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Thursday 31 January 2008

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Jeudi 31 janvier 2008

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Consultations prébudgétaires

Chair: Pat Hoy
Clerk: William Short

Président : Pat Hoy
Greffier : William Short

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Thursday 31 January 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES

Jeudi 31 janvier 2008

The committee met at 0902 in Bristol Room C, Four Points Sheraton Hotel, London.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Good morning. The standing committee on finance and economic affairs will now come to order. We're pleased to be in London today.

CITY OF LONDON

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I'll call on the city of London, our first presentation of the morning. Good morning, gentlemen. You have 10 minutes available for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning. I would ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of our recording Hansard. You can begin.

Mr. Tom Gosnell: Tom Gosnell, deputy mayor of London.

Mr. Grant Hopcroft: Grant Hopcroft, director of intergovernmental and community liaison for the city of London.

Mr. Tom Gosnell: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to the committee on the Ontario pre-budget. At our 2007 pre-budget submission on January 29, a year ago, we brought three major points that we wanted to leave with the ministry and city government. Again today we want to emphasize these points in the hope of continuing to partner with the provincial government towards building a strong and financially vibrant and healthy Ontario.

There are a number of comments that speak to all of the issues that are in the presentation that we'll leave with you, so I'll just touch on a few of the highlights. First, we would like to thank you for the changes your government has made in recognizing and moving towards a new deal for municipalities, such as the announcement by the Premier of the provincial-municipal fiscal and service delivery review. That's right at the heart of what we're attempting in this presentation, as you will hear with other municipalities, to change the financial relationship between the province and municipalities. The uploading of the ODB—Ontario drug benefit—program and the Ontario disability support program over four years to 2011 is significantly a benefit to municipalities and we thank you for that.

There are a number of other areas that we've laid out, especially the announcement of the new municipal infrastructure investment initiative. Those are very important for the community and they certainly enjoy the support of not only the city but municipalities across the province.

Yesterday you had a presentation from AMO, which we certainly stand behind. It's a well-written, very explanatory brief. I'd just like to reinforce that the city, along with AMO, believes there is a shared understanding that the current state of municipal finance does not provide municipal governments with the necessary resources for their immediate responsibilities or those of the future. That is certainly an ongoing issue; it's been with us for a long time. We are pleased with the seriousness with which the provincial government has addressed this issue and we look forward to working with you to try to level the playing field a bit more.

We need, as the cities and the province, to work collaboratively to fix immediate issues that have a huge financial impact on municipalities that can be fixed at little or no cost to the province. We call this "Stop the bleeding." This includes placing a moratorium on regulations that ultimately affect municipal costs and revenues.

When we look at the long-term issues to ultimately fix the problem, funding income redistribution and other soft services from non-regressive tax sources are very important. In 2007, London property taxpayers paid an estimated \$77.5 million, or almost 20% of our property tax levy, to support provincial social programs such as public health, social services and land ambulance. Allow Ontario municipalities to be competitive, while allowing Ontarians to enjoy accessible social, health and safety services and equitable access to the investment of provincial resources in our communities.

We need, as I mentioned, to place a moratorium on legislation, regulations and standards that drive up municipal costs. One example is our long-term-care facility, Dearness Home. Our costs have risen from 17% to 22%, and for municipalities, it's a very unsustainable amount over a period of time.

The Ontario municipal partnership fund: We welcome the 2008 OMPF allocations that will remain unchanged from 2007. The status of this funding, in light of the uploading of ODB and ODSP by 2011 and further recommendations arising from the provincial-municipal fiscal and service delivery review, is of concern to the city of

London. A new formula that continues to address the remainder of the \$3.9-billion provincial-municipal fiscal gap is required.

One of the issues we've identified that we would appreciate some assistance with is the appointment of additional justices of the peace and court security costs. In London, court security costs are \$1.8 million a year now on the municipal budget. That really is a function, we believe, of the provincial government.

Social housing and rent revenues: We've included in our presentation a graph to show what the impact has been. The rents have been frozen for a period of time. All new increases in costs are borne by the municipal government, and we're hoping that we'll have further discussions that will bring that back in line. Certainly, we believe it's a program that should be uploaded to the province. It's not really something that should be a property tax commitment.

In the long term, we have to fix the problem. Property taxes in Ontario are the highest in Canada. To maximize service delivery as effectively and efficiently as possible and to maintain competitiveness nationally and internationally, we will need to look at not only who does what but who funds what. The city of London supports efforts to resolve the fiscal imbalance identified by AMO and the provincial-municipal fiscal and service delivery review that is now under way. The following table that we've included shows that property taxes in Ontario are simply the highest in the country. An average homeowner on a comparable property valuation across the country—we're at \$3,300; Alberta is \$2,100 and British Columbia is under \$2,000. So the impact to the competitiveness and the strength and longevity of services in municipalities in Ontario is very much threatened.

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I'm getting close to the end of my 10 minutes here. There are a number of other initiatives that we would look forward to working with the provincial government on. We are grateful for the changes that have been made and the transfer payments that we've received in the last number of years. We are definitely moving in the right way and we would like to thank you for that. We look forward to working with you. There's no question that all of you as members understand that the strength of our economy in Canada really depends on strong municipalities. Anything we can do with you to address that issue and to have the type of transfer payments or the uploading of services that allows us to remain competitive and strong will be to the benefit of all of us, not just the provincial government but all the citizens of the province.

We look forward to continuing discussions. If there are any questions, I'm certainly prepared to take them now. Thank you for the opportunity to present.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation. This round of questioning goes to the official opposition.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, city of London, for your presentation to the government. This side is not

government; we're opposition. You have quite an extensive brief, so I have not had time to read all of the brief. As you've mentioned, property taxes in Ontario are the highest of anywhere in Canada. Historically, property taxes paid for services provided to property. I wonder if you could give us some direction. You make mention that it's now time for all three levels of government to embrace a "Who pays for what" review. It wasn't that long ago that \$3 billion of education costs were removed from municipal revenue. I don't expect municipalities want to go down that road again or see that kind of realignment. You're probably talking more of additional uploading to senior levels of government. What are some of the priorities that you would like to see, perhaps not only for the city of London but for municipalities across the province?

Mr. Tom Gosnell: In a broad statement, there was an article—Edmonton does a study every year to compare themselves to the cost of local taxes across the country. London was one of the top four highest taxes across the country. In Alberta, all the social costs are borne by the provincial government; it is not put on the property tax base. When you take that into consideration, Edmonton, which was in the middle of the pack, actually was \$600. We're significantly higher than municipalities in Ontario. So it's the principle of how property taxes should be applied. When social services or, as I mentioned earlier, court costs are applied to the property tax, it's very much an inequitable situation. The wrong tax base is being used to provide those services. If that could be addressed, that solves a significant part of our problem.

Mr. Toby Barrett: So London is one of the highest tax jurisdictions in Ontario?

Mr. Tom Gosnell: We're in about the middle of the pack in Ontario. They just compared certain cities. As an aggregate, Ontario has the highest-taxed municipalities in the country.

Mr. Toby Barrett: You make mention of the need for new funding sources at the local level. You say these are vital to continue on. I assume you're referring to additional municipal taxes, or what kind of funding sources are you referring to? You're looking at Toronto. I mean, we have a new land transfer tax in the city of Toronto.

Mr. Grant H: We found that programs such as the provincial and federal gas tax have worked very well in terms of addressing capacity issues at the local level. We're very concerned about creating a patchwork of taxes in every municipality across the province and what that does to our competitiveness as a province, as a country and as individual municipalities. The transfer payments work well when they're based on need, and population is a good proxy for need. It has a fairness to it. For example, the gas tax programs for transit in Ontario, the federal gas tax programs that are distributed on a per capita basis, are very helpful to us. There's a fairness to it. You can plan for it. To the extent that you can plan for it on a multi-year basis, you can invest the money more wisely.

While we welcome programs such as the MIII when they're one-year programs, if you don't have projects that are construction-ready in that particular year, you may have to go with a lower-priority project than you might have otherwise, because you haven't got your environmental assessments complete or you may have an outstanding OMB appeal and so on. Actually, we feel we have a very good submission that will be going forward that will, we think, generate a lot of economic prosperity for London and for the province of Ontario, but we don't know we have the money yet. It's an application; it's a competitive program. We're sure you're going to get a lot of good applications from right across the province, and there will be some that won't make it. That doesn't mean they're not important, but there will be a limited amount of money, and to the extent that everyone has a share they can count on, they can plan better.

Mr. Tom Gosnell: Back to the infrastructure issue, if social costs are borne by the province, such as in Alberta, and the revenues are available to municipalities, then we stick to our knitting, which is infrastructure. That means we invest in some of the programs Grant just mentioned. We get our services, roads, sewers and water systems up so we can attract and be a competitive industry. That certainly helps the city, but it has a profound impact on the tax base of the province. So we can stick to our knitting, and that's to grow and build the economy. But we don't for one minute discount the importance of social programs and some of the costs that have to be borne, but it should be on a different tax base. Let us help you create that tax base so we can all afford it.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your submission.

LONDON HEALTH SCIENCES CENTRE ST. JOSEPH'S HEALTH CARE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's Health Care, London, to come forward, please. While you're getting ready there, I'll remind you that you have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning. I would ask you to identify yourselves once we get started so that Hansard can record you as speakers.

Mr. Cliff Nordal: Good morning. My name is Cliff Nordal. I'm the president and chief executive officer of London Health Sciences and St. Joseph's Health Care. On my left is Ken Deane, who is the shared chief operating officer for both hospitals.

LHSC and St. Joseph's are in fact two separate corporations governed by two distinct boards, but have created the most integrated hospital system in Ontario. The two hospitals share the same chief executive officer and a number of other senior management staff. We have an integrated medical staff with common bylaws, rules and regulations that govern the medical staff. This model has allowed the hospitals to pursue common systems, pur-

chasing and logistics solutions, shared administrative functions and other efficiencies. I believe that there's no other hospital in Ontario that's achieved this level of provider collaboration and network development. We share the same unique ethos and culture that the original organizations had before us.

There are two issues that I want to talk about. One is to raise your awareness about the value and accountability of our hospitals in this region's health system, and also to table a few of the current challenges that require some concerted effort going forward.

London Health Sciences has been at the forefront of medicine since 1875, and offers the broadest range of specialized services in hospitals in Ontario and possibly in Canada. LHSC includes at its various sites the children's hospital, South Street Hospital, University Hospital, Victoria Hospital, the London regional cancer centre and two family medical centres. We have 846 beds and 20 bassinets. Our service is to more than a million patients over the course of the year, and we have over 10,000 staff, physicians and volunteers. We are a leader in many areas, including robotic surgery, cardiac care, clinical neurosciences, multi-organ transplant, clinical care and trauma, orthopaedics, and sports medicine. As a leader in medical discovery, LHSC attracts top clinicians and researchers from around the world. We have 16 world firsts and 22 Canadian or North American firsts.

St. Joseph's Health Care was created from an amalgamation of several hospitals and a long-term-care facility, with a history stretching back to 1869 and 1894. We're a Catholic hospital rooted in the spirit of the Sisters of St. Joseph. We're one of the province's most unique hospitals, with a wide variety of roles and programs relating to acute and ambulatory care, specialized geriatric, complex and long-term care, rehabilitation, and specialized mental health. In fact, our hospitals work in teams from Windsor right through to Waterloo.

