immediate accounting of how their money has been used.”

Quote again: “As disturbing questions about this program continue to percolate, it is time to shine a bright light on how Queen's Park doled out this money.”

Minister, the McGuinty government already tried to shut down an investigation by the Auditor General today by your inexcusable behaviour in the public accounts committee. I'm asking you, will you bring in the Auditor General to conduct an immediate investigation of the slush fund before the election? What do you have to hide, Minister? Why—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: I have been at the AWIC centre, as I mentioned yesterday. I've been at the London Cross Cultural Learning Centre. I've been at SISO in Hamilton. I've been to CultureLink. I go to the front-line service providers and I see, when a little bit of resources come from government, how far those volunteer-based organizations can take that money. Those are the investments that we've made. Those are investments we also make with our greater cultural groups so we can recognize the great diversity we have in this province. That's why we partner with the Hindu Museum of Civilization, where they're building the Wall of Peace. That's why we're partnering with some of the gurdwaras, which are doing exceptional volunteer work and charitable work. There's the evidence of our investment. That's the evidence of the integration that we strongly believe in, and the celebration of this great province from people all over the world.

1520

Mr. Hampton: Here's what the Globe and Mail has to say: "This has every appearance of being a Liberal slush fund, a way of cementing alliances ... before the October 10 provincial election.... The provincial Auditor General should take a tough look at where those millions have gone."

I think the people of Ontario would have a lot more trust in the Auditor General than they would have in the McGuinty government these days, given the way you conducted yourself at the public accounts committee today. So I'm going to ask you again: What is the McGuinty government so afraid of? Why are you so opposed to the Auditor General coming in, conducting an investigation and doing a report on your slush fund before the next provincial election is held in October? What are you trying to hide? Why are you so afraid of Ontario's Auditor General?

Hon. Mr. Colle: There are organizations across this province that have been ignored by governments, and not just governments in the provincial Legislature; the federal governments of both stripes have never invested fairly in our newcomers in this province.

The NDP was totally silent when we stood up for newcomers across this province and said it was unfair that newcomers in Ontario, which takes in 60% of the newcomers from immigration—60% of immigrants come here. They were underfunded for two decades. The NDP never stood up and said anything about the fact that they were underfunded. Our Premier said it was not right that they should be underfunded. We fought hard. We were focused. Now that money is flowing to these programs with \$920 million the NDP didn't care about or talk about.

PETITIONS

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition that was delivered to me, originating with signatures from Our Lady of Grace Church in Aurora. It reads as follows:

"Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas the legacy of Pope John Paul II reflects his lifelong commitment to international understanding, peace and the defence of equality and human rights;

"Whereas his legacy has an all-embracing meaning that is particularly relevant to Canada's multi-faith and multicultural traditions;

"Whereas as one of the great spiritual leaders of contemporary times, Pope John Paul II visited Ontario during his pontificate of more than 25 years and, on his visits, was enthusiastically greeted by Ontario's diverse religious and cultural communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to grant speedy passage into law of the private member's bill by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees entitled An Act to proclaim Pope John Paul II Day."

As the proud proponent of that bill, I'm pleased to affix my signature to it and pass it on to Page Brendon for delivery to the table.

PENSION PLANS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the" seniors "of Ontario request full access and control of their locked-in pension funds at age 55, without the current restriction imposed by government regulation;

"Whereas the current government regulation restricts what seniors and pensioners are able to do with their own savings and limits their options for an affordable and comfortable retirement;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government as follows:

"That the Ontario Pension Benefits Act be amended to give seniors of Ontario the option to transfer their locked-in pension funds (LIRA, LIF, LRIF) into an RRIF at the age of 55, as is the case for seniors in the province of Saskatchewan."

I agree with this petition. I've signed it and send it to the table by way of Page Lauren.

GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I keep getting petitions about the dilapidated bridge, which I will read into the record.

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

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

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

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

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

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign it.

STEVENSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

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

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital needs \$1.4 million in new funding over the next three years to get its birthing unit reopened and to ensure that they can recruit enough obstetricians and health care providers to supply a stable and ongoing service for expectant mothers in our area; and

“Whereas forcing expectant mothers to drive to Newmarket, Barrie or Orangeville to give birth is not only unacceptable, it is a potential safety hazard; and

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital cannot reopen the unit under its current budget and the McGuinty government has been unresponsive to repeated requests for new funding”—in fact, they turned us down—

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

“That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately provide the required \$1.4 million in new funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital so that the local birthing unit can reopen and so that mothers can give birth in Alliston.”

I want to thank all of those who signed this petition, and of course I will sign it too.

REGULATION OF ZOOS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I’m glad to present this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. The title is: “Regulate Zoos to Protect Animals and Communities

“Whereas Ontario has the weakest zoo laws in the country; and

“Whereas existing zoo regulations are vague, unenforceable and only apply to native wildlife; and

“Whereas there are no mandatory standards to ensure adequate care and housing for zoo animals or the health and safety of animals, zoo staff, the visiting public or neighbouring communities; and

“Whereas several people have been injured by captive wildlife, and zoo escapes are frequent in Ontario; and

“Whereas these same regulatory gaps were affirmed recently by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his annual report....”

It’s signed by a number of people in my community. I’m going to send them with Christian.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to do with lab services at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare. It says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the residents of the communities served by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) wish to maintain current community lab services; and

“Whereas maintaining community lab services promotes physician retention and benefits family health teams; and

“Whereas the funding for community lab services is currently a strain on the operating budget of MAHC; and

“Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with a growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

“Whereas the operating budget for MAHC needs to reflect the growing demand for services in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

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

“That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health increase the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to permit continued operation of community lab services.”

I support this petition.

1530

HERITAGE PROGRAMS

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:”—there are thousands of petitions here—

“Whereas the black cultural heritage program at the Toronto District School Board provides a valuable program where children in elementary school learn about the origins, history and the role of black people throughout Canada and around the world;

“Whereas since 1998, when the Conservative government took over the funding of education, the black cultural program has been at risk of elimination;

“Whereas a high percentage of students of African descent are feeling alienated and disengaged;

“Whereas the provincial high school dropout rate is over 40%, with black youth making up a large percentage of the dropouts;

“Whereas this program empowers students and parents and maintains a level of equity in education;

“Whereas when he was the opposition critic responsible for education, the current Minister of Education supported the funding of these programs”—this must be referring to Mr. Kennedy;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide ministry funding for the black cultural heritage program. In the upcoming budget”

I support this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I have signatures on these petitions that I will be tabling.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and

address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

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

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and David Caplan ignored stories of millions in rip-offs within Ontario’s lottery system for months, if not years;

“Whereas they acted only after they were caught and their first attempt was to ‘spin the scandal’ rather than fix the problems;

“Whereas Ontarians have every right to expect leadership from their government; and

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty and David Caplan have failed to protect the integrity of the lottery system in Ontario;

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

“That Dalton McGuinty start upholding the standards of integrity, responsibility and accountability, make the protection of the interests of all Ontarians a priority, and demand the resignation of David Caplan, the minister currently responsible for the lottery system.”

I’m pleased to hand it over to page Dillon to be taken to the table.

YORK SUBWAY EXTENSION

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I have another petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which is part of several petitions which we have received.

“Whereas York region and the city of Toronto have witnessed a substantial increase in traffic gridlock over the last several years; and

“Whereas these two regions continue to face traffic gridlock, which is an overwhelming economic and environmental problem; and

“Whereas we are significantly disappointed with the position of the leader of the NDP who wants to cancel the Spadina-York subway extension;

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

“That all York region and Toronto MPPs do their utmost to have the Spadina-York subway extension construction start during the year 2007.”

I fully support the petitioners and their intent, and I will contribute with my signature to it.

HIGHWAY 26

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

“Whereas the redevelopment of Highway 26 was approved by MPP Jim Wilson and the previous PC government in 2000; and

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

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

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

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

I agree with that petition and have signed it.

REGULATION OF ZOOS

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Let me tell you, thousands of Ontarians want us to regulate zoos and protect animals.

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly

“Regulate Zoos to Protect Animals and Communities

“Whereas Ontario has the weakest zoo laws in the country; and

“Whereas existing zoo regulations are vague, unenforceable and only apply to native wildlife; and

“Whereas there are no mandatory standards to ensure adequate care and housing for zoo animals or the health and safety of animals, zoo staff, the visiting public or neighbouring communities; and

“Whereas several people have been injured by captive wildlife, and zoo escapes are frequent in Ontario; and

“Whereas these same regulatory gaps were affirmed recently by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his annual report;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP David Zimmer’s bill, the Regulation of Zoos Act.”

That’s a fine bill, and all these people signing these petitions want to support it. I’ll affix my signature to the petition.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

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

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

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

“Whereas the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board has approached the Ministry of Education with the intention of having the school deemed prohibitive to repair as they believe the school requires

\$2.28 million in repairs, or 84% of the school replacement cost; and

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

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

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

Of course, I went to that school, my mother taught there for 33 years and I certainly agree with the petition.

REGULATION OF ZOOS

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): “Whereas Ontario has the weakest zoo laws in the country; and

“Whereas existing zoo regulations are vague, unenforceable and only apply to native wildlife; and

“Whereas there are no mandatory standards to ensure adequate care and housing for zoo animals or the health and safety of animals, zoo staff, the visiting public or neighbouring communities; and

“Whereas several people have been injured by captive wildlife, and zoo escapes are frequent in Ontario; and

“Whereas these same regulatory gaps were affirmed recently by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his annual report;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP David Zimmer’s bill, the Regulation of Zoos Act.”

I support the bill.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker: I rise, pursuant to standing order 55, to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, April 30, 2007, the afternoon will be opposition day, standing in the name of the leader of the official opposition; in the evening, second reading of Bill 212, the Education Amendment Act.

On Tuesday, May 1, 2007, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 218, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act; the evening is to be confirmed.

On Wednesday, May 2, 2007, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 174, Strengthening Business through a Simpler Tax System Act, one of my favourites; in the evening, second reading of Bill 218, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act.

On Thursday, May 3, 2007, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 218, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act.

I’d like page Ali to come over here and hand this to the table, please.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT (PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE AND SCHOOL SAFETY), 2007

LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L’ÉDUCATION (DISCIPLINE PROGRESSIVE ET SÉCURITÉ DANS LES ÉCOLES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 25, 2007, on the motion for second reading of Bill 212, An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety / Projet de loi 212, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l’éducation en ce qui concerne le comportement, la discipline et la sécurité.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I want to thank the citizens of Ontario for tuning in to this political forum. There’s always plenty to learn, and today we’re talking about an education bill. I want to recap some of the things I said yesterday, and then get to some of the elements of the bill.

I want to remind people that New Democrats were always very critical of the Conservatives’ zero-tolerance bill. We attacked the government of the day; we attacked their policy. We attacked the notion of zero tolerance. We believed that the government of the day wanted to be a law-and-order government. As a result of that, their policies were called “zero tolerance,” in order to show the public that they were going to be tough on bad behaviour in our schools—terrible behaviour, misbehaviour, bullies and so on.

1540

As a result of their policies, thousands and thousands of students were suspended and expelled—unbelievable numbers of students. Remember that under the zero-tolerance bill instituted by the Tories in the year 2000 and implemented in 2001-02, boards could have provided alternative programs in their classrooms to deal with difficult behaviour that may have occurred in the schools. Very few boards, however, chose to do that. The reason why few boards chose to do that, I believe, is because they felt teachers and principals in schools in general had a licence to suspend students, that they had a licence to expel students, that they had a licence to suspend them for uttering a threat, for inflicting serious bodily harm, possessing alcohol or illegal drugs, being under the influence of alcohol, swearing at a teacher, committing an act of vandalism, any other activity that is an activity for which a principal may suspend a pupil and bullying. Rather than dealing with those issues in school by providing alternative programs that dealt with that type

of behaviour, most schools, through principals by and large—here and there some teachers—decided to suspend students.

I disagreed with that because I always felt it was a mistake to kick students out of the classroom and throw them out into the streets for up to 20 days. What you allowed students to do was roam the streets and get into further damaging behaviour that, rather than correct bad behaviour, would bring bad behaviour back into the school again and again. But as I say, schools felt they had the licence to suspend under a law-and-order kind of government.

Similarly, schools, through principals, were allowed to expel for possessing a weapon—using a weapon to cause or threaten bodily harm, committing physical assault on another person, committing sexual assault, trafficking in weapons and committing robbery. These are serious, serious crimes that are committed against students. This is serious criminal behaviour, no doubt, and principals ought to have that ability—with some discretion, however—to be able to expel students.

But on the whole, most students were expelled. Rather than dealing with why it is the students bring that problem into the school in the first place, we simply expel them. Why? Because under the law-and-order kind of Conservative government we had, principals felt duty-bound to expel. They felt they had the licence to expel. Rather than forcing boards to look at the bill they had, which said you should look at alternative programming—very few boards did.

Yesterday I said it was the Durham board that provided alternative programming; I believe it was the York board. The old Toronto board that I used to be a trustee of allowed for alternative programming to happen in schools. Why? Because there's always a reason students commit certain problems; there's always a reason for bad behaviour. I know it's tough on principals and teachers to deal with that, but it's part of their duty as teachers and principals not just to teach but to help to deal with social problems.

I know it's a burden on the system. I know that teachers are not qualified social workers or psychologists. That's not their job. I understand that. Unfortunately, the job of a teacher today has been expanded to include other skills. You've got to be a social worker from time to time, you've got to be a policeman or policewoman from time to time, you've got to be a psychologist from time to time. Today that's part of the job.

But the government of the day didn't help. When the Minister of Transportation—the current Minister of Transportation—said of the Tories that the zero-tolerance policy was designed to get kids out of the schools, she was right. So the question I have of the Minister of Transportation and many Liberals, including the minister, is, why would it take you so long to deal with it? If the Minister of Transportation said that the zero-tolerance policy was designed to get kids out of the school system, why would you not apply that knowledge, that statement

to your own behaviour and say, "We've got to deal with the zero-tolerance policy. It's hurting our kids"? And why, Minister of Transportation and Minister of Education—both of whom have been trustees with the Toronto board—when you know that we've got to deal with this quickly and today and not some time in the future, would you say this bill comes into effect in 2008?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): So that they can get the programs in place, Rosie. You know that.

Mr. Marchese: Is that right? No, Minister of Education, I say implement today. If York region, under a Conservative regime, could implement programs that worked well, that you are familiar with, because you were a trustee and you knew about these things, if York region could do it under them, most boards could do it under you. You say you're so gentle and nice to them. Surely with all the billions of dollars you're spending, they could be ready today, not in 2008. If there is an urgency to the problem, as the Human Rights Commissioner said there was, why does it take four years, and why does it take yet another year to implement and enforce this bill? Why say to boards, "You don't have to do anything until 2008"? I don't get it.

The Human Rights Commissioner, years and years ago, before the year 2000, interviewed a whole lot of people—parents who had kids in the system. It was a thorough study, in my view. You could say, "Well, it wasn't as thorough as it should be." In my view, it was thorough. The Human Rights Commissioner of the day, Monsieur Norton, said thousands of black students were being discriminated on, thousands of black students were being profiled, thousands of black students were being kicked out, expelled and suspended disproportionately. He urged the government of the day to do a review of the Safe Schools Act, and it was an urging to the current government as well. He said thousands and thousands of students who have a disability—physical, psychological or intellectual—were being suspended and expelled disproportionately. Something is wrong. We should be helping out.

We have known for six, seven years that the zero-tolerance policy has not been working and particularly for two groups: people of colour and students with disabilities. We need to move fast on that. And we waited. Marchese called on this government years and years ago to move quickly to deal with this issue by bringing back discretion instead of zero tolerance. We said this in the year 2000, we said it in 2002 and 2003 and 2004 and 2005. We should bring back discretion instead of zero tolerance and kids getting kicked out. We said to Monsieur Kennedy and then Madame Papatello and now Minister Wynne, "Bring in mandatory alternatives for all suspended and expelled students, as the commissioner said we should do." I called upon the government years and years ago, and now they're bringing back mandatory alternatives for all suspended and expelled students. Now they're bringing back discretion instead of zero tolerance, which is much of what I told the Tories long ago and

much of what I've been pleading with Liberals to do for many, many years. But why does it take so long for the government to get to a position of saying, "Hmm, it makes sense. Why do I have to wait four years to have students continually being suspended and expelled when I can do something today"?

1550

What does the minister of the day do? Well, she commissions a group called the safe schools action team, because the minister and the Liberals say, "We need evidence. We need to study this. It isn't enough that NDP MPP Marchese tells us to do this. It isn't enough that the Human Rights Commissioner tells us to do this. It isn't enough that parents of colour told us, parents whose children have a disability—that's not enough. We need to be much more thorough. We need to pull together a team. We need to pay them well. We need to pay them for a long while to do a long study because we do have money and we can do that."

So the committee was commissioned to review the following: Consistency—

Interjections.

Mr. Marchese: Minister, for your edification or predilection, I'm not sure.

The committee was commissioned to focus on a number of topics. This is very interesting. "Consistency: Data indicated that the safe schools legislation was not being applied consistently across Ontario. The rate of suspensions and expulsions varied widely among schools." Speaker, the reason I find it humorous is because I could have told the minister without having to waste money on a group of people who, with all due respect, are capable, if she had asked me; of course there is no consistency across Ontario. How could there be? There could never be consistency, because each board would apply different rules to their constituencies depending on region, depending on the kind of board it is, the leadership they've got, depending on the kind of principles they've got, depending on the kinds of professional development they do together. Of course, there is no consistency.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I think the honourable member is speaking quite passionately about this legislation and there should be at least a quorum present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Clerk?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Deputy Clerk: Quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The member may now continue.

Mr. Marchese: Thank you, Speaker. I welcome a few more Liberals to the House.

Here's another thing. The safe schools action team was commissioned to review the issue of fairness: "Some groups were seen to be more likely to be suspended or expelled than others." Hmm. "A number of concerns

were raised that the legislation and related school board discipline policies were having a disproportionate impact on racial minorities and disabled students." Hmm.

Isn't that funny? The Human Rights Commissioner said this very thing. I said that very thing. Parents said that very thing—people of colour, parents who have children with disabilities. So we commission this group to review something that we knew, that we know. So we hire this, with all due respect again, select group to write a report about things that we already know. I guess we have a lot of money to dole out and so we can do that.

The other matter of study is discipline. "There was a perception that there should be more judgment used when deciding to suspend or expel a student." Hmm. Isn't that interesting? Marchese said you should use discretion rather than expelling and suspending. Before you do that, perhaps you should look at mitigating circumstances. Perhaps you should look at what else you could do to keep those students in the school and to prevent behaviour from happening again.

So we commissioned, with all due respect again, this group of experts that we have to pay to produce a report on matters on which the human rights commissioner has responded, Marchese has responded and other parents. Further: "Prevention: There was a perception that safe schools legislation focused more on discipline than on preventing behaviours leading to suspensions and expulsions. More than 60 per cent of students who were suspended changed their behaviour and were not suspended again or expelled. However, there was a concern that not enough was being done to prevent the behaviours that led to suspension or expulsion."

Interesting, Mr. Chair—member from Peterborough—these are the four categories that we asked this expert panel to do a review on. You see, I find it amusing. My sense of why the government did that was to stall, delay.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): No.

Mr. Marchese: Yes, delay, stall. It's a technique not to do. "We commission a study for a year, a year and a half or two, and why do we do that? To give us time as a government to think about what we're going to do." So they produce a report that Marchese said you should have done five years ago, that the human rights commissioner said you should have done five years ago, and then I wonder, why do we do these things? How could parents and citizens not become cynical about what politicians and political parties do? It wasn't all that complicated. The government could have been done this years ago. But you know what? Here's my suspicion: The Liberals are afraid of the Conservative Party to a great extent, and let me explain why that is.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): We're dying to know.

Mr. Marchese: Monsieur Levac from Brant might appreciate this, and the member from Mississauga West. They both might appreciate it. He's dying to hear it. The Liberals do not want to be seen as not being tough on crime. They want to be at par with the Tories in this regard. They want to be seen, like the Tories, as being

tough on crime. To deal with the issue of zero tolerance by simply saying, "We are repealing that bill," would put you fine, tough Liberals in a position to be soft. You cannot be seen to be soft. You have to be seen to be tough. So for the last three years what have the Liberals been talking about? Bullying. Why? They need to be seen—Liberals, that is—to be tough. If you're seen to be tough on bullies, you'll create the image that you're like Tories, a tough-on-crime kind of an image. So have the Liberals achieved that? I just don't know that. It's a silly game, I've got to tell you. It's a silly political game: three years, five years of knowing that students with disabilities and students of colour are being suspended and expelled at disproportionate rates—five years of knowing that. The Liberals, in order to keep an image of being tough, have for the last two years, two years and a half, been talking about how tough they are on bullies. And, lo and behold, what do the Liberals do when they produce their bill just last week? They say, "We're going to be tough on cyber-bullying." The focus of the minister was entirely on cyber-bullying, not getting rid of zero tolerance but being tough, again, on bullying—but now a new phenomenon, cyber-bullying, which I support, by the way. Don't misunderstand me.

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Mr. Levac: I wouldn't.

Mr. Marchese: The point is, David Levac from Brant, the minister has to create and maintain this image of, "We've got to be tough" as a way of keeping the old Tories—because John Tory is a nice guy. John Tory is a real nice guy, right? But the other Tories, I've got to tell you, they're really tough, they really are, because they're a carry-over from the old regime. I don't have any illusions about where they stand. John seems to be a nicer man, a nicer guy. But the Liberals need to maintain this image—and, Minister, you are too, by the way. I like you a lot. I just want to put it on the record.

The Liberals need to maintain this image that they too are just like the Tories: Tough. So, Minister, I'm with you on cyber-bullying. I think it causes serious damage, and it does, because when someone can copy an image and send the image, it's hurtful. When someone can write about someone in a very deleterious way and have that e-mail go across the world in seconds, that causes serious damage, and it's mental harm that I believe needs to be stopped, and we need to prevent it. I don't dispute that; I support it.