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St. Joseph's has celebrated over 20 world and North American firsts itself, including the first use of the natural surfactant drug as replacement therapy for babies with immature lungs, and we were the first site for a Canadian MRI.

We're academic hospitals. We have students from over 70 educational institutions across Canada. We're the primary teaching hospitals for the Schulich School of Medicine here at Western.

Integral to our academic missions is the Lawson Health Research Institute, which is the joint research arm of both hospitals. That organization receives over \$50 million in research funding each year, spanning the full continuum of human life.

As you can see, St. Joseph's and LHSC have long and proud histories, and we continue to be two leading hospitals in the transformation of health care. It has now been a decade since the HSRC, the Health Services Restructuring Commission, came to town and really changed the landscape in Ontario. The only hospitals that would remain are now LHSC and St. Joseph's, each of us

assuming distinct roles with complementary missions. In that regard, the commission suggested that we needed to renew our facilities, including the closure of LHSC's South Street Hospital. For St. Joe's, the commission has directed that St. Joseph's assume the responsibility for Parkwood and for two mental health facilities that are in our region.

London Health Sciences' next major milestone in construction is the completion of 600,000 square feet of shelled-in space in the building you can see on the screen, including 100,000 square feet of renovations. At St. Joseph's, the transformation of the hospital includes a number of construction projects, including a new building to house our surgical and diagnostic imaging area. We are now on a new project to enable about 81,000 square feet of existing space to be renovated, including providing a home for the famous Ivey Eye Institute.

We are now in the process of re-engaging stakeholders to build two brand new mental health facilities slated to be opened in 2013, including a forensic facility at a location near St. Thomas and a new, specialized program at the Parkwood site here in London.

I want to now focus on three things that are of interest to health care in general and ask Ken Deane to speak to them. First of all, there are operational efficiencies in our continuum of care; second is improved access to care; and third is patient safety. Ken, please.

Mr. Ken Deane: Thank you, Cliff, and good morning to everybody. It's a pleasure to be here.

At London Health Sciences and St. Joseph's Health Care, we connect with people at very important and poignant times in their lives: birth, illness, trauma and death. People count on us to deliver high-quality and compassionate care, but they also expect us to be effective stewards of the resources entrusted to us by the taxpayers of Ontario. To this end, we are constantly comparing our actual costs to benchmark efficiency levels. Our shared goal is to achieve top-quartile performance in all our programs while upholding our quality, safety and academic responsibilities.

For many patients we are the places of last resort, providing highly specialized and complex care. The aging population and advances in the treatment of chronic diseases or conditions that were once life-threatening have increased the complexity and size of our patient caseloads.

As academic health sciences centres, we are among the first to employ advances in medicine through breakthrough therapies and technologies. New modes of treatment make medical care better and safer for patients. However, as all of us appreciate, these applications can be more expensive.

Going forward, we will continue to focus on being as efficient as possible while providing high-quality and compassionate care to our patients. We are fostering a performance-based culture in which we measure performance, address sub-optimal performance and continuously improve what we're doing and the way in which we're doing it.

We're pleased with the significant progress that is made through the joint efforts of our staff, physicians and the government to improve access to care through Ontario's wait times strategy. In fact, Ontario has been the most progressive and successful jurisdiction in improving access to care.

Notwithstanding this progress, the single greatest impediment to access lies in the number of patients waiting for care in another part of our health care system. This is not a London-only problem. As reported by the Ontario Hospital Association, access to care is a systemic issue. At London Health Sciences, we are particularly challenged by the large number of patients who are occupying acute care beds while waiting for an alternative level of care. In fact, this morning, as of 7 o'clock, there were 86 alternate-level-of-care patients waiting in acute care beds within the London hospital centre. These patients have received care in the hospital and are now waiting to be discharged and transferred to another setting—nursing home, rehabilitation centre, home care or assisted housing—where they can receive care that is actually more appropriate for their needs. We support the government's plan to add long-term-care beds.

We recognize the need for systemic solutions, but we also recognize our responsibility to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. We are working intensely to deal with the situation, both internally and with our local health system partners. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care selected the London Health Sciences Centre as the first demonstration project outside of Toronto for a patient access and flow project. The goal of this project is to reduce the incidence of patients boarding in the emergency department, reducing the incidence of surgical cancellations, and reducing in-patient occupancy levels by improving our internal processes and systems. We are currently assessing the cost-benefit of establishing a transitional care unit. This unit would be for alternative-level-of-care patients who meet specific criteria and, after a two- to four-week period, would be discharged home. This initiative will free up acute care beds.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about a minute left for your presentation.

Mr. Ken Deane: Moving right along, then. We're working on access.

In terms of safety, we believe that each patient has the right to expect quality care, a safe patient care experience, and the right to know how effectively we're delivering our quality and safe care. We're committed to public accountability and transparency, and we welcome the public release of hospital standardized mortality ratios as well as other reporting requirements.

Mr. Cliff Nordal: There are three things we'd like you to consider. The first is to support more investment in the home, community and hospital alternative levels of care so that we do not have to care for patients we've already dealt with and could go elsewhere. Second, we encourage significant investment in information technology and systems. Third, we seek investment in legis-

lated patient safety issues, which are important but are coming to us without adequate support.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you very much for the presentation. The questioning will go to the NDP.

Mr. Michael Prue: Just on the last three points, it appears to me, and correct me if I'm wrong, but legislated patient safety wouldn't really have much to do with the finance committee. Would I be right in that? That's more with the health minister.

Mr. Cliff Nordal: Certainly the legislation of safety initiatives would be, but these are coming to us largely without any supportive funding, so we believe that the Ministry of Finance and the government as a whole needs to think about added investment as these legislative changes are being made.

Mr. Michael Prue: For these three initiatives, how much are you looking for, first of all for the London Health Sciences Centre and overall for the hospitals of Ontario? How much do you think is necessary?

Mr. Cliff Nordal: We think that the ministry itself has brought forward estimates, just using information technology alone, that are probably in the several billions of dollars over the course of a number of years. In fact, one of the greatest patient safety issues is this: doctors who are writing health records with pen and pencil that then must be transferred from one provider to the other. Errors are created, we can't find the records, and over and above that, it's very difficult to monitor performance of individuals when things are in paper charts in our hospitals. Significant investment is needed.

Mr. Michael Prue: But could you give us a number?

Mr. Cliff Nordal: We think the number is probably in the magnitude, over a four-year period, of about \$5 billion.

Mr. Michael Prue: So, in this fiscal year, you're looking for about—

Mr. Cliff Nordal: No, we're looking for a phased-in approach. I believe the Ministry of Health is making a presentation to finance that has the phasing. I don't have their numbers, but I think it's probably going to ramp up a few hundred million over a course of time and then probably build up.

Mr. Michael Prue: So you would generally support—

Mr. Cliff Nordal: Very supportive of that.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. You talked about investment alternatives. Could you expand a little bit? I need to understand that better.

Mr. Cliff Nordal: Yes. There are investments being made in an aging-at-home process, in adding long-term-care beds, and in generally providing other community-based supports in mental health and a variety of other areas. We think these investments are inadequate, and in fact, long-term-care beds are coming on very slowly. We have about 1,500 people in the London-Middlesex area waiting for a long-term-care bed right now, and by 2010 we'll have added approximately 600 new beds, so we clearly see that the investment in this area is inadequate.

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Mr. Michael Prue: And by investing in this other area, this will free up hospital resources, obviously.

Mr. Cliff Nordal: Yes. None of the patients Ken alluded to—the 80 to 90 who are in our hospitals every day—really need to be there. That would free up capacity to take patients who are waiting in the ER department, not just overnight but sometimes days, for a bed.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

SIX NATIONS OF THE GRAND RIVER

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on Six Nations of the Grand River to come forward, please. You have up to 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning. I would just ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Mr. Wray Maracle: Wray Maracle, district 4 councillor for Six Nations.

Chief William Montour: William Montour, elected chief.

Ms. Claudine VanEvery-Albert: Claudine VanEvery-Albert, district 1 councillor, Six Nations.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You can begin.

Chief William Montour: As I said, my name is William—Bill is what everybody calls me—Montour, elected chief of Grand River, and these are our two councillors. I want to start by giving some background on Six Nations.

Six Nations of the Grand River community has 22,480 registered citizens. Approximately 12,000 people live on the territory. However, most return for the basket of services as they deem necessary. The reasons for their living off the territory are usually lack of housing, employment and education.

The annual population growth rate of Six Nations has historically been 2.5%. The majority of our residents are under the age of 30.

Our annual operating budget hovers around \$70 million per fiscal year.

Contrary to popular belief, our community members contribute more dollars to the federal-provincial tax base than our yearly operating budget.

Several community studies completed by Six Nations indicate that the social well-being and health status of our residents is two to three times poorer than that of the national average in all categories of measurement.

The current trends: Six Nations is encouraged by recent statements by the Premier of Ontario. He expressed a willingness to work on better relations with First Nations and aboriginal communities in Ontario. He stated that he is willing to raise the bar to improve the well-being of aboriginal people in Ontario by bringing improved services to our people. The Six Nations elected government recognizes the positive initiatives already in place, such as the aboriginal healing and wellness strategy, commonly known as AHWS. These AHWS projects have greatly improved the well-being of First

Nations people in Ontario and at Six Nations. These statements and recent efforts are congruent with the goals of Six Nations of the Grand River as we strive to build a happy, healthy, safe and sustainable community.

Therefore, and without prejudice, on behalf of the Six Nations of the Grand River, I present the following urgent requests to be considered by the standing committee on finance and economic affairs as you prepare for the upcoming Ontario 2008-09 budget.

Environment and infrastructure:

For our water treatment system, we require 40 litres per second—we presently have 12. We need a waste water treatment study to look at new technologies for waste water, as we're up against the wall there. We need a pilot project to deal with some new technologies to take care of the burgeoning solid waste problem we have.

We require 1,600 housing units immediately.

We have to have a correction of our road safety issues because our road safety program has seriously deteriorated over the years.

We need a communication network infrastructure. I draw your attention to the Rural Connections program that Ontario had last year. That bypassed our communities.

Emergency protection services:

We require adequate funding for a fully functional fire department. We need training dollars for our paramedics. We'd like to move our emergency measures service to an advanced level. More importantly, we want to establish pay equity with surrounding services. We need annual funding to employ an emergency measures coordinator and disaster plan update.

We would like to have a study with Ontario to establish a Six Nations justice system.

In education, we want equity funding per student comparable to the rest of Ontario. We're looking for a feasibility study to create a Six Nations high school that focuses on language and culture.

In social services, a Best Start and Early Years program for Six Nations children is badly needed.

For Ontario Works equity funding, Six Nations has been offered an administrative cost of \$1,400 per case. In our due diligence, it appears that the average in Ontario is \$2,300 a case. We can't operate without going into a deficit.

We want to look at the development of a Six Nations child care agency.

In health services, primary care services are not funded by First Nations and Inuit Health. We require mental health and addictions funding, which we request to become a community transfer payment. Currently, funds are funnelled through an external agency with limited funding allocated to the Six Nations. We need funding for drug abuse treatment strategies such as harm reduction, detoxification, inpatient treatment and daycare rehabilitation. We require an urgent decision from Ontario on the funding model for the family health team physicians.