My point is that it's all about bullying, right? It's that image. Why didn't we focus on the things that we said four years ago we should do? Monsieur Levac, from Brant, you and I both, we've been in the educational system. We know, right? I believe that you, member for Brant, were a good principal; I really do. I really do believe that you would have dealt with a student if there was a problem. You would have used your discretion. You would not have said to some student, "You're gone." My sense of you is that you would deal with the problem and you would do something else: You would probably attempt to understand what problems there were

outside of the classroom that were brought into the classroom. You would do that. I suspect that you would look at what social and economic issues we're dealing with. Does the child come from a background that prepares him or her to bring problems into the classroom? Does the child have a parent who drinks? Is there an alcoholic in that home? Are there two alcoholics in that home? Does that cause problems? Yes, it does. How does it hurt this child? In a very, very bad way. What can I do, as a teacher and principal, to help? "Let me reflect on what I could do" would be your answer. It would be the answer of a principal who really cares, and it would be the answer of a board that really cares.

What do we do when a board understands, a principal understands and a teacher understands that there's a possibility of mental illness, perhaps in the child, perhaps in the home? "Let me deal with that." A principal and a good board would know, "Maybe we've got economic issues in our school. Maybe we've got kids who are very, very poor. Maybe we have children who come in the morning and don't have breakfast." Does that cause social harm? Does that cause intellectual harm? Does that cause bad learning habits? Does it prevent kids from learning? All of that—yes, it does. A good principal, a good teacher and a good board would know that if you've got alcohol spectrum disorder—and 100,000 people suffer from that—that causes harm to the student and to those that he or she could hurt. Alcohol spectrum disorder is serious. Even doctors don't know how to identify it. Teachers don't know how to identify it. What does a teacher automatically do when a student comes from such a background? That student causes harm and doesn't know it. That student doesn't pay attention to the teacher. That student does not take direction from the principal or the teacher. Why? Because they cannot judge their behaviour. They are incapable of knowing they are doing wrong. But what does a teacher do, not knowing? A teacher who doesn't know immediately says, "This kid is so bad and doesn't listen—out you go."

Do we make an effort—as teachers, as principals, as school boards, as governments—to say, "We've got a problem. We've got to help"? We don't. Teachers are not expected to be psychologists; teachers are not expected to be doctors. I understand that. But we all have an obligation, as governments, as boards and as schools, to look at that as a serious issue. We don't do an adequate of doing that.

I sometimes do not blame teachers, and often I need to defend them. They are not required to be the things that I said they should be. In this day and age, a teacher's role has changed. Sadly, most of them—many of them—don't feel they need to be policemen and women, don't feel they need to be social workers or doctors, but they need to be. They need to look at their role in a much broader way.

But teachers need help. They can't do this alone. Principals can't do this alone, and this bill is going to impose more obligations on the principal than ever before. But I see it as a good thing, and I believe we need to support those teachers.

Good principals look at the socio-economic environment and say, "What could we as a school do to help?" Good boards do that as a matter of philosophy and as a matter of principle; some boards do not. I believe that having mandatory, discretionary programs built into a program that a child needs to have is a good thing.

I believe that before expelling a student, the principal needs to do a review, as the bill points out, and if that student needs to be expelled, it needs to go before the board. That puts tremendous pressure on the schools to deal with their problems locally. But as I said, it imposes tremendous pressure on the principal, because the principals have over the years absorbed many more responsibilities than they are capable of dealing with. And so sometimes, some things simply do not get done. This will add an incredible burden on principals.

In the same way, when you have to fire a teacher, it takes two to three years—and the member for Brant would confirm that with me. It takes two to three years to get rid of a bad teacher. The energy it takes from a principal to decide that some teacher is going to go based on incompetence is overwhelming, and that's not the only thing principals do. So now, for every student who gets expelled, they have to have a thorough individual review, and then it goes to the board. Imagine the expectation on the principal now. Can they do it? Will they do it? I don't know. It's going to be tough.

What kinds of alternative programs are we going to provide? We don't know; I don't know. The minister says, "Well, there will be guidelines."

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: I don't, actually, Minister. I really don't. I get worried sometimes.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: But you were a trustee with the Toronto board. You know what they did.

Mr. Marchese: I agree with you. We did good things at the Toronto board. I was proud of the old board, at least, of which I was a member. Things did change after 1990, I must admit, with a few exceptions. And you, minister, would be one of them. I say that seriously.

It is true: The Toronto board used to have great mandatory alternative programs. Maybe the Minister will look at that. I'm not sure.

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I worry, because for the last three and a half years most boards did not provide alternative programs. So I say to myself, okay, why haven't they done that? In a Liberal regime, where the Liberal regime says, "We're friendly. We're nice. We love them. Oh, God, we spend billions of dollars on them," why wouldn't these boards say, "Okay, we're ready to do that, because we've got the right climate, we've got the right government"? Why didn't they do that?

When the minister says, "Marchese, you know that we're going to offer alternative programs and they're likely to be good," I say, hmm, I don't know. And if we have examples of the Toronto board that used to do good alternative programming and if we've got examples of York offering good alternative programming, why can't

we use those as models and say, "We're going to do it today. We're not going to wait until after the election; we're going to do it today"? What do you have to fear except, as you say to me, it takes time? Well, if other boards have done it years ago under a Tory regime, why can't we do it today?

Minister, I've got to tell you, I worry about the fact that you say there's going to be \$23 million for these alternative programs because I just don't know whether the money is real or whether the money is there, or going to be there, or whether that money is going to be taken from another pot and moved around for this. I really am doubtful. I know you have good intentions, but I'm really very doubtful of your government, because I've seen by the evidence that you move money around. And just like Minister Papatello said, we have solved the wage gap that Dr. Rozanski talked about. You know the wage gap that I'm talking about. Rozanski said it's a \$650-million gap between what governments give and what boards get to pay teacher salaries. And that creates a gap.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship): We did.

Mr. Marchese: Minister, you said you did, right? I know. Minister Papatello said she did too. And Minister Wynne says she did too. But here is how you did it. This is why I mistrust you, because the government has—well, let me tell you. This is why I raise the doubts. You have stolen money from two programs: the local priorities amount and the learning opportunities grant.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: I want to hear your argument extended when—are you doing a two-minute response?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I am.

Mr. Marchese: Okay, so we'll hear from the minister.

I'm doubtful because they stole \$500 million from the local priorities amount and the learning opportunities grant, stole that money—remember, these programs deal with kids at risk and all sorts of other local programs. They take that money out of that pot, bring it here, and solve the teacher gap. It's gone. But in doing what I say they've done, they have now created a gap in the local priorities amount and the learning opportunities grant, meaning boards no longer have any flexibility to provide the programming they used to. But the government says, "We solved the gap." You understand. The government is, I must admit, very adroit, very able, very, just to use a simple word, sneaky—that's simple; I think people understand that—in taking money and moving it around. And they call it new money.

I'm afraid the \$23 million is just going to be circulated money. It just moves around. And when we call it new, we can say, "God, we spend billions of dollars, billions," in the same way that the minister said just the other day that school boards and trustees—it's hard to say to them you can't do certain things, that they have the responsibility. If they want to be able to fix schools, repair them, build portables, they can. Now it's okay. And the minister said it's up to the trustees to determine equity. Sorry, government of the day, Minister: It's up to you.

You, government, you, Minister, determine equality among students across the board, across Ontario. It's not trustees who deal with equity issues; it's you. If we do not provide adequate central funding to all of the boards, we will produce inequality throughout Ontario, and that's what you've opened the door to. I find it baffling, incredibly baffling, that you would allow that. Minister Wynne, in this regard I'm a bit puzzled by you, because I didn't expect it from you. I would have expected it from Monsieur Kennedy, Madame Papatello, but not you, because I think you're a little more progressive than they are. In this regard, I believe you're terribly torn. I believe you are conflicted. In the way that you expressed yourself in the Toronto Star article, I believe you are conflicted. It says, "Wynne noted the province has given boards money that allows them to leverage \$4 billion for capital projects, which she called 'a good start.'"

Four billion is hardly a good start. If you actually spent \$4 billion, it would be an end to all of our capital programs; it wouldn't be a good start. The reason why the minister says it's a good start is because the money they claim is going for capital projects is not happening, and that is why the Liberal government, the McGuinty government, is quite happy to say to school boards, "It's okay. You can build whatever school addition you want. You can build portables, you can build classrooms, whatever you like. You can do it now." The private sector can go in, put its name somewhere on some new addition, and it's okay. This opens the door to a two-tier system, as People for Education said the other day. It opens the door for two-tier education. It opens the door for wealthy schools and wealthy boards to do what they want. It opens the door to poor schools not being able to do what they want and what they need. It opens the door for huge inequity. It's inevitable, ineluctably so. And you know this. This is why I know you are conflicted about it. I know that you are.

You've got to be very careful. You're going back to the good old days of 100 years ago, where the well-to-do could get what they wanted, and those others—too bad, so sad. This is a sad development, I need to tell you, in this Legislature today. I am profoundly worried about this new Liberal manoeuvre to deal with the issue of funding. Parents are going beyond the bake sale. Parents are going beyond the skip-a-thon. The bake sale was okay. Even a skip-a-thon was okay. But now you're saying to schools, "You can go out, get private money, and build what you want."

Madam Minister, this is bad. This is really bad. I know that if we had a private conversation, you would agree with me. I know that. I know the member for Brant would agree with me if we had a private conversation. I know that a few other members would agree with me as well.

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): Would you agree with us, Rosie?

Mr. Marchese: I'm disagreeing with you, though.

What's missing in this bill? Yes, they've now brought mandatory alternatives, which I called for five years ago;

discretion instead of zero tolerance, which I called for five years ago. We think that is okay. But if we do not deal with the social and economic issues that students bring into the classroom, we're not going to help a lot of students who come from low-income, troubled families, low-income parents who have difficulties and troubled families as it relates to alcohol, substance abuse, mental illness and very serious economic issues. If we do not deal with that, the policy that you've just brought in with this bill, where you're saying principals can suspend, yes, but if they need to expel, they have to do a thorough review and make recommendations—all that is good and we support it. But I'm telling you, what is missing in your bill is the following, apart from the other issues I raise that are extraneous to the educational system and that impinge on learning in the classroom.

We need the adults we used to have to provide support to many troubled students. Ms. Wynne, the minister, knows that when the Conservatives were in power we lost a lot of people whom she fought to maintain. Community advisers, youth outreach workers, attendance counsellors, social worker positions and psychologists in some places of the province were cut. We hoped the Liberals would restore those programs; they haven't.

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We need youth workers. Ms. Wynne, who came from the Toronto board, knows how helpful they were. We had meetings when the Conservatives, under Mr. Christie, their supervisor, made the cuts to the Toronto board in particular. I was there when she was a trustee, defending the trustees then. Both Liberals and New Democrats and, yes, even many Conservative trustees were defending them when the Conservative government was, through Mr. Christie, firing these people. The youth workers and the students who were affected and beneficiaries of their advice and help told us about how important they were, told us how youth workers were critical in allowing them to stay in the educational system. Youth workers were their connection to a reality that obviously around them did not exist. Youth workers were able to understand their problems, work with their problems and allow them to stay in the system and work them through, but it permitted students to stay in the system. When those youth workers disappeared, were fired, it meant that those students who were troubled, students at risk, had no one to turn to any more. They were abandoned and on their own.

We need youth workers. We need youth counsellors. We need social workers. These are the people who provide social support, mental support, someone who would listen to them, someone who might understand them, someone who might help them and hold them back before they decided that they were going to leave the system.

This is what's missing in this bill. The government might have made reference to them, might have talked about them in a way that would assure me that they're actually doing something to hold these people, but they're not. They didn't say anything. They haven't said

a thing. I worry, as we say that schools must integrate into the regular classroom more and more special education students, that this will create more problems for the regular classroom and the regular teacher. The policy of integration is great; without supports, it is a disaster.

If we do not support that teacher, if we do not have the required educational assistants to help out, if we do not have youth workers, if we do not have social workers, integrating more and more special education students into the regular classroom to save money is going to be a disaster. That's what this government is doing. To save money, we are encouraging more and more students to get into the regular classroom.

I am profoundly worried about this policy direction, and the supports are not there. We have not increased the number of educational assistants. As we entertain this policy of putting more special ed students in the regular classroom, it will hurt the regular student who doesn't have a social or intellectual problem. It will hurt the special-ed kid, who won't have the support from the teacher. It will hurt the teacher, who won't be able to deal with regular students and special education students, and it will hurt the teacher when they have to now absorb more ESL students, more special ed, more split classes. It will hurt everyone. We have more split classes than ever before. Split classes means that you join two grades together, and in some cases three. Imagine bringing two or three grades together at a time when we're integrating more ESL students and more special-ed students. What is a teacher to do? Monsieur Levac, you know that split classes are a serious problem.

Mr. Levac: We've had it for a long time.

Mr. Marchese: You might say we've had it for a long time. It is a growing phenomenon. We are getting more and more split classes. Many teachers are good and some teachers are not so great. Some don't know how to teach the different levels with the different problems that come into their classrooms. I don't blame them. It's a hard job. We're getting more and more of those problems in the classroom.

So I'm saying you're creating more problems for students and you're going to create a lot of problems for the principals who are going to have to deal with the issues of students who are going to be expelled and now have to be sorted out, talked to carefully, using thorough discretion to deal with those problems, and you won't have the people to help: not the educational assistants, not the youth workers, not the social workers, not the psychologists. We are in deep trouble, as a system, and if we're not careful, we're going to encourage more and more students to go to the private system. That's what I'm afraid of.

We need a healthy public system, and we need to fund it properly so parents can feel good and feel they don't have to resort to the option of considering a private school. Most of our students still stay in the public system, and I am profoundly happy about that. Our public system works. We need to make sure it works well, and we need to make sure it works better.

So I'm looking for a commitment from the minister, in her response, to the notion of bringing back—restoring—community advisers, youth counsellors, youth workers and social workers, and increasing the number of educational assistants in order to be able to help prevent problems before they become a problem or a worse problem in our educational system.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I am happy to be able to respond to the member opposite. I have to say that when I was a young mom on the Toronto board, he was a trustee on the Toronto board, and I have a lot of respect for the work he did as a member of that board.

Tempting as it would be to respond to some of the financial issues, where we're trying to have more transparency and the fact that we've invested in more education workers and more teachers in the system, I'm not going to get drawn into those parts of the debate, because I really want to focus on the issues around Bill 212 and around the programs we are putting into our schools and the questions he asked about why it has taken until now.

The reason it has taken until now to get this legislation in place and to move on this is that we really wanted to get it right; we needed to have a conversation. Although I personally have great respect for the member opposite, his opinion really wasn't enough on which to base government policy. We actually needed to talk to people around the province who have been working in the field, who know the impact of the previous government's legislation and who gave us advice and gave the safe schools action team advice on which parts of the legislation needed to be changed and made very clear to us that the programming for those students who were on long-term suspensions and expulsions was an important part of what we needed to put into the policy and into the legislation. The money that is going into the system is for exactly the supports the member opposite is talking about: the human resources to work with those students.

The last thing I would say is on cyber-bullying. I have no intention to set myself or our government up as being tough. What we're doing is drawing on the students in this province, on the expertise in this province, to talk about what the rules should be. The member opposite doesn't know what the rules should be, because he didn't grow up with the technologies our kids are growing up with, and we need to access that information so we can make the right decisions.

1630

Mr. Wilson: Just to respond to the comments from the member for Trinity-Spadina, I think he did a great job and he was very passionate in his one-hour remarks.

Certainly with respect to this legislation, I'm not completely sure what difference it's going to make. You still get expelled for the same reasons as in existing legislation.

Interjection.

Mr. Wilson: Well, you say there's no mandatory expulsion, but it seems to read to our researchers, the

people who are talking to us, that it is kind of mandatory expulsion. There's an interview with the principal and it's unclear what's going to happen after that, other than the kid may get sent to another school nearby.

Anyway, I do like the part about the bullying, cyber-bullying. I agree. I think you alluded to it in your remarks. But I want to say that one thing I do disagree with the member from Trinity–Spadina on is private schools. I have nephews and nieces who went to private school. I have a nephew and niece in Barrie who went to Trinity Christian School. I went to—we didn't call it private school, but certainly the separate school system—St. Paul's school in Alliston, which, by the way, Minister, needs to be fixed. I do petitions on it almost every day in this House.

But today was an unusual day when we had Mr. Fonseca's—

Interjection: Fonseca.

Mr. Wilson:—Fonseca's; sorry—resolution that said that in the opinion of the House the government was—or at least he thought the government was—so committed to public education that they're not going to give one cent to private schools. I just think that's wrong.

Every year I'm delighted to get invited to the convocations at the Christian schools in my riding. I'm always very, very proud of the students. I realize those parents still pay their money to the public or separate education system, really a double tax, because they choose to send their children to faith-based schools. I note that Stephen Alder, for example, was here from the Canadian Jewish Congress today, and as I walked out in the hallway, as thankfully we voted down this resolution that was against private schools this morning, they were certainly very happy that at least the Progressive Conservative Party stood up for them in this province.

Mr. Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to have a comment on the member from Trinity–Spadina.

This morning, I used this little bit of a trick. I have my glass of water here and it's empty, and the other one that I have is full. I see this as full, and, my gosh, look at what we're talking about again. It just happens to be another member of the NDP who sees the glass as empty. This is a full glass of water we're talking about here. Quite frankly, I know he thinks that. I know he realizes that the evolution that has taken place in the last three years is much, much better than what we had to face for the last eight years before we got into power, because what we're talking about here is an evolution, turning the Queen Mary around. Quite frankly, we were headed in a direction that I know he fought and he also knows that I fought and a lot of us in this place fought. As a matter of fact, a lot of us got involved in politics simply because of what we saw happening to the public education system.

Let's be very quick here: Since 2003—and I know the member does his homework, so I want him to check this out—there are 5,000 more EAs in the province than there were before 2003: 5,000 more EAs. Now, the member wants to talk about all the cuts that have been taking place. Let's make sure we're talking about the entire

province of Ontario, because before the funding formula was tweaked and changed and differentiated between where money was spent in the province of Ontario, there were very, very, very rich boards and there were very, very poor boards. I will say this, and I said this from the beginning: I did compliment the Tory government for making that change, to make sure that we spent equal amounts of money across the province of Ontario.

He's talking about social workers and psychiatrists and this worker and that worker. There were an awful lot of boards in the province that had never had one of those people in place. Now we're getting there. We're turning the Queen Mary around, and I think he knows the glass is full.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? Seeing none, the Chair recognizes in response the member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Marchese: The problem I've got with the Liberal way of doing things is that you guys crawl so slowly. Sometimes I think even turtles walk faster.

Member from Brant: 5,000 more EAs? Please. Send me the document, please. Mr. Speaker, are you with us here? The member from Brant said they have 5,000 new—this is additional—EAs. Correcto?

Mr. Levac: More.

Mr. Marchese: More than what?

Mr. Levac: More than 2003.

Mr. Marchese: More than 2003. So every year we saw an increase, not simply what you replaced but in addition to what we had. Is that correct?

Mr. Levac: That's correct.

Mr. Marchese: I need that research.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Some 7,600 more support workers.

Mr. Marchese: I know, but here's the problem: You keep on announcing that you've got thousands of more teachers, you've got thousands of more this and that, and I can never get an answer as to where they are, where they come—

Hon. Ms. Wynne: They're in kindergarten to grade 3 classes.

Mr. Marchese: No, no. Please, send me the documents so that I can table them here.

Mr. Levac: I'll get it.

Mr. Marchese: Are you sure? Before the election?

Mr. Levac: I'll get it next week.

Mr. Marchese: That's what I'm happy to hear.

The minister says that they needed more evidence from people out there before they could change this. I really don't believe they did. They basically returned to a policy we used to have before zero tolerance. Before the imposition of the Safe Schools Act, the authority to suspend a student was limited to principals and the authority to expel was limited to school boards. In both cases, the exercise of that authority was discretionary. That's what we had before. That's what we have now. Did we really need to wait that long? Did we really need to have a group go out and spend money, to pay them to do that and consult? Did we really need to do that? I don't think we needed to wait that long.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Delaney: If there is one topic, if one stands in this Legislature and wishes to debate, in which you know you're going to be listened to carefully and in which you know you're going to have a range of expertise among a wide variety of people to comment informatively, it's got to be education.

I'm standing here on a Thursday afternoon, where the week is winding down and with fairly few members in the House, I can look across and see a Minister of Education who was a very successful trustee, a minister who was a board CFO, a school principal, and another trustee. And I was a part-time sessional instructor at Ryerson and taught business statistics, Internet marketing and planning and budgeting. So I am in august company.

But this is about safe schools. I think many of us can think back on the safety aspect of a school and think of somebody who at some point said to us, particularly rudely, something like, "You're stepping on my side of the hall, jerk-wadder," or somebody who said, "Yo, I need my algebra homework by tomorrow or maybe somebody's going to get hurt."

Sometimes when we talk about safe schools, the things that we're addressing are blatant, and sometimes it's an undertone. It might be a withering look, it might be an elbow in the hallway. After all, I'm a guy, and I'm told that the really nasty stuff happens with the opposite sex.

So you sit in class and worry instead of paying attention and learning something. You toss sleeplessly in bed and you show up to school tired. You get on the school bus and you wonder who's safe to sit beside. And day after grinding day, you hate to get up in the morning and you dread going to school. That's not the kind of Ontario that we're here to build. That's not an education; that's a grind.

That's why Ontario needs to do something about it. That's why Ontario needs safe schools. That's what this debate is all about. It's a debate about safe schools and how that links to student achievement. It's important enough for Ontario to put \$31 million on the table in this fiscal year, and to say, "That's going to make our schools safer."

This bill is about legislative amendments that implement provisions of the Education Act. Those provisions would more effectively combine discipline with opportunities for students to continue their education. Those are the provisions that would say, "You can make a mistake and you can come back."

Student safety is not just the goal and not just a vision; student safety is the priority for Ontario and all of its education stakeholders.

I've talked about how it feels to be bullied and how much it truly is awful. This legislation also addresses the inappropriate behaviour that causes this kind of anguish.

1640

We have a champion in this Legislature in MPP Liz Sandals from Guelph-Wellington. She has a solid background in education. It was she who took the time to

consult her peers, parents, educators and also to follow up on the recommendations made by the safe schools action team.

What difference is a safe school going to make? It's going to keep kids in school. If you keep kids in school, then you go a big step toward addressing one of the real problems not only in this country but in every country, and that is that more than four out of five inmates in Canada's prison population are people who never completed high school.

There will always be dropouts who make good. Bill Gates did. In Mississauga, Iggy Kanefff did. Some of our outstanding citizens in every age started with little, worked hard all their life, got little formal training, and they did well. But it's not the way to bet. Mess up in school and you're much more likely to be on your way to a desperate, hand-to-mouth existence, with few resources and even less hope. And that's what this bill is about. It's about making sure that the resource is there, it's about being able to get up when you fall, and mostly it's about hope.