We're looking for an increase in long-term-care beds, as we usually have a wait-list between 25 to 75 at any one time, and we're looking for a fast-tracking of the dialysis project, both in capital and operations. We don't know where it's gone. It was almost at the point of being put together, but now—

Next steps: The Six Nations of the Grand River elected government requests the opportunity to meet with the various ministries at your earliest convenience to discuss these urgent needs in detail.

You're going to be wondering why I'm bringing this, because a lot of it could be federal. It's always been my stance that we want to be interdependent, not dependent or independent. I think Ontario can be a great partner with us to go and bring more federal dollars where the federal responsibility is, because we're not going to spend it in Manitoba or Quebec; we're going to spend it in Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the privilege and the opportunity to make this presentation.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. This round of questioning goes to the government.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you for your presentation. I'm especially interested in the area you're speaking of in social services. You're talking about the Best Start and Early Years programs. Do you have access at all, in any way, to those types of programs right now?

Chief William Montour: Not at present.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: So do you not go off-reserve to find those at all? No, you can't get that?

Chief William Montour: Because of the size of our community, it's very hard for families to do that. We have over 140 kilometres of roadway to go to Brantford or Hamilton or Simcoe. It's at great expense to people who are mostly on limited incomes or really no incomes.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: You talk about the development of a Six Nations child care agency. What do parents do currently when they need child care?

Chief William Montour: I'm talking about a children's aid society. We had started this in my previous tenure as chief, from 1985-91, to look at creating the Six Nations child care agency, because our services are delivered out of Brantford. They have a native program, as they call it, but it doesn't address the needs as we see, like the extended family concept. A lot of people off-reserve don't understand that our extended family concept is much bigger than the non-native idea, the nuclear family type.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I have First Nations bands in my riding and I know they share the same thing. They want to do much the same in their First Nations bands as well with their children: to keep them within the extended families that they have there. So in terms of the Early Years, what are you doing now? Have you got anything at all?

Chief William Montour: We've got some that we've pulled out of the federal funding, but it's not really direct funding. We've been using surpluses and stuff like that for helping our moms effectively, teen rap sessions where

they can talk to people and stuff like that. We really need a chance for our very young people to get that extra push to become better citizens as they grow up.

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Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Do you have any type of parenting courses or support for young parents?

Chief William Montour: Yes, we do.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: What do you do currently?

Chief William Montour: Well, as I said, it's very limited, but we have our helping our moms effectively—which means that we help young mothers develop their mothering skills and stuff like that, because we do have a lot of teenage pregnancies. It's becoming a real issue that we've got to get our heads around and get the proper education to the people.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: So how much in dollars do you think you're going to need to do that kind of thing?

Chief William Montour: We didn't go specifically into dollars because I know we're crossing boundaries between the federal and provincial here, and that's why we requested a meeting with the ministries. I'd like to do the plan first and then put the dollars to that. As a new council, we've only been in office for a little over a month now. We want to do these visioning sessions, and we thought we would come here and give you our idea of where we want to go to build this community that we envision as being healthy, safe and sustainable.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

COMMUNITY LIVING TILLSONBURG

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on Community Living Tillsonburg to come forward, please. Good morning, gentlemen. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning. I would just ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of Hansard.

Mr. Doug Cooper: Good morning. Thank you. My name is Doug Cooper. I'm on the board of directors of Community Living Ontario, representing the southwest region. Also presenting with me is Marty Graf, executive director for Community Living Tillsonburg. We would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to bring to you some of the critical needs facing community organizations that provide supports and services to people who have an intellectual disability.

The 2007 provincial budget committed \$200 million over four years for developmental services, starting with \$62 million in the first year. While this was a good start, intended to begin stabilizing the sector and begin addressing wage gap issues, the additional funding did not go far enough toward resolving the immediate pressures on individuals and families waiting for supports and services. The difference between the budget request and the funding allocated, combined with the costly resolution of local labour disputes this past summer, has exacerbated

the pressure on an already financially strained sector. To resolve these ongoing pressures, we believe the government must address these three critical needs of the sector.

Many people living with an intellectual disability are living in an ever-increasing state of poverty as a result of the failure of ODSP to maintain adequate levels of income support. A single person on ODSP can receive a maximum benefit of \$999 per month, or approximately \$12,000 per year to live on. Notwithstanding the government's recent ODSP payment increases, many Ontarians with an intellectual disability live in poverty because ODSP benefits remain more than 18% below 1993 levels when compared with inflation. With this income they must cover all expenses, including shelter, food, clothing, transportation and household items. A commitment to reducing poverty for Ontarians with an intellectual disability must start with a substantial increase in the income support provided through ODSP.

We ask that you consider increasing payments under the Ontario disability support plan to reflect the real cost of living in Ontario, with a guarantee of annual adjustments aimed at keeping pace with changes in the cost of living as one element of the government's poverty reduction strategy. An independent committee using rational and just criteria should be established to advise the government on where to set ODSP benefit rates.

There are approximately 120,000 Ontarians with an intellectual disability. As a consequence of their permanent intellectual limitations, people with an intellectual disability require varying degrees of support throughout their lives. Such support will vary from person to person but can be required for such basic needs as bathing, dressing, preparing meals, using public transportation or even the telephone. Approximately 40% of people with a disability have multiple disabilities and may require behavioural supports or support for other complex care needs that often require 24-hour assistance.

Many families across the province are waiting five years or more for 24-hour residential services. There is a growing waiting list for access to supports and services in Ontario. Based on 2006 census data, there are approximately 13,400 Ontarians waiting for residential services, day supports and other supports and services, including respite services for families. Throughout the province, 5,047 individuals are waiting for residential services, 3,018 for day supports and 5,337 individuals for other services and supports. We also ask that the government commit \$325 million over four years to reduce the waiting list of these 13,400 Ontarians who are waiting for residential services, day supports and other supports and services, including respite services for families.

While the government is moving toward greater collaboration and integration in the delivery of services to Ontarians, there is a long way to go. Individuals with an intellectual disability must deal with several ministries throughout the course of their lives, including Children and Youth Services, Community and Social Services, Education and Health and Long-Term Care. A strategy that would ensure greater continuity and consistency of

services through an individual's life and coordinate the roles of various ministries would assist in reducing gaps in supports and services and enhance the lives of Ontarians with an intellectual disability and their families. We believe it is time for a comprehensive, long-term policy and funding framework for developmental services to address the needs of a transformed system and create a sustainable financial model. This new approach would provide enhanced access to a broader range of community services for individuals with an intellectual disability, improve choice and flexibility for families and address the sector's human resource challenges through a comprehensive human resource strategy. We ask that the government develop a comprehensive long-term policy and funding framework to safeguard the sector's sustainability, guide its long-term development and ensure that all Ontarians with an intellectual disability have access to the supports and services they need.

We thank the committee for its time today and we look forward to its support in the transformation of the developmental services sector. In order to achieve this and resolve the ongoing pressures, the government must:

- increase payments under the Ontario disability support program to reflect the real cost of living in Ontario and guarantee annual adjustments. An independent committee should be established to advise the government on where to set ODSP benefit rates;

- commit \$325 million over four years to reduce the waiting list of 13,400 Ontarians who are waiting for supports and services of all kinds; and

- develop a comprehensive long-term policy and funding framework to safeguard the sector's sustainability, guide its long-term development and ensure that all Ontarians with an intellectual disability have access to the supports and services they need.

Mr. Marty Graf: To bring it home a bit, to share with you the waiting lists in our community, Community Living Tillsonburg works collaboratively with other like agencies in establishing waiting lists for service delivery. These wait-lists are managed by the Community Services Coordination Network. Currently, the wait-list for Oxford county has 41 individuals who are waiting for group living, with nine individuals requiring services immediately. There are 10 individuals requiring supported independent living services, with three individuals requiring services immediately. Those kinds of waiting lists are in all of our communities throughout Ontario.

The labour disruption this summer: Community Living Tillsonburg experienced its first labour disruption in its 54-year history. It was a painful experience for those individuals who had their homes picketed. The multi-year funding announced by the Ministry of Community and Social Services in last year's budget has brought about a level of stability that should help over the next few years.

Community Living Tillsonburg is also a service provider of child care, early learning, resource supports to children with special needs and their families. Several hundred families were affected by the strike. Our

supports to children and families through funding by Oxford county and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services needs a similar multi-year approach.

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In regard to Family Day, our agency was founded by families over 54 years ago. We have been involved in supporting children with special needs and their families throughout our history. We provide the supports and services which help keep families healthy. We look forward to the first celebration of Family Day and we ask the government to recognize the important role that agencies like ours play in supporting families. Through your budget deliberations, you need to ensure that our sectors can remain vibrant and healthy. Families rely on us to help them remain healthy.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the official opposition.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Doug and Marty, for speaking up for people who sometimes may have difficulty presenting the case to government, and thanks for speaking on behalf of Community Living Tillsonburg. I still think of you as TACL. I worked with TACL, I think it was 12 years ago. Pay equity was the issue. You talk about wages. I don't know whether that's been resolved yet or not.

Mr. Marty Graf: We now have a solution in hand as a result of the funding that has come through this past year.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Good. I have another question and Julia has some questions. With respect to ODSP and the \$999 a month, you propose an independent committee to advise government. I think that would be well worth looking at. We may put that forward as a resolution to this finance committee. With respect to the \$999 a month, just very quickly, are there barriers? I do know people who are receiving ODSP have the opportunity to work or to work part-time. I would like to see fewer barriers for people to be able to work or to help out or to volunteer and get remunerated a bit without being overly penalized. Is there anything else we could do to try and streamline that or try to get employers to be even more flexible in working with people?

Mr. Marty Graf: We are a service provider helping individuals with disabilities gain employment. We believe that government should make a strong commitment toward supporting the inclusion of people with disabilities in employment. We believe it's one of the strategies that business, industry and government should consider, due to the fact that there is a labour shortage.

We've seen the success of inclusion of people with disabilities. The difficulty still is the clawback, in terms of earning a certain amount. There's a confusion of, "Yes, go out and get a job, but we're going to reduce the volume." So what happens is, as they earn the monies, they go from the \$12,000 a year to \$13,050 or \$15,000. So it's not a lot of incentive yet to work gainfully. We still need to work on strategies to overcome that.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you for coming today. I just wanted to go back to the beginning of your pres-

entation when you talked about this year's budget that allocated \$200 million. You received \$62 million in this budget year. Is that correct?

Mr. Doug Cooper: That's correct.

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question was whether or not you anticipated that this was primarily for labour negotiations or whether there had been some indication that the allocation would be available to you for other purposes in Community Living.

Mr. Marty Graf: Usually in the past there has been the breakdown of some of the resources going to salary issues and some going toward new services. I believe most of the funds committed under that \$200 million related to the issues of the low salaries in our sector. So it was not targeted in a split as it normally is.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I think that's important for us to understand, because obviously it means that the rest of the issues that are critical are left hanging, if that's the case.

The question, then, that I have: If it was allocation for staffing, would you consider this now to be something that will offer you a further tool in the area of retention of staff? I understand this to be certainly an important issue for you as a sector.

Mr. Marty Graf: Certainly, the government and the developmental sector are recognizing the need for the stability. We think this funding has helped, but it's also going to take work on the sector's part and the government's to come up with a good human resource strategy to continue to stabilize our workforce. Along with that, there is the transformation process that has been under way to try to figure out new and creative ways to provide better services. So I think the combination of those strategies will help us.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

ONTARIO FLUE-CURED TOBACCO GROWERS' MARKETING BOARD

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board to come forward, please. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning. I'd just ask you to identify yourself for our Hansard recording.

Ms. Linda Vandendriessche: Good morning. Thank you for having me here today. I am Linda Vandendriessche, vice-chair of the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board. Our board represents all of the flue-cured tobacco producers in the province of Ontario, about 1,000 farm families holding provincial quotas to grow tobacco. We are a provincially mandated marketing board that looks after production, marketing and advocacy on behalf of our farmers. We oversee a strict regulatory framework for tobacco production which ensures that all legally grown and sold tobacco in the province goes through our auction exchange in Delhi.

I am here today to ask for help. Over the past several years, we have found ourselves impacted by government tobacco control policies. Our farmers and communities are devastated. Our farmers are trapped. They have invested their life's work in tobacco-specific equipment and assets and are carrying significant debt associated with those assets.

The Ontario government has instituted, in its own words, a "war on tobacco," putting in place some of the most rigorous tobacco control legislation in the world. Smoking bans have been enacted. Taxes have been increased. Retailing of tobacco products has been curtailed.

We have not argued with these measures. We have not fought the government's agenda. We have complied with the law in our own operations—buildings that are owned by tobacco farmers.

Since 1998, the tobacco crop size has been reduced by 79%. Farmers are being forced into bankruptcy. In contrast, governments are receiving record levels of tobacco taxes: \$9 billion in 2005 alone.

We appreciated the help of the provincial and federal governments in 2005 as a first step in this process, a program to help us deal with the most financially vulnerable at that time. Many farmers took the buyout and ceased operations; many more would have taken it if funds had been made available to them. However, the devastation in our sector requires a more comprehensive plan. It is time to finish the job government began in 2005.

We believe it is now time to take the obvious next step and put a plan in place that will eradicate all tobacco production in Canada over an agreed-upon period of time. As you know, we are in detailed discussions with the federal government on an orderly wind-down of the tobacco farming business in Ontario through an exit program for the remaining quota. As I am sure you can understand, this was a wrenching decision for us. Many of us have farmed this land for four generations. This was our livelihood. But there appears to be no relief in sight from the brutal realities of the tobacco market. It is time for us to move on.

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Discussions with the federal government are going well. We are optimistic that an exit package will be announced soon. Our first request is that you support our efforts to convince the federal government to achieve the buyout. It is the just solution.

We are grateful for the support for a solution that many of you have given us in this effort, including Minister Dombrowsky. Minister Dombrowsky has stated that she supports a program for tobacco farmers, but that it should be paid for through federal tobacco taxes. However, you should know that the federal government tells us they will ask the provincial government to pay for up to 40% of the cost of this program, as is the custom in federal-provincial agricultural programs. We are asking you to set aside funding for this opportunity when it arises.

Hopefully, many of us will be able to use the resources from the program to transition to other types of

farming by allowing us to retool and re-equip. It will also allow Ontario to keep its two greatest natural resources—the people and arable land—in productive roles for the Ontario economy.

We strongly believe that the communities that rely on tobacco production need a significant amount of assistance to adjust to a new economic base.

We have received the support of members of Parliament and provincial Parliament from all sides for our proposal and ideas. We have been working closely with governments of all levels on this issue. We appreciate the level of serious consideration our proposal has received.

Our farmers have never been in a more precarious financial position. Many of them cannot hold out much longer. The anxiety in our farm community is running at a fever pitch. You may have heard recent news stories that point to the public declarations of this anxiety. We need two levels of government—provincial and federal—to sit down, roll up their sleeves and get this deal done.

To the committee here today, we need all MPPs to be supportive of our plight and the provincial government to be a willing partner in solving this issue, once and for all. We are asking to be helped out of a business that the government is committed to eradicate. This only makes sense.

I thank you for this opportunity for the government to end the tobacco-growing industry in Ontario as we know it. We have travelled a difficult path to get to this point. We are asking you to meet us there. We hope that you are up to it.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation. The questioning will go to the NDP.

Mr. Michael Prue: I think there's really only one issue here, for me. I need to know the cost. You state about midway down the second page, "However, you should know that the federal government tells us that they will ask the provincial government to pay for up to 40% of the cost of this program, as is the custom in federal-provincial agricultural programs," which is true.

What is the total cost to get the farmers out of tobacco production?

Ms. Linda Vandendriessche: The original proposal contained approximately \$3.30 for the total of 271 million pounds of quota. But I will tell you this, that the federal government has acknowledged that they do not agree with the \$3.30 per pound, and we have also been told that they do not agree with \$2.62. So we are not in negotiations; we are in discussions with the federal government to get some sort of proposal there, and at that point we will understand what the 40% will be.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. So at this stage we cannot make a recommendation to the finance minister other than to pay the 40%. We can't say it's going to cost \$50 million or \$500 million. I mean, I have no idea what we're looking at here.

Ms. Linda Vandendriessche: Yes. I can tell you it would approximately be the \$500 million, so probably 40% of that, depending on what the federal government will acknowledge.

Mr. Michael Prue: So if it is \$500 million in total, then our share would be about \$200 million.

Ms. Linda Vandendriessche: Using those numbers, yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: All right. So that's the kind of recommendation, then, that we should be making to the finance minister.

Ms. Linda Vandendriessche: The recommendation you should be making to the finance minister is, this particular area of farmers need assistance and they want once and for all to be out of the production of tobacco.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would hope that the finance minister and the Minister of Agriculture—I think certainly everybody around this table knows that's true. If he doesn't know that, something's wrong. I just want to be specific so that we can do the right thing in terms of finances. Are there any other monies that are required over and above that?

Ms. Linda Vandendriessche: Over and above that, there would be some consideration to our communities that have been affected. We have approximately five municipalities that have been affected by the tobacco turnaround.

Mr. Michael Prue: And they need additional municipal funding?

Ms. Linda Vandendriessche: Yes. They would appreciate that.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

UNITED WAY OF LONDON
AND MIDDLESEX
UNITED WAY/CENTRAIDE
WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on United Way of London and Middlesex to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning. I ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Mr. Bob Adams: Thanks very much for the opportunity to visit with the committee. I'm Bob Adams. I'm the CEO of the United Way of London and Middlesex. My colleague, Sheila Wisdom, who's the executive director of United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County, and I appreciate this brief opportunity to address the committee this morning. We have a short presentation and look forward to a brief dialogue after, if that's possible.

Our presentation really is focused on the need to develop a more efficient, responsive, consumer/client-oriented way of supporting people who are accessing and navigating the needed information and intervention supports in their communities.

By way of a bit of background, as you may well be aware, the United Way is the largest non-governmental funder of community services. United Ways are uniquely

positioned to work with all levels of government as well as business, labour, health, education and individual community members in addressing significant social issues such as poverty, literacy, diversity and children and family wellness.

We are tremendously encouraged by the provincial government's agenda to tackle poverty and look forward to new opportunities to enable families, children, youth and other individuals to reach their full potential. Locally, the city of London is prepared to co-lead an anti-poverty strategy in the near future. We have many community organizations prepared to work with us, but we will need the province as a full partner ready to look at systemic barriers in legislation and social policies that often prevent us from achieving a more positive outcome for low-income citizens.

We would like to commend the province on its child welfare transformation agenda. Clearly, keeping children out of care, safely in their own homes, makes not only good economic sense but is absolutely the right thing to do for the child. Here in London we have been engaged in a partnership with the children's aid society and many others to determine the underlying causes of the increasing number of children entering the care of the society. Our research, *Protecting Children is Everybody's Business*, pointed to poverty, maternal mental health, women's abuse and inadequate parenting skills as contributing factors. Through a Family Networks initiative, a pilot initiative in two neighbourhoods, funded in part by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, we are using professional and lay supports to strengthen families. This work is really critical if we are to reverse the alarming and costly trend in child welfare.

It's really in this context of our close work with local communities, both in London and Windsor, and throughout the United Way network across Ontario, that working with community groups, stakeholder groups and individual consumers, we're seeing a repeated theme in a need for a navigator and information broker or facilitator that's emerging.

In Ontario, we estimate that there are nearly 15,000 local organizations delivering a diverse range of really 80,000 or more social and human services supports and programs. These important community resources enable people to successfully cope with many of the life challenges and be as productive, active and engaged as possible. They are sustained in many ways by funding from municipal, provincial and federal levels of government as well as charities, like United Way, and as you know, various foundations, private donors and non-governmental organizations.

Navigating through the maze of providers and constantly changing service offerings can be bewildering and often results in a hit-and-miss approach. This is often more pronounced in rural and remote settings where needed services might not even be located in your own community. Unfortunately, this can serve to further disadvantage the most vulnerable or those in the greatest distress. The key problem is the absence of any kind of

coordinated system or network to provide the public with current, accurate information about these resources and how best to use them.

That's where this idea of 211 access comes in; 211 access is designed to directly and effectively address this shortcoming. I'll turn it to my colleague.

1010

Ms. Sheila Wisdom: Like 911, which provides people with coordinated access to emergency services, 211 uses a three-digit phone dialling to eliminate the need for people to remember or find a seven- or 10-digit phone number. Callers to 211 gain access to information about the entire human services system, as well as helpful professional training to assess the individual caller's needs, provide accurate information and advise them about the most appropriate service or program available for their particular circumstance.

Currently, Ontario residents with access to 211 can be served in more than 150 languages. Certified counsellors answer 80% of the calls in less than 20 seconds. Nearly 90% of callers follow up on the information and referrals received through 211 and actually get the help or service that they need. As a testament to 211's popularity and value to callers, virtually all say they would recommend the service to friends and family.

Most recently the addition, thanks in part to the support of the province of Ontario, of an online 211 capacity expands access further, allowing e-mail inquiries and improved service for others, including people with impaired hearing or those located overseas.

This new public utility, offering people a one-stop-shopping approach covering the full range of community, social, health and related government services and programs, has many advantages. It also creates a new infrastructure platform from which many different products, initiatives and public benefits can be pursued. As such, a provincial 211 system represents an important foundational component of Ontario's efforts to reduce poverty.

Access to information and the connectivity it facilitates helps sustain the health and prosperity of individuals and communities, and support institutions created to address human needs. In Windsor-Essex, we've conducted extensive consultation on services. Regardless of the service area, whether we're talking about children, seniors, families or persons with disabilities, access to information has been identified as a critical gap. By providing that access to information on community services, 211 empowers individuals and helps them cope with a wide variety of life challenges. Promoting individual resilience and community engagement enables people to better sustain themselves and their families.

At the program and policy development level, 211 enhances the efficient utilization of existing human service infrastructure and provides front-line professionals and volunteers with an authoritative online I and R resource. Currently, people seeking human services make five to seven calls before they find the right provider. Each call consumes valuable staff time, and 211 helps

reduce the cost related to errant calls, freeing up staff to serve more clients.

At the community level, 211's real-time data documenting the demand for various human services and resources is a powerful new tool for quantifying poverty and understanding social trends. By accurately identifying resource gaps, waste or duplication, 211 provides new insights to inform planning and investment decisions by governments and non-government organizations. I would just add as an aside that the city of Toronto's planning departments are now using information gathered as a result of 211 when they are looking at neighbourhoods and development of new neighbourhoods in the Toronto area.