There are a lot of people who share that vision. I'd like to quote someone whom I've gotten to know very well: Emily Noble, the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. She says, "We are also pleased to see that the 'zero tolerance' philosophy has been rejected by the government.... Proposing a progressive discipline approach to address inappropriate student behaviour and providing programs for expelled students and those on long-term suspensions are progressive changes that allow students to continue their education while taking responsibility for their actions."

That last part is very important—the notion of taking responsibility for your actions. As you grow up and grow older, realizing that part of the act of becoming an adult is taking responsibility for your actions is one of the real strong points in this bill. It's one of the things that's going to really make a difference.

Among all of those who enter what's called a strict discipline program, more than three out of four exit for reasons that can be described as positive, including two thirds who achieve their goal, which is reintegration back into a regular school setting or obtaining their Ontario secondary school diploma while they're in the program. This is all about finishing what you've started. If you don't have that secondary school diploma, your visions and your horizons are going to be a lot, lot lower, and life will be colder and more brutal than it will be for your friends who stayed in school.

Many of our friends on the other side of the floor think similarly. Let me quote my colleague the member for Leeds-Grenville, who said, and I'll use his words: "I think if you have an appropriate locale for anyone who's ... consistently causing problems in the school system, you just don't want them out on the street." That's the main challenge, and that's the main outcome with this bill.

So among those protective factors that can assist youth in staying in school, these include alternative schools,

caring and supportive teachers, school climates that are caring and flexible, as well as proactive supports to students to remain in school. We don't want to chase you out; we want to chase you in. We want to engage you. We want you finding a way to learn. It doesn't matter how you do it; it just matters that you do.

Let's have another quote here. I'm going to quote Rick Johnson, the president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. When dealing with what he saw in this bill, he said, and I'll use his words: "The proposed legislative changes strike a responsible balance. They set out strong consequences for unacceptable behaviour and, at the same time, put in place alternative programs that allow students to continue their education while learning accountability for their behaviour. The proposed legislation supports boards in building more creative and flexible approaches to addressing the complex issue of discipline." I couldn't say it better.

Earlier, my colleague from Trinity–Spadina, a man who is passionate about education—we may not always agree, but no one will ever question his passion and, I might say, his integrity. He did, however, err very slightly, so let's correct the record here. There are not more portables since 2003, something that out in the city of Mississauga I'm pretty sensitive about. In fact, there are 1,156 fewer portables since 2003.

On fixing schools, there are 6,771 repairs completed or underway since Good Places to Learn was initiated. I know that in the city of Mississauga I've walked into a lot of those schools and I've seen the difference that they can make in the learning environment and how buildings in which the plant itself may be old can be rejuvenated and given a second life and brought up to standard and made to be places that kids enjoy coming to learn.

In my final moments, I'd just like to provide a little outline of some of the other improvements in this bill.

Boards will be provided with \$20 million for supports to address inappropriate behaviour, including supports for all expelled students and students serving long-term suspensions. In other words, programs would be designed to address the causes of the problem behaviour and allow them to continue learning outside the classroom.

Speaker, I could go on, but I am running out of time. I thank you for your indulgence, and I look forward to voting for this bill.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I'm pleased to have a chance to respond briefly to the member for Mississauga West. He offered his opinion of Bill 212, of course, this afternoon and spoke in support of it and spoke in support of the process and the policy.

I was very pleased to be here this afternoon when our party's critic for education, the member for Oak Ridges, took an hour to respond to the minister and the minister's parliamentary assistant and their presentation on this bill. Our critic offered the perspective of our party, which was to suggest that we will support the intent of this bill and that we hope it will be sent to committee so that there

will be an opportunity for some further discussion. I realize that there has been a great deal of consultation, and the member for Mississauga West talked about that.

But I think I would also have to question and raise the issue that was raised earlier by the member for Trinity–Spadina: Why did it take more than three and a half years for this government to bring forward this legislation? When you look at the priorities of the government and when you look at the last three and a half years, some of the bills that were brought forward ahead of this would have to be considered very questionable priorities, perhaps urgent political matters the government wanted to attend to at that point in time. But given the fact that we're very much in the lead-up to the election, this bill seems to be rather late in the four-year cycle. I would ask the member for Mississauga West, would he agree that it's taken a long time to get this bill before the House, and would he in fact suggest that this bill should have been a higher priority on the government's agenda when they won the election in 2003? I would ask him if he would agree that this bill should have been a higher priority or not.

Mr. Marchese: I have just a few brief comments to the member for Mississauga West.

He made the point that this bill is about forcing students to take responsibility for their actions. Actually, this bill is about forcing teachers and principals to help students take responsibility for their actions. Without teachers and principals helping those students, in most cases, some of those students can't do it on their own. They need help. Most students don't on their own decide, "I'm just going to go cause havoc today." Some do, but most have a reason. The reason is connected to some causal thing that forces them to do that. It's our job as a system to help. If we help them and we correct that behaviour and that misbehaviour is not repeated, we help that student, we help the school, we help everyone—we help society. So I wanted to simply add that to your comment.

1650

To correct your record a little bit, your claim is that you put so much money into capital projects. Let me explain why that is not accurate. The Tories did a study in 2002 and said you should spend \$4.2 billion. Minister Kennedy said three years ago that he was putting aside \$275 million to leverage \$4 billion of capital projects. The first phase was supposed to be \$75 million. You haven't even completed your first phase. You didn't even spend more than \$25 million. Your \$75 million would have generated \$1.2 billion worth of capital expenses, but you haven't even spent \$25 million, so far behind are you. That's how bad it is.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: The member for Mississauga West has painted a picture of the pain of a victim of bullying, and I think it's really important that we all pay attention to that, because the reason that we need to change this legislation and the reason that we need to update the concepts in it are to do with those individual children that the member for Mississauga West was talking about. We

can't afford to ignore the fact that there are kids who are suffering in our schools because of the behaviours of other students, and we need to make sure that supports are in place for those kids. So the addition of bullying as an infraction that has to be looked at very seriously and for which suspension must be considered is absolutely a move in the right direction. It has nothing to do with a façade of political toughness; it has to do with the reality that kids in school need to take this seriously.

What we did before we brought in the legislation was, we put a whole anti-bullying strategy in place. We put money in the system, and resources for schools to start training their teachers and the kids in the schools about what bullying is. We put supports in place for the victims of bullies and the bystanders, because bullying is a very particular phenomenon where there's a role for the bully, there's a role for the victim, but there's also a role for bystanders, and the community needs to understand—by that, I mean the other kids in the playground need to understand—what's going on.

I just want to make a quick point about the member for Trinity–Spadina's issue around the capital that we've put into the system. The reality is that boards have got money to spend. There are over 6,000 projects going on around the province. The fact is that the boards haven't been able to spend all the money fast enough. That's what we know. The money is there. They're working on it, they're working to get that work done, and the schools are in much better shape than they were in 2003.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments?

Seeing none, the Chair recognizes, in response, the member for Mississauga West.

Mr. Delaney: Thank you again, Speaker. Quite often the responses are not so much in accord as they are today.

To my colleague from Waterloo–Wellington, a gentleman whom I always enjoy following in debate—and it's a privilege to have him follow me—we'll take your support any way you choose to express it, and we thank you. With regard to some of the points he raised, the “could have,” the “should have,” or the “would have” aside, it's here, it's now; let's vote for it.

To my colleague from Trinity–Spadina—this is easy—I'll take his point that the emphasis is on helping teachers, principals and parents correct student behaviour; fine. When he talked about capital projects, I can talk about capital projects, because I've been in them, and I've been in them talking to the students in places like Ray Underhill in Streetsville, like Vista Heights, where I've looked at the difference in the facilities between the time that I first went in there in 2003 and the time that I last went in there several weeks ago. If somebody says we're not moving on capital projects, I respectfully beg to disagree. I can see them. They are there in my board, and I'm proud of them.

To the Minister of Education, your sentiments echo the many meetings that I've had with parents who have come to see me. Our focus has always been and will

always continue to be the children who are our future. Alberta has oil; we have the grey matter in the generation of the children to follow us, and it's our challenge to take that grey matter and turn it into the wealth, the prosperity, the hope, the vision and the future of the province of Ontario, the place that we're all so proud to call home.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for further debate. The Chair recognizes the esteemed member from Waterloo–Wellington.

Mr. Arnott: I thank Mr. Speaker for that characterization. I appreciate that, and I'm pleased to have the chance to speak briefly on Bill 212, An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety. This bill was introduced in this Legislature fairly recently, on April 17, which is just a few days ago, and second reading debate commenced yesterday. I was pleased to be present in the House to hear much of that debate. I heard the Minister of Education; the minister's parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph–Wellington; the member for Oak Ridges, who, as I said earlier this afternoon, serves as our party's education critic; and I heard part of the leadoff speech from the member for Trinity–Spadina, the NDP education critic amongst other critic responsibilities.

I actually feel something like what the NDP members feel every day. I'm doing triple or quadruple duty today. I'm supposed to be in a standing committee right now, the finance committee that's sitting, but we are a bit short-handed this afternoon, so I have the chance to be in the chamber right now to speak to this particular piece of legislation.

I come to this debate as a member of the Legislature who has been privileged to serve here now for 17 years, and I'm very honoured to do so. I come to this debate as the spouse of a teacher. My wife, Lisa, has taught in the public system for approximately 20 years. It's hard to believe, but that's true. She currently teaches at James McQueen Public School in Fergus. We are blessed with three young boys, who are in the public system. My son Jack is almost 12, my son Phillip is almost 10 and my son Dean is eight years old, all of them in the public school system. So I come to this debate as a legislator, as the spouse of a teacher and as a father and a parent who cares about the education system and has always been supportive of the public system of education.

When I think back through the years, I've had the opportunity to raise many education issues in the Legislature. There was even a time when the teachers' federations used to come to me asking for my assistance on issues. I hope that in the future that opportunity will exist for me again, because I think that the teachers' federations and the teachers have, obviously, a great deal to say about these issues and that we should be listening to the front-line teachers with respect to education issues because of the fact that by virtue of their position they have a great deal to offer us in terms of advice. I would hope that we can avail ourselves of those opportunities in the future.

I know that we had some difficult years when our party was in government with respect to working with the teachers' federations. But from my perspective, my door was always open to the teachers' federation representatives, and it still is. Again, it's my hope that if we do form the government again, a new relationship can be forged that is mutually beneficial. From my perspective, that's my hope and my objective.

The context of this debate, of course: We are now past the midway point of the third year of the government's mandate. In six months' time, as a matter of fact—it's hard to believe—the election will be over, the signs will be down and a new government will probably be in a transition period. It's our hope that John Tory becomes the next Premier of Ontario, but that's a subject that we won't get unanimous consent on right now in this House. But there will be a new government no matter what, and we look forward to that opportunity and hope to be in a position to form the government at that time and demonstrate new leadership in this province.

Again, when you look at the timing of this piece of legislation, when you consider that more than three and a half years have passed since the election of 2003, we still have to raise again and question the priorities of this government. They would have us believe today that this is a high priority of their government, yet it took them more than three and a half years to bring the legislation forward.