Establishing 211 as the first point of entry for human services reduces the need to advertise each existing program, eliminates the costs associated with public outreach when introducing new service initiatives, and helps contain the proliferation of specialized help and 1-800 lines.

It relieves pressure on the 911 system by providing an alternative for non-emergency calls, and also complements the role of first responders during disasters and emergencies, when the demand for both information and human services spikes and the most vulnerable face the greatest risks.

A cost-benefit analysis conducted by Deloitte conservatively estimated that the value of benefits from 211 outweighed the cost by more than 2.4 to 1; the payback on investment occurs in less than three years.

Start-up investments made in the 2006-07 budget have greatly accelerated 211 development in Ontario. The 211 phone and Internet service is now available to residents in Toronto, Niagara region, south Georgian Bay, Halton region and Windsor-Essex. That's more than 30% of Ontarians. Service will commence for residents of Ottawa and Thunder Bay in early February and for Peel region in May. By that time, just over 50% of Ontarians will have 211 access, and the infrastructure for serving all of Ontario will be completed. In addition, the 211 Internet service will be extended province-wide by May.

In the United States, more than 200 million people now have access to 211 service, including those in communities along Ontario's borders with New York and Michigan.

The Ontario 211 initiative is now poised to fulfill its goal of ensuring all Ontario residents have access to this vital service. The main components of a provincial delivery system are now in place; a provincial governance structure and corporate vehicle has been established; an implementation plan developed by Deloitte documenting the financial requirements of the Ontario 211 system has been developed; and a fair share formula identifying the relative cost of the system for government and charitable funders exists. Based on this, United Way proposes that the provincial government earmark \$24.3 million over four years to complete the province-wide implementation of 211 and sustain the system being created to deliver 211 in Ontario.

One of the questions that governments usually ask when seeking input on budgets is, "Where can we cut costs and where can we save taxpayers money?" While we cannot assert that 211 will absolutely result in fewer dollars being spent, we can tell you that our experience with 211 has demonstrated a much-improved integrated access network that reduces the duplication of 1-800 numbers and dedicated lines. We have seen enhanced access to services and supports for clients and stakeholders, along with more flexibility that allows local organizations to use scarce resources towards more in-depth service and support for clients.

We'd be very happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you very much for your consideration.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. This round of questioning will go to the government.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you very much for your presentation, and I want to congratulate Mr. Adams for his position—for being the executive director for London-Middlesex United Way.

I had the chance to listen to your group I guess a year ago when they came to our office and spoke about the 211 phone system. I think it's an impressive system. I thought it would be in place by now. I don't know what the reason is that didn't enable you to implement it all over the province. How did you implement it the first time? How did you get the funding, whether provincial or just—

Ms. Sheila Wisdom: The funding for 211: The province made available start-up money in a number of communities, and that's how we have been able to put it in place in places like Windsor, Ottawa and Thunder Bay, with a combination of start-up costs from the province of Ontario and local support. Right now, I would say it's a patchwork quilt approach. In Windsor and Essex county, we are piggy-backing on the 311 service that the city of Windsor provides, using their telephony and infrastructure as a starting point, maximizing that existing asset. United Way is also contributing toward the cost, as is the county of Essex, so it's a combination of provincial start-up costs, municipal funding and charitable funding. In Halton, it's being funded entirely by the municipality. So it varies from community to community. In Niagara region, it's funded totally by the not-for-profit sector.

While we have been able thus far to ensure some consistency of service, with standards and requirements for service delivery, our concern is that, first of all, only half of Ontario is getting it, it is totally reliant upon the local community to do it, and it also fails to acknowledge the nature of the way we live now. We ought to have a system that allows someone in North Bay who has parents in Windsor to contact the person and say, "Something has happened to my parents. What services and supports are available for them now?" because we are mobile; we move around. That kind of consistency does not exist.

I guess the other piece is that regardless of whether or not we work in the not-for-profit sector, local government, municipal government, provincial government or federal government, really we are here to serve the

people in the community. How do we look across our respective systems and work in a way that actually serves the person? The person doesn't care if the funding for the program comes from the province or from the United Way, but they do want to know the service is there.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Basically, you're asking for \$24.3 million to continue your project across the province of Ontario. At the present time for areas like London, for instance, which don't have the 211 phone number, how do they get the service? Through 911, and they screen it and send it to you?

Mr. Bob Adams: Maybe I could talk a little bit about it. Right at the moment, the service is more of a patchwork quilt in London. There is a backbone information service that's somewhat dated that often goes through individual organizations or through city hall, for example, where there are some great supports. Part of the issue is that we don't have that network in London-Middlesex.

1020

Just building on Sheila's point on this patchwork quilt, we probably need to think about this information access really as a public utility and fund it as such. Federal, provincial and municipal governments are spending substantial numbers of dollars trying to do outreach to their communities. Where we've seen success is where we've been able to see the 211 not-for-profit investments linked with municipal investments or other provincial investments. So we need to move away from a modeling which is project-based into something that's really funding a public utility and then look at how we knit it together where we can, in fact, look at economies of scale and enhance access at the same time. But we're not there yet in London-Middlesex, which is what we're working towards.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

ONTARIO SCHOOL BUS ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): To the committee, I'm advised that our 10:30 is not here yet but the Ontario School Bus Association is prepared to come forward. Thank you, gentlemen, for arriving promptly and early, indeed. We appreciate that for the committee. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning. I would just ask you to identify yourselves for the purpose of our recording Hansard and then you can begin.

Mr. Michael Murphy: First of all, Chairman Hoy, the bus is running a little early this morning.

Mr. Tim Hudak: We heard that joke last time.

Mr. Michael Murphy: Same story, eh?

To my immediate left is Kevin Langs of Langs Bus Lines, and he's also vice-chair of the local school bus association in southwestern Ontario called WOSBA; Tony Leighton, First Bus, First Group, who is the secretary of our local association; and John Chapman on my far left from Newry, from the association of Huron-Perth. He's a director on the provincial association as well.

I'd be remiss, Mr. Chair, if I didn't recognize your past interest in our association and in school bus affairs over the years, back in the days of buses being passed by cars etc. The last time I did this, you were the Chair. It was in the Legislature. I was wondering, are we not getting it right, or do they like what we're doing but we're back together again? We'll keep persisting, anyway.

I think everybody in the room recognizes that bus operators really are advocates for safe and reliable student transportation and that situation means safer and cleaner school buses. We've had ongoing federal regulations for the past 10 years that have enhanced the safety of the buses and enhanced the features. We have a new environmental reg that took place in 2007 that makes the engines that much cleaner, with the new emissions reg.

The goals are best established by stable and predictable funding. That takes into account the real cost of operating a school bus. That's really what our parents, students and members are looking for, a stable and predictable funding model.

I would like to remind all that a decade ago, when the government brought in a new funding model for a number of the grants, transportation was not included. That debate and discussion have been ongoing since 1997. I've got the bruises. I was on that committee beginning in 1997, so it's been an ongoing debate and process ever since. But there are some things in the tube and we are optimistic that some of this can be brought forward to you.

I realize that over the course of your travels in the province, you've heard from the people up in Timmins, Mr. Dwyer and Mr. Malette, and the need for the funding model to take into account the true cost. I'm sure you're aware that the province did get a report from Deloitte and Touche last year on that very costing issue. I think it's somewhere on a shelf on Bay Street right now, but hopefully it will be continued.

In Kingston, I know that when they met with you they were talking about the issue of our drivers and the turnover. Here in London, a 30% turnover on a yearly basis is fact. That's what we're faced with.

I know that you were in Guelph and that you were briefed on the cost of fuel and how that affects us. We really do need a predictable fuel escalator that keeps our contracts in line. I have a favourite saying: "I can't take the kids halfway home." We have to take them all the way home and we have to burn about the same amount of fuel on a given day. We can try and limit the idling, but that's about all we're able to do.

Today, I need to address the challenge that our industry faces that perhaps is a little contentious. It's about the enveloping of funding for student transportation.

Over the past decade, the way education has been funded has changed fundamentally. All of the dollars, as all of you know, come from Queen's Park, compared to a few years ago when local trustees raised and spent a large amount of the local tax. As a result, our boards are caught in a challenging situation. On a number of matters,

Queen's Park has enveloped, and dictates how much money a board must spend on a particular priority. Those funds are called enveloped and they can only go to the program they are intended for. The minister has always believed that local trustees know their community, and they want to leave some flexibility for the boards to determine their local priorities, so not all of the programs, including transportation, are enveloped.

Unfortunately, this creates a system where boards are stuck with limited room to manoeuvre dollars around to fund programs of interest in their community, and one of the places they can go to when they need to find the money is their student transportation budget. I'm not saying that anyone is acting improperly. The ministry has to ensure the provincial government's priorities are funded, while retaining local authority. Local boards have to be responsible to local needs; we all know that. Everyone is acting with the best intentions for the students when they make those tough decisions, but one of the consequences of moving that money around is the continual under-funding of student transportation in some of our boards.

The challenge is that the ministry calculates what they think it will cost to run a school bus system for a particular board, and they transfer that money to the trustees. They look over all of their priorities and make decisions about where the dollars go. They decide, perhaps, that they can squeeze a few extra points out of their student transportation file.

That puts your local operators in a tough spot. Most bus companies are small, family-run companies, including my own. When we're dealing with the school board—we're a one-customer business. We don't bid on five bridges hoping we'll get one of them; we only have that one customer, and if we lose that one customer, we're out of business. So when we are dealing with the board and they've transferred money to other points and look over all of their priorities, they take some money out of the transportation file. We're not going to pull up our stakes and move to the next town. There would be no point in doing that, as there's only one school board. We're not in a position to say no if they want to significantly lower the price of the service. We're not likely going to repaint the buses and go into the taxi business. An empty bus isn't worth a lot and an empty bus yard isn't worth a lot either.

The result has been belt-tightening in the industry, where the margins are slim. There is ultimately one payer, and that's the government, and the ultimate premium is safety. We won't skimp on maintenance and other safety obligations. We can't pay less for fuel than what the fuel supplier says. There aren't any bargains on fuel.

What's left is an impact on the age of the fleet. Older buses do not have the same safety features as those manufactured in the last few years. Older buses are less environmentally friendly than those built with the new emissions standards. We're trying to keep running the older buses that are less clean because we just don't have

the wherewithal and the flexibility to buy new ones on the proper schedule that we should be.

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The other impact, of course, is on our people. Our drivers, we feel, are underpaid, and the result has been a spike in recruitment and retention problems.

On the point of drivers, we've been successful as a government and as school boards and as your operators. We're running the buses harder. A lot of buses are doing two and three runs in the morning and two or three runs in the afternoon. Our drivers now all have first aid, they all have CPR, and they all have EpiPens. They have defensive driving, they have fire extinguishers, and assertive discipline. For that we're paying them between \$40 and \$50 a day.

We've been successful in what we've done with the electronic routing on the buses, but the drivers are really the part that we haven't picked up and brought forward and recognized their contribution.

Finally, if the government values safe, clean, efficient student transportation, we're asking that the government ensures the dollars it allocates for busing are actually spent on busing. If things go sideways, it will be us—I mean the government and the operators—who will have to answer. If you say to the taxpayers, "We're adequately funding transportation," but they're not getting the transportation, that's an issue we've got to look at.