When I look at the issue of safe schools, I believe that whatever we do as a province and whatever we do as a Legislature, whatever the government does, should be guided by five principles. The first principle, I would suggest, should be that our schools must be made as safe as possible for our students. That goes without saying. I think there's general agreement in the House that that's an important principle that must guide any discussion of safe schools. Our students need and deserve a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning. Obviously, we have to ensure that the classroom environment allows for learning to take place. It follows, I guess, that destructive influences in our classrooms need to be addressed and overcome; otherwise, learning suffers.

Another important principle that needs to guide our actions in this respect is the fact that discipline is necessary in every classroom. All students need to understand that inappropriate behaviour will have consequences, including the withdrawal of privileges that they might value, and that positive behaviour, on the other hand, will be rewarded and appreciated.

1700

Another point that needs to be brought to the attention of the House with respect to principles in this regard is the need for an acknowledgement that bullying is a serious problem and it needs to be confronted.

I had the opportunity for approximately a year to serve in this Legislature as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education. My colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo served as the Minister of Education in the last year of the Ernie Eves government. The issue

of the Safe Schools Act was something that we were working on even at that time. We knew that the Safe Schools Act, having been in place for approximately a year, needed to be carefully monitored and closely followed to ensure that its objectives were being met and that if there were any problems or issues that needed to be addressed, we should do that.

Listening to the member for Oak Ridges yesterday talk about the fact that every piece of legislation is, in effect, a work in progress—many of these issues have to be revisited constantly so as to ensure that the stated objectives of the legislation, as they were originally laid out and prescribed, are being met. If they're not, we have to accept that and bring forward legislation that corrects those problems.

I want to raise the question as to whether or not Bill 212 adheres to the five principles that I talked about, and raise that as a question. Over the course of this debate we'll have an opportunity to hear from more members, and I would hope that those issues will be addressed and answered.

That this bill was the subject of considerable consultation, obviously. I look at the list of people who participated on the safe schools action team, which was headed up by the parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph–Wellington. Also participating in that group were people like Dr. Debra Pepler, who is a professor of psychology at York University and a senior associate scientist at the Hospital for Sick Children, someone who brought a great deal, I'm sure, to the discussions; Mr. Stu Auty, the president of the Canadian Safe Schools Network, who is a noted expert on these issues and the issues of bullying—I've met Mr. Auty in the past and I'm pleased that he was participating in this process; Ray Hughes, the national education coordinator, Fourth R Project, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Centre for Prevention Science—obviously a professional who would have brought a great deal to the discussions as well; Dr. Inez Elliston, member of the board of directors of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation; and Lynn Ziraldo, the executive director of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, York region, and former chair of the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education.

I would like to express my appreciation to the individuals who served on the safe schools action team. I think they're all excellent people who worked, I'm sure, very, very hard, because when you look at the months of consultation that went into this process, the number of communities that were visited and the number of hours that must have been put into the consultation, obviously a great deal of work was done.

I want to express, on behalf of our caucus, and reiterate the position that we have taken as a caucus with respect to Bill 212. We have said that this bill is long on rhetoric and short on substance. On the one hand, the education minister has said that the bill would end mandatory suspensions, yet we're advised that the bill makes some mandatory suspensions for the same list of activities as was the case in the previous bill.

The minister apparently stated during her media conference when this bill was announced that alternative programs for suspended and expelled students would be voluntary, but the bill states that they would actually be mandatory.

Our caucus has said that we support the appropriate supports for students together with resources to schools to assist students facing challenges, and this must be implemented. However, apparently not one cent of the \$31 million that's committed in the education minister's announcement goes towards these programs that would help students.

The other big concern we have that we need to put forward and I hope the government will acknowledge and respond to is that the Ontario Principals' Council's safety concerns in our schools have not been addressed. There's an issue regarding the lack of supervision created by the last contract that was signed with teachers, in which supervision minutes were significantly reduced. I know that most members of the House would have been visited by members of the Ontario Principals' Council a few weeks ago when they were here, and I certainly appreciated the advice I received from the principals. Their advice, I would suggest, would be advice that we should listen to and not dismiss. Each principal is the leader in their school and obviously they've got a great deal to say about this issue too, and we would want to listen to what they have to say.

Thinking about what happened yesterday with respect to the comments by the member for Oak Ridges, I thought he was absolutely right when he made reference to the fact that when we brought forward the original Safe Schools Act—as the provincial Progressive Conservative Party and as the government of the day—we were endeavouring “to provide a safe environment within our schools; second, to provide the necessary supports to teachers, principals and administrators within our school system to be able to deal with the challenges of supervision, to be able to deal with the challenges of students who were creating problems within the school environment because of their behaviour; and the intent of providing alternative programs for those students who were unable to function within the normal classroom environment and for whom a very express provision was being made through that legislation and through the corollary announcements relating to alternative programs of the day.”

That was the stated intent of the government when the Safe Schools Act was brought forward. Again, I think all of those expressed intentions were good ones, and we were trying to respond to issues that were being brought forward to our attention at that time. I do recall speaking to a number of teachers who had felt that discipline in the classroom was a huge problem, that their hands were tied, in many respects, in terms of dealing with some of the disruptions that they wanted to address so as to ensure that the other students in the classroom would be in an environment that was conducive to learning, as opposed to constant disruptions.

I know the member for Oak Ridges has said that all legislation—most legislation—is in fact a work in progress, and I would agree and concur with that. From time to time, there need be changes and adjustments. Certainly, we're not prepared to stand here and suggest that the Safe Schools Act as we presented it at the time was perfect and that it doesn't need a change in 2007, because evidently there need to be revisions.

The member for Oak Ridges also pointed out that there were 152,626 students suspended in 2005, or 7.2% of the entire student population, which is a significant number of students, obviously. But he talked about the fact that 18% of that number were special-needs kids, and that we needed to ensure that for these students—who were being suspended, in some cases, perhaps based on questionable situations—supports were there to ensure that they would get the education they deserved so that they could reach their full potential. I would certainly concur with that.

If we go back to the intent of the bill, Bill 212, we see that “the bill repeals sections 306 to 311 of the Education Act and replaces them with new provisions that substantially alter part XIII of the act with respect to the suspension and expulsion of pupils.

“If a pupil engages in an activity set out in new section 306, a principal may suspend the pupil for up to 20 days. The list of activities mirrors the list in old section 306, with the addition of bullying. Beginning in February 2008, the principal will be required to assign a pupil suspended under the section to a program for suspended pupils provided by the board. A suspension imposed under new section 306 can be appealed to the board in accordance with new section 309. On an appeal, the board either confirms the suspension, reduces the length of the suspension or quashes the suspension.”

The bill also provides for the fact that “if a pupil engages in an activity set out in new section 310, a principal must suspend the pupil for up to 20 days. The list of activities mirrors the list in old section 309. Following his or her suspension of a pupil under new section 310, the principal must promptly conduct an investigation, as required under new section 311.1, to determine whether to recommend to that board that the pupil be expelled.”

That is part of the explanatory note which sets out the intent of this bill and allows for us to look at the changes the government is proposing.

1710

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to point out as well some of the additional comments that were made by our party's critic when he led off in his speech yesterday afternoon. He spoke of the need to ensure that situations like the tragedy that took place a few years ago with a 16-year-old student named Andrew Stewart would never be repeated. He reminded us that Andrew Stewart lost his life tragically, defending a friend against a gang of thugs just steps from East York Collegiate, where Andrew was a student.

Interruption.

Mr. Arnott: I hope someone will answer the telephone.

Mr. Wilson: Some group wondering where their slush fund money is.

Mr. Arnott: Well, the member for Simcoe–Grey has talked about the behaviour that took place in the House this afternoon. Most of the members who are here now would probably agree that in the behaviour that took place in the House this afternoon, we were not at our finest moment as a Legislature. I think you see some of the behaviour—when I look at it from where I sit in the Legislature and I hear the comments of some of the cabinet ministers, and you think of the time that we've served here and the behaviour that's taken place in this Legislature, again, in particular, cabinet ministers have been some of the worst-behaved members during question period in the last three or four weeks. That's my perspective from sitting here, and I think most objective members—perhaps the Liberal rump would see that as well. It's most unfortunate and surprising when we're talking about safe schools. You think of the students who saw the behaviour in the House today and how they would respond to it. We talk about discipline. We talk about, in the context of this bill, behaviour in the classroom. Certainly behaviour in the Legislature leaves a lot to be desired at times. I think you would have to expect that the cabinet ministers would show a high standard of decorum because of the virtue of their office and representing the ministries that they do and the opportunity and the serious responsibilities that they carry. It's most unfortunate that in many cases their behaviour leaves something to be desired.

Returning to Bill 212, I want to suggest that we have to ensure that this bill goes to committee. Even though we support it in principle, as the member for Oak Ridges said, and I think most of the members from our caucus will concur with that, the committee process is an important one whereby public hearings can take place and further public discussion by experts on this issue and other educational matters can be brought forward. It gives us an opportunity, at committee, to bring forward amendments and suggestions and changes and further refinements to improve the bill. I would suggest that and would hope the government is willing and prepared to send this bill to a committee.

I realize that we're getting near the end of the spring sitting of the Legislature. It would appear that the government is more and more employing time allocation motions in order to try to expedite the flow of legislation. It's certainly a rumour within this place that perhaps we won't continue to sit right up until the end of June, as we normally would. We have a constituency week break in late May and we would expect to be back here in June. I certainly would expect to and would hope to have the opportunity to continue to do the work of this Legislature and this provincial Parliament so as to ensure that the government is held to account. I would hope the government is not contemplating shutting that down. I wouldn't be surprised if there are some backroom advisers in the Premier's office and perhaps their campaign team who are encouraging the Premier right now to

shut the House down as soon as possible because of the fact that the question periods, day after day, are yielding the deficiencies and the drawbacks of the government and demonstrating that to the people through the media. I'm sure that those discussions are taking place, but I would caution the government not to do that, obviously, because if they expect to go to the people in the summer months and the month of September asking for another mandate from the people of Ontario and they aren't even prepared to finish out the existing one, I think the people of Ontario will respond in a way that will surprise some of them.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It seems to me that the topic under discussion is Bill 212, and that doesn't seem to be what the member opposite is speaking to.

The Acting Speaker: The member can consider that, because we're debating the bill.

Mr. Arnott: I'm glad to catch the attention of the Minister of Education. I hope she's not one of the ones who are in fact advocating within the government to shut the House down sooner. I'm not sure if the government is prepared to time-allocate this bill in order to ensure that it gets through before the May 24 weekend or what, but I would suggest again that it's important that we have the opportunity, as a Legislature, to do our work in the month of June and hold this government to account.

So I appreciate your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for hearing me on Bill 212.

The Acting Speaker: Time for questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I had an opportunity to comment briefly on this bill a few days ago, and wanted to say that in terms of hearing some of the debate earlier, some of the comments from my colleague Rosario Marchese, I can see where this bill, which essentially takes us back to the situation we were in before the Safe Schools Act, before the zero tolerance—there are elements here that are simply common sense. Frankly, one has to ask, if they're simply common sense, why they weren't implemented a number of years ago, why it took this government almost to the end of its term to actually deal with a problem that was identified before 2003.

We knew what the problem was. We have an expulsion of disabled students, we have an expulsion of racial minorities, far in excess of their numbers. We have social problems in our schools that can't be dealt with simply with suspension or expulsion. We take the problem, we move it out of the classroom, we put it on to the street, but the problem continues. This bill, notwithstanding comments to the contrary, is not going to solve those larger problems. It will be a mechanism that will allow principals to intervene for brief periods to move problem students out of that school. The expulsions are suspended. Essentially now a principal has to go to the board of education to get an expulsion. In practical terms, that will happen far less frequently simply because it's so much more of a problem to do. But when you actually

get down to the heart of it, unless this government deals with the elements that drive the destructive behaviour, this bill will not deal with it.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I'm happy to respond to the member for Waterloo–Wellington's comments. I think, given the debate in the House today, I would expect all-party support for this bill when it comes to the vote. Certainly the member for Waterloo–Wellington was back-peddalling very quickly on the legislation that his party had put in place.

The argument about the timing of this bill: You know, we've had a very busy legislative agenda. We have been a very activist government. I think that with any legislation that we've brought forward in the last few months of this year, we might have said, "Well, why so late?" The fact is, we've been busy since we came to office in 2003. This has been a priority. The fact is that if the party that the member for Waterloo–Wellington is part of had done the kind of consultation that we did with the safe schools action team, then the legislation would not have been such a mess to start out with. What we had to do is to unravel the mistakes that were made. Having said that, the way we do business is that we go out to people who are experts in the field, people who are in the field doing the work in our schools, and we ask them what the impact of the legislation has been, where they think we should go, and we've worked that into our response in terms of the legislation.

On the issue of money for the programs, the member suggested that there isn't money for the programs. That's just not the case: \$23 million of the \$31 million is going to programs for students which were not required by the previous government in the legislation. That's why we've put that money in place.

As far as the mandatory suspensions and mandatory expulsions, there are no more mandatory expulsions, and the mandatory suspensions are for a very small number of serious incidents for which then there is a consideration of an expulsion. We really have moved away from that very flawed notion of zero tolerance to a Liberal concept of—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The Chair recognizes the member from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to join in the debate today and follow the member from Waterloo–Wellington, who has three boys of his own and I'm sure knows the education system quite well and the challenges that—

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I have three too, Laurie.

Ms. Scott: The Minister of Education says she has three, too, so we have lots of experienced input. Everybody's got their hands up. This is good.

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The member for Waterloo–Wellington had to go to committee, so I apologize that he couldn't stay here for his last two minutes to wrap up his comments, but I'm sure he'll read the Hansard and consider the feedback he's been given on Bill 212.

My colleague the member from Oak Ridges—and our critic for education—delivered a very good presentation yesterday in response to the bill. Certainly we are supportive in principle and we appreciate the consultation that was done on this bill. There were some concerns brought forward, but I know we'll be going to committee, I think, with this bill. Am I getting the nod that we're going to committee with this bill?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Absolutely.

Ms. Scott: Okay, just to hear some concerns, to make sure that we get the process right.

Certainly we're all supportive of any measures to promote school safety and also to provide safe environments. I know there have been alternative programs that I've had the opportunity to visit at the schools—I have two school boards in my riding—and the very creativity that exists within that school board and with the teachers to deliver alternative programs to some of the children who need that extra assistance and for whom the classroom's just not the right space.

My brother is a teacher who teaches virtual learning. That has been an excellent tool that has been offered to children and students, for whatever reasons, and it has been involved in the adult education programs that exist in the Trillium Lakelands District School Board.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to the bill and apologize that the member from Waterloo–Wellington did have to go to committee.

Mr. Levac: I'd love to have an opportunity to continue to talk about the bill. One of the things I forgot to do, and I should have done, is to thank the minister for actually changing and correcting and improving the situation with our kids. I was a principal during the time period in which this draconian kind of attitude came in about kids. It was basically, "If they step out of line, throw them out," and for 25 years, I wanted them in. I spent all my time trying to make sure they understood that staying in was the answer.

What we've got now is somebody who's turning that ship around, and we should be sitting back and—I'm faintly hearing from both parties that they are begrudgingly saying, "This is the right direction we want to go, but you're all wrong." I just can't understand the logic, but like I said before, that's the empty glass we're hearing in a lot of the talk over there, and I prefer the full glass.

Let me tell you something very specific about some of the things that the very creative principals have been doing across this province. Contrary to a lot of talk over there that the principals don't know what they're doing, they're the ones who have been coming up with some of these really creative ideas to keep kids in schools. They're the ones who actually visit the homes. I know. A lot of my friends are principals. They actually get out of the office and visit the home to say, "How can we help? What can we do?" They're reaching out. They're telling them that we believe, strongly and firmly—and that's the message about the full glass, that every single kid in this

province deserves a chance. That's what we're talking about.

Are there students who make it very difficult for teachers and principals and their own parents? Sure, there are students like that out there, and we need to deal with them. We need to suspend them and we need to expel them. But what we're trying to say is, we're not giving up on them. How old are these kids? They're 14, 15, 16 years old, and we're saying, "We're going to give up on you"?

I thank you, Minister, for having a lot of faith in our kids. I know they're going to get the message. We're getting everybody onside, and we're going to have a better system for it.

The Acting Speaker: Time for a response. Seeing none, the Chair recognizes the member from Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Tabuns: I had thought there would be one more comment from the opposition benches.

As my colleague the critic for education, Rosario Marchese, said, when the Safe Schools Act came in proposing zero tolerance, our party opposed that bill because we knew it would result in what we see today, and that is that young people, children, who are problems, who come from problematic backgrounds, would be expelled onto the streets where the problems they had would continue to manifest themselves, would continue to cause problems for society as a whole.

That was something that was recognized by the Liberals when they were in opposition and something they talked about in the last election, something they said they were going to take action on. It's four years later, almost time for another election, and finally there's legislation before us. It's an awful long wait to see action on a problem that is broadly recognized, broadly understood and, frankly, a problem where, in a number of school boards—and I mean school boards in York and the city of Toronto—action was taken and a model was available that the government could simply have looked at, brought forward in legislation and implemented years ago. That would have made a lot more sense, because we're going to continue to see students expelled without the programs being in place to look after them. We've gone through a number of years of it. Now, at this very late date, we're seeing action.

We know that previously principals felt they had a licence to suspend. There's no question that there are circumstances where, for the safety of children in the classroom, principals should exercise that power. But for the safety of the children who are suspended or expelled and for the safety of society as a whole, there was not the safety net, the backup programs that would actually make a difference. Thus, we had an approach to education, an approach to our young people, that exacerbated the problems.

What we see now is principals being given the power to suspend on their own, which we have no opposition to, and the power of expulsion being put in the hands of boards—appropriate enough. But the change that needs

to come in terms of supporting those students, making sure the programs are there for them so that the social problems that they're already wrestling with which cause destructive behaviour—those programs won't be required until 2008. I don't see why we waited all these almost four years and why this government is continuing to put the resolution, this solution approach, off into the future.

We all know that if children come in hungry, they are not going to learn well. If they don't learn well, if they're bored, if they're restless, they'll get in trouble with other students, they'll get in trouble with their teachers, and then the provisions of this act will come into effect. That's far down the road—very far down the road.

We've had debate in this chamber about the national child benefit, the one that's being clawed back by this government and will be clawed back for a number of years to come, so that children who are hungry today because the money they should have had in their household so they can eat properly will still not be with them. We know that if kids are hungry, they won't learn well; we know that they'll be disruptive. We also know that if their housing circumstances are poor, if their lives are chaotic, if their parents' lives are chaotic, that will impact on, will affect, the way they act in school.

I remember, a number of years ago, reading statistics about academic performance in American cities and finding that children who lived in public housing in the United States, as poor as that housing generally is, as problematic as that housing generally is, had higher academic performance levels than poor children living in private housing because, notwithstanding all the difficulties they faced, at least there was the stability of knowing that they had a landlord who was not going to be trying to force them out for speculative interest and, generally speaking, because their rent was subsidized so that their families could better afford making sure that they had a roof over their heads.

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We have tens of thousands of people on the waiting lists for affordable housing in this province, and we're seeing, at best, an anemic effort on the part of the government to resolve that problem. The underlying forces and dynamics that drive destructive behaviour in the schools are there, they're continuing to fester and grow, and at the same time we're told that these problems will be dealt with by having this bill brought forward. I don't oppose the bill. What I do say, though, is that if you don't have a concerted effort to deal with all those other problems, then you don't get rid of the problem at hand; you simply move it around.

I had an opportunity the other evening to be at a meeting in my riding talking about youth crime and youth security. Interestingly enough, there were two young men there. One, Kevin, who's a youth worker working on the east side of Woodbine Avenue, did a lot of work with kids who weren't doing well. One of the young men he brought with him had grown up in very difficult times in Regent Park and talked about the forces that were at work on him and drew him briefly, but others perman-

ently, into a style of living that took them out of school, that took them into destructive behaviour.

One of the things that drug dealers will do in places like Regent Park or in other neighbourhoods in this city, in this province, where people are disadvantaged, is ask kids to go to the store and buy them something and keep the change. This young man was quite insightful. He said what happens is that these dealers are looking to take advantage of these kids, to build a debt of gratitude towards them, the dealers, so that over time they can introduce more and more tasks and draw those kids in.

This young man was saying to me, when he was first asked by a dealer to go to a store and buy something and keep the change, he was astounded at the fact that he had money to actually buy something on the shelves. This was a young man who didn't get an allowance, who came from a household with no money, and so he was extremely vulnerable to the temptation offered by that drug dealer. The drug dealers do more than that. They see that, as this young man said, your shoes are shot, that they're gone, and he's very happy to buy you a pair of shoes—the best—so that the bond of friendship and that debt of gratitude grow, and so one day it's not going to buy groceries in the store; it's a question of holding a bag of something—not specified, just holding a bag of something—while the drug dealer moves on.

We are not investing adequately in our youth. They are open to and susceptible to these programs of recruitment, and when we don't deal with poverty in our society, then we get the sorts of destructive behaviour that, not unreasonably, parents want dealt with by having a kid removed from class. I think that's not unreasonable on the part of parents: to want a safe space for their kids. What you need to go beyond that, though, is to ensure that the programs are in place and that the social causes that bring about the problem in the first place outside of school are addressed early on.

I know from talking to friends of mine in the Bangladeshi community that the extraordinary difficulty that new Canadians have in finding a decent-paying job, the extraordinary difficulty they have in getting their credentials recognized, has a crushing pressure on those families. It starts to force things apart in those households, so that you have parents expressing great concern about where their youth are headed, what sort of activities they get involved with because their families are in crisis.

I remember talking to a Vietnamese woman in my riding who was working two jobs. She would be out of the house pretty much from early morning to late evening. Her Vietnamese children grew up in English, her English was poor, so she rarely saw her kids and she was not in a position frankly to even speak with them well. Her kids were angry. That was a common problem. It has been a common problem of angry children in these situations where families are being crushed down under the pressure of poverty, where the kids don't get the support at home that they have to have.

I say to the Minister of Education that in fighting for those kids who are often suspended or expelled, but also

fighting for the kids who are in school who deserve a safe environment, any government in power has to push for more than simply regulation in school and moving kids out. It has to deal with the underlying dynamics that shape those children and their behaviour.

The very troubling and disturbing case of Drew Stewart was raised in this chamber. Drew lived in East York. I actually had an opportunity to meet him in 2004 when I was campaigning. Something I did in 2004 was stand on a street corner with a sign and wave at the cars, and Drew—being Drew Stewart—thought it was interesting to see a guy standing around on a street corner. He came up to me, shook my hand and chatted with me briefly. He was a very open, engaging, healthy-looking young man. A few months later, in a fight in one of the local restaurants near his collegiate, he was stabbed to death.