Any one of us would be happy to take any questions, Mr. Hoy.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation. The official opposition has the questioning.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you, gentlemen—all. Thank you very much for your presentation. I'll say at the start that sometimes we have groups that present the same brief in each community, and I want to commend you because you've taken up a different theme in each and given some level of detail about those different pressures on the school bus system, so I want to commend you for that.

Specifically, I wanted to ask a bit more, drill down on the funding model. You say on page 2 that "one of the places" trustees "can go to when they need to find money is the student transportation budget." A couple of paragraphs later you say, "The ministry calculates what they think it will cost to run the school bus system in a board and they transfer that money to the trustees." That's under the per student envelope, or how is that money allocated to each board?

Mr. Michael Murphy: Some of the allocation to each board has been based on a history, if you go back to what we called rough justice in the 1990s. The transportation budget is adjusted on an enrolment basis, plus it is increased arbitrarily—last year it was by 2%—but then it's adjusted based on the board's enrolment as well.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Okay. The historical funding pattern is adjusted somewhat for population growth, and the 2% increase last year.

Mr. Michael Murphy: Yes.

Mr. Tim Hudak: But, again, it's not enveloped as you describe in terms of it must be spent on transportation; it can be spent elsewhere.

Mr. Michael Murphy: No. It can be.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I know it gets convoluted, but can you track on a board-by-board basis which boards are spending the full amount on bus—

Mr. Michael Murphy: Oh yes.

Mr. Tim Hudak: And can you describe that briefly for us?

Mr. Michael Murphy: Well, it's not every board, but there are boards in this area and certainly boards in the greater Toronto area that are not spending all of their transportation dollars on their student transportation.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Are we talking about half of it? Are we talking about 90%?

Mr. Michael Murphy: I'd have to do a calculation, but probably half.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Are you able to follow where those funds then go as opposed to what they're intended for?

Mr. Michael Murphy: Well, they may go to wages.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Not bus driver wages.

Mr. Michael Murphy: No, no. I'm talking about teachers or staffing at the school board, or they could go to capital. If they go back into the general fund, it's hard to say exactly where the dollar went.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I know there has been a significant change, when then-Minister of Education Kennedy interfered in the collective bargaining agreement and mandated a reduction in supervisory time for teachers, and that was unfunded. I don't know if some of the money has gone into that area.

A second point on that is, has the change in supervisory duties meant a change in bus scheduling, a more frequent use of buses?

Mr. Michael Murphy: Yes, it's limited. The window for arrival is only a few minutes before the bell, so there is supervision in the yard when the bus arrives. In some cases, there's a five-minute window. Then, after school, generally we have a 10-minute window. In fact, here the contract is we must leave within 10 minutes.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Before Mr. Kennedy's intervention, what was the sort of—

Mr. Michael Murphy: Well, there was a greater window, particularly in the morning. So you could arrive and unload at one school and then continue on and arrive at another school in that 15 or 20 minutes that you had. Now that arrival is narrowed down.

Mr. Tim Hudak: And what kind of compensation did you receive for this change in the collective bargaining agreement?

Mr. Michael Murphy: We didn't receive any additional compensation for that. What it more or less did was limit in some cases what that particular bus or route was able to accomplish in that period of time.

Mr. Tim Hudak: In my time as a member, there has been a series of private members' bills brought forward on school bus safety, some members more prolific than others in that respect and all with good intention. What

kind of increase does that put on operating or capital costs for things like seat belt initiatives, signage on buses, those types of mechanisms?

Mr. Michael Murphy: There are two things with the capital right now. With the Canadian dollar, there's some downward pressure or a downward factor on the cost of a new bus, but the new emissions factor and the new D250 factor have balanced that off. A new bus today, depending on the engine and a few other things, is between \$80,000 and \$90,000. The dollar has helped on the one side, but then the regs on the other side have offset that.

Mr. Tim Hudak: There's a debate on seat belts for students on school buses. If you want to talk about the merits of that or concerns you have about that, in terms of expense too, what would it cost to fit new buses with seat belts or retrofit older buses?

Mr. Michael Murphy: I don't know how we would retrofit the older buses. The seats aren't designed to accommodate belts. The tie-downs wouldn't be designed. Our capacity would be limited because you would restrict how many kids could be in a particular seat because of the belting issue. You'd have to have two adults on each bus to ensure that the belts not only were on but were properly on. Remember, we could have a three-and-a-half-year-old in that seat, and the next run could be a football player. Really, we're running to that—from 40 pounds to 240 pounds, literally, on that.

I don't see in the immediate future where the system could afford to move to that. In North America or Canada or Ontario, if you look at the history of the school bus with the enveloping and the seating, there are some issues and some situations where a seat belt would actually be detrimental to the well-being of the children.

I've learned at home and school meetings, Mr. Hudak, not to argue against safety, but people just have to realize what we have going and try to update them on the good things we are doing.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

LONDON HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the London Home Builders' Association to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning. I would just ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Ms. Lois Langdon: Okay. We thank you for this opportunity this morning. My name is Lois Langdon. I am the executive officer of the London Home Builders' Association. I have been with the association for 13 years. I have with me this morning Paul Rawlings of Rawlings Homes. He is an award-winning London builder. He builds R-2000, Energy Star and concrete homes. He has been the chair of the technical committee for the Ontario and the Canadian home builders and is well-versed in our industry. I'll turn it to Paul.

Mr. Paul Rawlings: I would like to take a few moments this morning to address some of the local benefits of our industry and then talk briefly about some areas of concern as well as some areas provincially.

The London Home Builders' Association is the voice of the residential construction industry, the home building industry. We're also associated with the Ontario and Canadian Home Builders' Associations. We have 250 member companies locally with over 300 representatives. We represent not only home builders but also renovators, financial institutions, manufacturers and suppliers. We produce in our association, our members, the majority of residential activity in this region. We contribute \$566 million in wages with 12,645 direct and indirect jobs.

The LHBA and our members are looking forward to what should be a fairly stable year in 2008. We had a slow finish to the year in 2007. There were a little over 3,000 new home starts, and this is a little bit, about 15%, below the cyclical start in 2006. A healthy local job market and the ensuing economic growth have generated strong housing demand in the London area. We've had record-breaking existing home sales, and of course this has positively affected the new home market. So we're forecasting, along with CMHC, a healthy 2008 for our area.

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We also expect a strong year in the renovation sector. This bodes well for our existing housing stock with efforts to maintain and upgrade existing housing.

There are some issues I'd like to talk about regarding the recommendations for the upcoming provincial budget.

First off, I'd like to congratulate the provincial government for running consecutive balanced budgets. We realize there are many competing demands on the government that make it difficult to make successful choices. We certainly also take a sympathetic view to the province's concerns in regard to the federal-provincial fiscal imbalance and the issue of fairness regarding employment insurance when we see the province making hard choices. Again, the LHBA is supportive of these provincial efforts.

With respect to infrastructure funding, the residential construction industry is supportive of initial investments in the fall 2007 fiscal update. On a broader provincial scale, the Move Ontario 2020 plan is a great initiative for the greater Golden Horseshoe area, but of course in London our infrastructure priorities are slightly different. I'll just list the immediate needs, if you will indulge me, please:

- a Hale and Trafalgar Streets overpass;
- a road widening and bridge on Sarnia Road—\$20 million; and
- a road widening on Wonderland Road between Fanshawe Park and Gainsborough.

Another road widening that would alleviate a bottleneck in high-traffic areas would be Bradley Avenue from Jackson Road through to Wellington Road.

Probably one of the most important things we see within our industry is the creation of new industry and jobs in London, and key to this would be the development and support of Innovation Park, which is a development of lands adjacent to our airport.

We also have a couple of recommendations for the standing committee to consider.

The residential building industry was supportive of the transfer of two cents of the existing gas tax initiative during the first mandate of the McGuinty government. We believe this was a successful program. Just before the re-election of the existing McGuinty provincial government, we passed a resolution at the Ontario Home Builders' Association annual general meeting asking for an additional phase-in of at least three cents per litre of the existing gas tax for municipal transportation infrastructure. This would bring a total of five cents from the existing gas tax by the end of the McGuinty government's second mandate.

Home builders and new homebuyers in London are proud to support the financing of infrastructure directly tied to the neighbourhoods we build. We not only provide shelter and a place where families create memories and shape their traditions, but new communities also bring in important new property assessment growth for municipalities as well as a population base to support job growth. We pay the capital costs related to growth through development charges, while supporting the economy through both direct and indirect jobs and the tax revenue generated through construction for all three levels of government.

I'd like to also point out, on a side note, that outside of alcohol, housing is the most highly taxed. I didn't know it was a sin to actually live in a new house, but I do my best to support both levels.

Unfortunately, municipal politicians target new housing for additional taxes, levies and fees while artificially suppressing property tax to appease existing ratepayers. They fail to realize that these additional costs are paid for directly by the new homebuyer.

We've got a very good relationship with the city of London. We've worked in co-operation on background studies for the last two development charges, but we're still concerned that a strong lobby from other municipalities to open the Development Charges Act will significantly raise the cost of housing, not only in the province, but certainly in London as well.

I'd like to just talk about our DC locally. As of this year, it's \$16,720 for every new home. This also includes a \$379 education development charge. Just to put that in perspective, last year it was \$14,184 and the year before that it was \$13,784. So housing affordability and the fair taxation of new homebuyers is a central factor in any future discussions regarding the Development Charges Act.

Another area of concern is having a sufficient supply of approved land to satisfy new home developments. The London Home Builders' Association has taken a proactive approach by joining with the London Development Institute, the association of realtors, and also we've

joined with the labour unions of London. This partnership is called the Keep London Growing Coalition, and it has been working for the last year to find solutions to a dwindling land supply in the hope of keeping jobs in London. While there is sufficient land within London, there is what's called an urban growth boundary. There seems to be an artificial shortage that is being created by the municipal approval process, and it's causing the cost of land to increase unnecessarily. Working with the municipality, we're seeing some positive growth in this area as well.

Another area of concern across the province is the harmonization of the GST and PST. We see the federal government adding more pressure. Mr. Flaherty has been obvious in his communications with the province, that they would like to continue forward with this and hopefully give a boost to the manufacturing sector through a harmonization of these taxes. Our understanding is that Minister Duncan is not putting this on his radar screen, and we encourage that this continue—that we do not go down this road of harmonization.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about a minute left for your presentation.

Mr. Paul Rawlings: Thank you. We're concerned about harmonization, that in provinces where the GST and PST are already harmonized, costs have risen dramatically. Many of the components within a house are not covered by PST. This would add significantly: \$12,000 for a mid-range home in Ontario.

One of the other issues that's also looking at raising costs is the issue of housing sprinklers. We realize that this is a safety issue, and certainly we support this. Just a brief fact: A good portion of homes over 20 years old do not have functioning smoke detectors. We want to make the point that smoke alarms save lives while fire sprinklers save property. Again, let's focus our attention on safety, but making safety available to all in Ontario.

I think that's all I have to say. I have lots more to say, but my time is up.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you very much for the presentation. The questioning will go to the NDP.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you. Two areas: First of all, you want to phase in an additional three cents of gas tax to municipalities to bring it up to five cents. Presently, the gas tax is apportioned to those municipalities that have transit systems. We've heard from some of the smaller municipalities that they've been left out. If the government were to raise the additional three cents, do you see it still going only to municipalities with transit systems, or would you apportion it differently?

Mr. Paul Rawlings: That's a great question; thanks for asking that. I'm not really sure if we have a position on that, quite frankly.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Take one.

Mr. Paul Rawlings: Make one up? I think it's fair, sure.

Mr. Michael Prue: What's fair? The way it is now or the way that smaller municipalities are asking for?

Ms. Lois Langdon: I think smaller municipalities have a definite need. London would be one of those. A light rail transit system is in our future. It doesn't have a date on it yet, but we definitely have needs here and I would assume that other municipalities of the same size would have additional needs.

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Mr. Michael Prue: No, but London right now is getting the two cents of gas tax. London is not left out. It's not a small municipality; it's one of the big ones.

Ms. Lois Langdon: Well, it's certainly not sufficient for the needs that we have here. That's why they're asking for more.

Mr. Michael Prue: All right; you want more so that London can prosper. But you have no real position on small towns like Tillsonburg, who was here earlier, or Delhi or those places.

Ms. Lois Langdon: Not an official one, no.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay.

The second one has to do with house sprinklers. This is not that contentious an issue at Queen's Park, although the sticking people seem to be the home builders. They don't want to install this in new homes. If you look back, cars 20 years ago were built without seat belts, but you wouldn't build one today without a seat belt. You know that some things save lives; some things are just accepted that weren't. Why the reluctance to use the technology, which is fairly inexpensive, to not only save properties but, I would put it to you, save lives—particularly firefighters' lives? They come to a house that's at flashpoint, and they could die.

Ms. Lois Langdon: I think there are a couple of points, and certainly Paul can jump in as well. The point that we would like to make is that new homes are already more fire resistant. They are built of different materials than existing or older homes are. They are already more fire resistant. We have been looking to the fire marshals for information on the ages of homes where there are fires, to try to track some statistics, and are as yet unsuccessful in being able to gain that information, but we know that the new homes are already more fire resistant. They are also hard-wired with smoke detectors. We feel that if you're serious about saving lives, the emphasis should be on existing homes and ensuring that they have smoke detectors.

Mr. Paul Rawlings: If I can add to that, I've been involved in this discussion for probably 10 years on a national level. I was involved in a discussion on TV with the Mississauga fire chief, who has been a proponent of fire sprinklers. Interestingly, when the fire chief was asked if he had fire sprinklers in his own home, his answer was no. When he was asked why: "Because they're too expensive." So I'd like to just correct you, because the home builders are not against sprinkler systems.

Mr. Michael Prue: The only people I've ever heard speak against them have been home builders. Maybe that's not your position, but I've never heard anyone else—

Mr. Paul Rawlings: No, our position, quite frankly, is we are against mandatory sprinkler systems. If there is shown a need for our customers that we are able to fulfill, we are certainly more than willing to do that.

You also made the comment that they're inexpensive. That's not a correct statement. They are extremely expensive; they do add significantly to a new home's cost. The problem here is not new homes, as has been pointed out; the problem is, 74% of Ontario's housing stock is more than 20 years old. So what we're doing is we're actually penalizing those who do not have, or cannot afford, a new home. We're making it almost—actually, I'm not going to go there. What we're doing is making homes even more expensive, and we're really penalizing those who cannot afford new homes. I think that's unfortunate. I think it's an unfortunate position, that those who are trying to push this mandatory sprinkler system are taking that position. You're right: We want to concentrate on saving lives. How do we do that? We concentrate on smoke detectors, because we know that before there's fire, there's smoke. Quite often, people are already dead before. So sprinkler systems save property; they don't necessarily save lives. I think that's an important point for us to keep in mind.

Ms. Lois Langdon: I think one other small point on that is that there is a process that has been followed for years for effecting changes to the building code. It is an important process. It requires discussion, it involves manufacturers, it deals with specifics of how things are installed and what the impacts of changes are in the building code. To bring it through as mandatory through legislation doesn't follow that process. It doesn't give the industry an opportunity to work through all the requirements that we would need technically to install them in houses.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

FEDERATION OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes available for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning. I'd just ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Sister Sue Wilson: Good morning. My name is Sue Wilson. I'm a sister of St. Joseph. I work at the office for systemic justice for the Canadian federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. This federation represents six congregations and over 650 sisters. Our office speaks for the federation on matters of eco-social justice.

As we identified priorities for the upcoming budget, our first concern was to examine the well-being and sustainability of Ontario communities from social, economic and ecological perspectives. This morning, I want to highlight one of the most critical patterns that we discerned: the growing gap between rich and poor. As

you know, the gap was a problem during the tough economic times of the early 1990s. But it continued to widen, even as Ontario's economy strengthened in the late 1990s, and it has now reached a record high, both in terms of the gap for earned income, as well as after-tax income.

There are those who argue that the gap doesn't matter as long as the poorest among us have access to the basic goods in society. However, that's just the point: As Armine Yalnizyan shows in her study, Ontario's Growing Gap, the rich set the pace for the price of basic goods, such as housing, health, education and transit. In addition, sociological studies are demonstrating that a wide gap between rich and poor affects social cohesion and well-being for all citizens. Societies that have wide gaps between rich and poor experience higher levels of violence, poorer health for all, lower levels of trust and community participation, as well as higher levels of racism and sexism. A wide gap between rich and poor is clearly contrary to community well-being and sustainability.

The gap between rich and poor also has ramifications for how we address climate change. Hopefully we can all agree that climate change is an issue that needs sharply increased investments from all levels of government. While we strongly support such policies, we also ask that the government be attentive to barriers faced by people living with low income as these policies are developed. For example, we know that the cheapest housing often has the highest energy costs, with the result that people living with low incomes have a higher energy cost burden. At the same time, they lack the resources to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. So climate change policies must also assist people living with low incomes to make the transition to low-emission lifestyles.

As I move to more specific recommendations for the upcoming budget, I'd like to note that we've been very pleased to see that the government is developing a poverty reduction strategy. It's in the context of this commitment that we recommend the following budget priorities for Ontario as a means of beginning to address the growing gap between rich and poor.

First, in terms of the labour market, Ontario needs a minimum wage that enables those who work full-time, full year, to live above the poverty line. Since studies indicated that raising the minimum wage would have little impact on employment levels, we recommend setting the minimum wage at \$10.25 an hour in 2008 dollars. That's \$10 an hour in 2007 dollars. We urge that this level should be reached as quickly as possible with an annual indexation to reflect the cost of living.

At the same time, employment standards need to be updated to ensure that migrant, contract and temporary workers, people with whom we're in touch every day, have the same protection under provincial legislation as do full-time workers. It's also critical that more inspectors are hired so that employers who break the law are identified and fined.

Second, in supporting the transition to the workforce, current rates of social assistance are seriously inadequate, making it much more difficult for people to move into the workforce because so much time and energy is needed simply to meet the basic needs of one's family.

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Benefits for both Ontario Works and ODSP need to be increased by double-digit levels during 2008 and indexed to inflation so that recipients have access to the resources and opportunities that are fundamental to participation in community life. At a minimum, this should include a shelter allowance that reflects the real cost of adequate housing in Ontario and it should provide for the cost of meeting the nutritious food basket as it's defined by local public health authorities. We also call on the government to establish an independent committee to determine just and rational criteria by which social assistance rates should be set.

Third, the government can support families and children in four ways that we want to highlight: by speeding up implementation of the Ontario child benefit so that families receive the fully benefit sooner; by continuing to invest funds for building a system of not-for-profit, universally acceptable, high-quality child care, in addition to the funding for junior and senior kindergarten; by increasing the availability of affordable housing through annual targets for the construction of new affordable housing, the rehabilitation of aging public housing and a housing allowance program to assist low- and modest-income renters; and by being attentive to the poverty barriers in addressing climate change.

As money is invested in developing alternative energy sources, it will be very important to create strong grants and programs that will assist low-income householders to make the transition to energy conservation and efficiency. It will also be important to make significant long-term investments in public transit systems.

The Nordic countries are demonstrating that it's possible to use comprehensive strategies to address both poverty and environmental concerns, while remaining highly competitive among world economies. Studies also indicate that the overall benefits for community sustainability and overall health would be enormous.

We urge the provincial government to be guided by a similar vision in its decision-making for the upcoming budget.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation. The questioning will go to the government.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Welcome, Sister, to the committee. Could you tell us a little bit more about the office for systemic justice and the work that you do there?

Sister Sue Wilson: Yes. As many of you will know, our sisters for hundreds of years have been involved in addressing social issues in our cities and in our small and rural towns. A lot of our work has been kind of front-line work. That might be working with refugees who are new to the country, working with people who are un-

employed; another example would be running soup kitchens.

Our office is our effort to take a step back. We think it's important to reach out to address these concerns, but our office takes that step back and asks, "What are the root causes of these problems that are existing? Why do these people not have access to goods that we would consider basic to society?" and to look at some of the government policies that contribute to these problems.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I just want to address your point about the not-for-profit universal child care system. Certainly, my riding is a very rural riding and the big-box type of child care is not a viable alternative in a rural community. We not only have a lot of not-for-profit but we also have situations of households that use it as an opportunity to bring income in. So we have individuals who provide child care to neighbours, especially in rural communities, because of the isolation that we experience there. It's a matter even of convenience in terms of bringing our children to a situation on a farm or an individual in town who will do the child care for us.

What is your position on that? That really is for-profit. The point is to have income coming into the household. So how do you feel about that in terms of not-for-profit? Is there space in your plan for those individuals who provide child care to their neighbours and their communities and also do it for profit?

Sister Sue Wilson: I think there will always be space for that option. I think there will always be people who simply can't afford to access that as an option. Those are the folks I would be most concerned about. It seems to me that if we can move to a place where we're giving child care workers a decent wage, we will allow the blossoming of a not-for-profit industry there. I think that we need to get the structures in place that allow that industry to develop in a way that reaches out and gives access to all people.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

ONTARIO PROPANE ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I'm advised that our 11:15 is not here yet, but the Ontario Propane Association is willing to come forward. If you would do that, sir. Good morning, and thank you for making your presentation somewhat earlier. We appreciate that very much. You have 10 minutes for your presentation and perhaps five minutes of questioning following that. Please identify yourself for Hansard.

Mr. Andy Bite: Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the pre-budget consultation. My name is Andy Bite. I am here on behalf of the Ontario Propane Association. I'm the CEO of EDPRO Energy Group, a propane marketer that's located here in London. We have three facilities and operate in Ontario. We have

provided a very detailed submission which I will summarize in the next few minutes.

First of all, the Ontario Propane Association is the recognized voice of the propane industry in Ontario. We have over 240 members and we represent the interests of propane marketers, along with transporters, producers, wholesalers and suppliers to the industry.

I'm going to keep it pretty simple and straightforward. Our industry submission can be summarized in about five relevant points:

(1) Propane as a transportation fuel is 25% less expensive than gasoline, 11% less expensive than diesel and 9% less expensive than CNG. In fact, propane is the most cost-effective fleet fuel when evaluated on a full life-cycle basis, when you consider the cost of conversion when it's used in fleet applications.

(2) Propane is more environmentally friendly than gasoline or diesel, emitting up to 26% less greenhouse gases than conventional gasoline and significantly less emissions of criteria air contaminant and air toxics that impact air quality and human health.