When you talk to the teachers who work in those colleges, you know that there are these bubbling dynamics, these undercurrents that cause anger, that cause frustration, that cause destructive behaviour. When we're in a situation where we don't deal with those things, this bill will not solve the problems. It is not enough of a solution. It is not a broad enough approach to deal with what has to be dealt with.

It isn't so much that we shouldn't end the right of principals to expel students without a hearing. I think that change is entirely defensible. I think principals should have the power to suspend. The list of reasons for suspension—threatening someone's life, bringing in weapons, drug dealing, etc.—all those things are reasonable measures. The problem we have is the larger unreasonable and problematic dynamic of how we treat our young people as a whole and how we don't address those questions of hunger, homelessness and lack of economic opportunity.

One of the difficulties I have when I look at this bill and realize that programs have to be put in place is that the \$23 million that's mentioned as the funding that will deal with these problems—it's not clear that this will be new money. It's not certain that it won't simply be yanked from some other program. We already have a problem with funds that are supposed to go to English as a second language being diverted to pay for heating buildings, to pay for simple operations.

I was a city councillor from 1990 to 1997. I was out of office for a number of years and came back last year. One of the things that startled me, that shocked me, was the physical condition of the schools, the physical deterioration of windows, roofs, eavestroughing, of the simple envelope, the simple structure of the buildings that had been set aside and neglected for so long. So when I look at this \$23 million that has been promised, I have to ask: Is this money that will simply be taken from other programs or is this in fact a real investment of new money into these schools?

Paul Christie, who was appointed to supervise, to run the Toronto board of education a number of years ago when they were saying, "We can't balance our books"—

one of the things he did to balance the books was get rid of the youth workers. That was part of the problem that we're facing in Toronto. In order to balance the books, fundamental supports for children to ensure their behaviour was safe rather than dangerous were taken away.

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I don't have the confidence that the funds will be there, just as we know that even now school boards are facing great difficulty, just as we know that capital money was diverted over into operating money this year so that the Toronto District School Board wouldn't be running a deficit.

We seem to be playing this shell game of money moving around and around, just like we see with the Ministry of the Environment, where today's crisis—a legitimate crisis—means that yesterday's crisis is set aside, staff are pillaged, they're reallocated and the problems continue to grow, as the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario has said. We see the same pattern in education as we see in environment: a moving around of money, a declaration that the problems were going to be dealt with, but a fundamental reluctance, a fundamental lack of commitment, to actually getting at the problems in any systemic way.

The key point that this Legislature has to consider in the government's behaviour—and I've covered a number of areas—is that this problem of zero tolerance and expulsion should have been dealt with years ago. We knew what the problems were earlier in this decade. We knew what the problems were in 2003 when this government was elected, and yet it has waited until quite literally, in legislative terms, the end of the clock for action. After that, there's a wait until 2008 before schools are required to have in place the alternative programs for those students who are expelled.

This government seems to have adopted the strategy that Mackenzie King made quite famous, which was: Do nothing until you're absolutely forced to do something, and then do a very little bit.

We're back to where we were before the Safe Schools Act came into effect. That's better than having the Safe Schools Act in effect the way it was originally written, but that is something that could have been resolved years ago. And in that time, over these years, there continued to have been unreasonable expulsions; there continued to have been a conveyor belt of minority youth and disabled youth pushed out of the schools, onto the streets. So that when we see crime problems, we shouldn't be surprised. When we see problems simply left almost for the full term of the government before it's willing to address them, we shouldn't be applauding them. We should be saying, "What took you so long? Why didn't you act very shortly after being elected?" This was a problem you already understood, that the Human Rights Commissioner had already identified, a problem that you said had to be addressed quickly—a problem that required urgent action.

Almost at the end of your legislative term is not urgent action. Almost at the end of your term is essentially

putting something aside for a long time till you realize an election's coming and you have to do something so that when you get out on the streets you can say, "We did something." Others will address this, but this government shouldn't be proud of doing the simple work it said it would do years ago.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Small Business.

Hon. Mr. Takhar: I want to congratulate the Minister of Education for bringing Bill 212 forward.

I had the chance to work in the second-largest school board in the province for about nine years, and I have seen with my own eyes what happened with regard to students before the Safe Schools Act came into existence and after the Safe Schools Act.

Before the Safe Schools Act came into existence, trustees paid great attention before they expelled any students. They agonized over those cases for hours because they wanted to keep those students actually in the classroom. After the Safe Schools Act came into existence, trustees didn't have a choice. What happened was that automatically the students got expelled.

Before the Safe Schools Act came into existence, there were a handful of expulsions in the school board, which had about 120,000 students in the classrooms. After the Safe Schools Act came into existence, the expulsions just skyrocketed.

The students get into trouble for various reasons. This bill is not going to solve every problem, but this bill is actually in the right direction. They get into bad company or they maybe come from poor parents or they somehow get involved in cases where they shouldn't have gotten involved.

I have experienced, with my own eyes, some of these students who came from private schools where they got into trouble. They came into the public school system, they did well, but after a while they got into trouble again because of the company they were associated with.

So what is really important for us is to keep these students in the classroom—work with them so that they can progress to the extent they need to progress—rather than actually kicking them out. This bill exactly does that.

We need to do the progressive punishment, not just kick the kids or the students out as soon as they get into trouble. We need to work with them. We need to make sure that they get integrated into society and into the schoolroom.

Those are my comments.

Mr. Wilson: I do appreciate the comments that our colleague from the NDP caucus from Toronto–Danforth made with respect to the bill, particularly as he talked about the deterioration of schools. As I drive by schools in my riding—and I remember when I was first elected after having a few years of David Peterson and the Liberals, where we used to count the potholes and the number of portables. You can do that now that the Liberals have been back in for three and a half years. The numbers of portables are going up. Your capping of class sizes has forced more students out into what used to be

the playground, which is now the parking lot with portables sitting on it.

There are more split classes. You didn't think through that policy. It was really sexy to go to the voters three and a half years ago during the last election and say that you're going to cap the lower classes—it was going to be a hard cap back then; it's not necessarily a hard cap now. I do see schools deteriorating and we see it. Unfortunately, you had a moratorium on dealing with the closure of schools, and now that that's coming to an end, you've bumped any decisions that will come forward from school boards until after the next election, and there'll be a day of reckoning then. There will be schools that have to be closed, there will be schools that have to be opened, but there's a great deal of uncertainty now.

With respect to expelled students, I still don't quite get it. I'm sure the government is going to try and drill it through my head, but I won't necessarily say the Safe Schools Act is great, because I agree with the previous Liberal speaker that we saw the number of expulsions go up. We should be putting the resources into our school boards to make sure that expelled students do have the counselling and whatever they need to get back on track and into the school.

I agree, you just can't throw them out into the street without any resources, but as I understand the minister's announcement, there was \$31 million committed to education at the time of her announcement—I guess, new money—but they tell us in our research that not one cent of that will actually go to programs that will help expelled students. So I guess you're going to have to explain to me exactly how that's going to—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. The chair recognizes the member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I was pleased, as I'm sure many listeners and watchers of the legislative channel were, to watch and listen to Peter Tabuns—I'm sorry; the member for Toronto–Danforth, of course—as he spoke to this legislation, Bill 212. This member has brought to this Legislature a wealth of knowledge and a broad-ranging background. His work on city council in and of itself, makes him an incredibly valuable member of this chamber. But his insight into legislation and his ability to read it and analyze it, and he does, consistently.

I just left my office, and I was reading some of the e-mails that are coming in. I got an e-mail from a high school teacher, I say to the Minister of Education, who says “Here we are, we've got a government—not inappropriately—addressing once again the issue of young people's behaviour in our schools.” He says, “And do you really expect this school”—referring to his own—“to display the promotional material” that he anticipates will accompany the Minister of Education's Flick Off campaign?

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Hon. Ms. Wynne: It's not mine.

Mr. Kormos: The Minister of Education wants to disavow any association with it, and of course she's right; it's the Minister of the Environment's. The Minister of Education says, “That's not my program,” and

she's right. She was so quick to remove herself, to detach herself.

I've got a photo of the Minister of the Environment standing in front of a backdrop that reads “F-U-C-K.” Here it is, Speaker, in living colour. The Minister of the Environment is standing in front of a backdrop that—

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I'm happy to respond to the member for Toronto–Danforth. I just want to say that the member for Toronto–Danforth makes a good global argument in terms of the underlying causes of children's pain or deprivation. I think we have to be a little bit careful, though, that we make don't a classist or a racist argument around discipline in schools. We have to be careful about that because discipline issues cut across socio-economic divides and they cut across race divides. We just have to be a little bit careful.

I know the member from Toronto–Danforth would not intend to make an argument that would be discriminatory, but I do think we have to be careful. I completely understand, which is why in our budget we introduced measures that address some of the issues of child poverty in particular that he is talking about. It would be wonderful in this House if we could get some questions from the opposition in the next little while about our budget, about some of those measures, because those are things that I really think need to be aired and we need to be able to talk about, but the members of the opposition have not chosen to do that, or the members of the third party.

I am very sure that the member for Toronto–Danforth will support this legislation. The argument about the timing of the legislation I think is one that we can set aside. The fact is, we did the consultation that needed to be done and we are introducing the legislation. The timing of the introduction of the programs is such that we want boards to have time to set up the programs.

One of the things the previous government did was put programs in place without regard to what needed to be in place in schools. They didn't take into regard how much time it would take for the materials to be ready, for the staff to be in place. We need those things all to be in place, and that's why February 1 is when the programs will be required to be in place.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for a response.

Mr. Tabuns: Thanks to all those who commented: the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship, the member for Simcoe–Grey, the member for Niagara Centre and the Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education is correct in saying that it is not simply or solely poverty that drives destructive behaviour. There's no question that there are households that are well off which, for a variety of reasons, will have an atmosphere that's emotionally destructive and that aids or actually drives destructive behaviour on the part of children. She's quite right. There are mental health issues that cut across all classes and all races. Frankly, those issues have to be addressed, as well as the ones that I cited in my earlier speech.

The minister asked why we don't talk about her budget. Frankly, there's not a lot to talk about. Did it actually deal with poverty? Nope. Did it actually make a difference environmentally? Nope. Did it deal with the difficulties we have with education or natural resources? Nope. So the questions that we ask, we'll ask as we see fit. I find it interesting that the government continues to try and change the channel by asking that we ask about their budget. Why?

In any event, getting back to this bill, the minister knew, should have known, a year ago or two years ago,

that any action taken to deal with this problem would require resources going into those schools. Frankly, I don't see why it took so long and why we're going to continue to have to wait until 2008, why this wasn't acted on much sooner.

The Acting Speaker: It being approximately 6 p.m. of the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday, April 30, 2007, till 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1755.

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Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Thunder Bay–Superior	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	
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	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 West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L) Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	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–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	Toronto–Danforth	Tabuns, Peter (ND)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Trinity–Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Parkdale–High Park	DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Parry Sound–Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Waterloo–Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Perth–Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Whitby–Ajax	Elliott, Christine (PC)
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Prince Edward–Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L) Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Sarnia–Lambton	Di Cocco, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (L) Minister of Culture / ministre de la Culture	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Sault Ste. Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Ferreira, Paul (ND)
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse		
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		

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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