(3) There is an abundance of propane in Canada available to meet the transportation sector needs. Propane from domestic sources can replace up to 20% of domestic gasoline demand.

(4) Propane pricing has been and is likely to be more stable than gasoline, diesel and ethanol blends well into the future.

(5) Propane is the most readily accessible and available alternative fuel in Ontario and additional infrastructure is easily installed as fleet-specific needs arise.

In summary, propane is the most cost-effective and easiest clean fuel for fleets to implement. Propane is readily available for them, there is an abundance of supply, it has environmental benefits, and it provides significant cost savings without vehicle performance compromises.

That is basically a short summary of what is in the document. All the evidence is there and I encourage you to read our submission. We believe there is no one single solution to reduce the impact of transportation fuels on the environment and climate change or provide ongoing energy security. We believe there is a myriad of solutions required and developed for specific segments of the transportation market. We believe propane can be part of the transportation fuel solution in Ontario within specific fleet segments.

We've also attached two business cases done at the Ivey School of Business from two municipal fleets: One is here in London, the London Police Service; another is in Mississauga, the region of Peel TransHelp, a para-transit service. As well, we've attached a testimonial from one of the largest private fleets in the world, United Parcel Service, better known as UPS.

1110

At this point we're really not asking anything from government other than to keep what is in place in terms of alternative fuel programs, perhaps enhance them. But we are pointing out that fleets, including government

fleets, can enjoy significant cost savings using propane while also improving the environment.

Thank you very much. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the official opposition.

Mrs. Julia Munro: First of all, I'd like to offer comments as there's perhaps a conflict of interest. I'm a propane user.

Mr. Andy Bite: Well, that's a good thing.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I was a little bit disappointed right at the end when you said that in terms of specific recommendations—quite frankly, that's what I wanted to hear; I really appreciate the detail of the submission that you're making to this committee. I know that previously there was an initiative by government to really increase the use of propane. It would seem to me that the time has come perhaps, if I might use the expression, to fan those flames.

Mr. Andy Bite: In terms of alternative fuels, propane being one of them, there is an alternative fuels policy, there are incentives and rebates in place which we've documented. We believe that at a certain point in time those should be enhanced. They should be done on a fuels-neutral policy, and we'd be glad to be part of those discussions.

I believe there's a niche for every fuel, that there's no one answer. Long-haul trucking is different than the consumer vehicle and so ethanol blends fit in those; long-haul trucking, biodiesel. The commercial sector, the municipal sector use significant fuels in light-duty vehicles, centrally fuelled and maintained. Those are ideal for propane.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I think that's really what we, as a committee, need to hear, recommendations such as that. I'll pass it on to Mr. Hudak.

Mr. Tim Hudak: You know, I've got to declare a conflict of interest too, like my colleague Mrs. Munro. I've got to tell you, I'm a customer of Free Gas out of Pelham, Ontario.

Mr. Andy Bite: In Fonthill, yes.

Mr. Tim Hudak: When I heard it was Free Gas, I thought this must be a tremendous business, and then I get bills every few months, so you can do something about that.

But on a serious note, I noticed in your presentation—thank you for the level of detail, which I'll have a chance to look at a bit later on—as I was skimming it, you talked about propane being at its peak as a transportation fuel in the 1990s: 50,000 vehicles consumed a quarter of a million litres of fuel. But today that has decreased significantly: 120 million litres of fuel in 6,000 vehicles. So help me understand why that substitution has taken place. What are the market forces causing that?

Mr. Andy Bite: In the 1980s and early 1990s, propane was heavily incented. A number of the grants from the federal government went away. We didn't keep up with the technology and then the technology became way more expensive so the economics changed. Through the

late 1990s, early 2000, we had relatively low gasoline prices. There was no incentive to change and there was no pressure environmentally at that point in time.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Right.

Mr. Andy Bibe: Now we're seeing more and more private fleets looking at their fuel costs. We are not seeing much activity in the municipal sector, and we think that is a prime sector, as well as certain fleets within the provincial government or funded by the provincial government.

Mr. Tim Hudak: And the abundance of fuelling stations that have propane available?

Mr. Andy Bibe: Right now, there are about 1,200 in Ontario. There were close to 5,000. Again, that infrastructure is easily replicated.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Is the Ontario reality, with respect to fleets and such we've discussed, the North American reality or have there been interesting shifts in Ontario versus other provinces or states?

Mr. Andy Bibe: It's a Canadian reality. BC, Ontario and Quebec have the best fiscal regime for propane as a transportation fuel. In the US, there is not a surplus of propane like there is in Canada, so it doesn't quite fit as well. The more natural gas we produce in Canada, the more propane we get, the more we ship to the US.

Mr. Tim Hudak: To what degree is propane going to be impacted, whether as a home heating fuel or transportation, by the current energy policy to build all the new natural-gas-burning facilities and close down the coal energy generating plants?

Mr. Andy Bibe: As I said, as the natural gas supply and demand grows, so will propane supply. Eighty per cent of the propane in Canada comes from natural gas, so as we produce more natural gas to meet more demands, we will have more propane available.

Mr. Tim Hudak: But the concern is that the new plants will suck a lot of the natural gas out of the home heating supply for general energy use. Propane will—

Mr. Andy Bibe: No. About 55% of natural gas produced in Canada is exported to the US, so those exports will be diminished and LNG, liquefied natural gas, will be brought into the US, into Houston, into facilities offshore Boston, offshore New York.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation before the committee.

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO-THAMES VALLEY LOCAL

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario-Thames Valley Local. Good morning. You have 10 minutes available for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning following that. I would just ask you to identify yourselves for our recording Hansard.

Mr. Phillip Mack: Phillip Mack, president, Elementary Teachers' Federation-Thames Valley Local.

Mr. Craig Smith: Craig Smith, vice-president, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario-Thames Valley Local.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local, represents more than 3,200 public elementary teachers in the Thames Valley District School Board. We welcome the opportunity to participate in the pre-budget consultations related to the education funding model in particular. It is clear to us that adequate funding is the key to ensuring a high-quality education for all elementary students—for each one our members represent and teach.

We recognize that the funding model is not perfect and is in constant need of review in light of changing priorities and needs. We do have confidence, however, that ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local and the Liberal government share a common goal of ensuring that education is funded to provide a high quality of education for all Ontario students, that the levels of funding need to meet the needs of elementary students and teachers, and that these funds are allocated appropriately.

Funding cuts imposed over time have resulted in serious program losses and represented a major setback for public education in the province. On a per pupil basis and taking inflation into account, education funding was cut by almost 5% from 1998-99 to 2001-02. Since this government first took office in 2003, education funding has seen a significant increase of over 17%, again taking enrolment and inflation into account. We applaud the government for making the rebuilding of public education a key priority.

While progress has been made to reinvest in public education, the ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local remains concerned that the funding provided for elementary students is significantly less than what is provided for secondary students. This historic gap in funding is no longer defensible and contributes significantly to the creation of a two-tiered public education system.

ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local's primary concern is the gap in funding between elementary and secondary students. From the beginning, the student-focused funding formula has placed a higher value on secondary students than elementary students. We believe this funding inequity is a barrier to ensuring that all elementary students receive the high-quality, well-rounded education they need to be successful lifelong learners.

Based on calculations provided by the Ministry of Education, we know that the gap in funding for elementary and secondary education in 2007-08 is approximately \$711, which is to say that school boards are provided approximately \$711 in additional funding for each secondary student than for each elementary student.

We appreciate the concerted effort that the government has made to reduce this gap. In 2003-04, the gap was \$1,318. The current gap of approximately \$711 represents a reduction of approximately 46% in just four years. However, a gap of approximately \$711 is still significant and should be seen as unacceptable.

The funding gap means fewer resources in elementary classrooms, fewer specialist teachers for elementary students and less preparation time for elementary teachers. We believe the government will not achieve its goals of improving students' level of academic achievement and reducing high school dropout rates if it fails to address the underfunding of elementary education. If the goal is to increase student achievement, elementary education needs to be better funded. There is simply no rational explanation to justify this difference in funding.

1120

A couple of questions: Why is staff development per elementary student \$1 less than per secondary student? This deprives the elementary panel of \$1.25 million. Why are textbooks and learning materials funded at \$27 more per secondary student than elementary student? This gap totals almost \$34 million that is not available for elementary resources. Why are classroom supplies funded at \$105 more for a secondary student than for an elementary student? This is a loss of \$131 million for elementary classroom supplies.

The ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local is concerned that elementary students in grades 4 to 8 are presently experiencing larger class sizes than in the school years between 2003-04 and 2006-07. We recognize that it was not the intent of the Ministry of Education to implement the primary class size reduction at the expense of elementary students in the junior and intermediate grades. In Thames Valley, however, it is clear that the implementation of the primary class cap has resulted in increased class size and split grade pressures in the junior and intermediate divisions.

The platform promised to create a \$150-million fund to assist students in grades 4 to 8. This acknowledges that there is a funding gap, and it's a problem, and is an important first step in reducing the gap between elementary and secondary funding. We do look forward to this new funding and to working with the government to ensure that it is put in place quickly and effectively.

There are a couple of things that we are looking at. Each elementary school should have a full-time teacher-librarian. In spite of the government's current focus on literacy, few elementary schools are staffed with a full-time teacher-librarian whose role it is to assist students with literacy and research skills and support classroom teachers to deliver their programs. Currently, an elementary school must have over 750 students to qualify for funding for a teacher-librarian. Most elementary schools fall far short of this number. Elementary students are thereby disadvantaged by this current approach.

Only one guidance teacher is provided for 5,000 elementary students; that would be the equivalent of one guidance teacher for every 14 elementary schools of 350 students. To this end, ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local supports the view that every elementary school should be staffed with at least one guidance and/or student success teacher, as is the case in secondary schools.

In essence, the time to close the gap in funding is now. An era of declining enrolment should provide us with a perfect opportunity to do so.

A couple of other initiatives where we are looking for support: in full-day kindergarten. The government has made a commitment to phasing in full-day junior and senior kindergarten programs beginning in 2009-10. This is a very positive first move and one that recognizes the extensive research that supports learning for the early years. We look forward to this initiative. ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local believes that these programs, provided by qualified elementary teachers, will ensure that all students receive the foundation they need for successful lifelong learning.

The goal of achieving higher student achievement in literacy and numeracy requires that the funding provided to school boards be predictable, stable and adequate to support the learning needs of all students. Given the recognition that success in the later years of a student's schooling is based on a solid foundation in the beginning years, the current gap in funding between an elementary student and a secondary student does a tremendous disservice to Ontario's elementary students.

We would like to make a few recommendations:

- that the funding gap between elementary and secondary students be eliminated;

- that the primary class size funding be folded into the foundation grants;

- that the lines in the foundation grants for staff development, textbooks and learning materials, classroom supplies, classroom computers and classroom consultants be no less for elementary than for a secondary student;

- that the school foundation grant be modified to fund one full-time teacher-librarian for every elementary school;

- that the foundation grant be modified to fund a minimum of one full-time guidance teacher for every elementary school;

- that design and technology courses for grade 7 and 8 students be re-established;

- that the local priorities amount be re-established in the foundation grant;

- and finally, that the funding formula be modified to ensure that no board receives less money in real terms, adjusted for inflation and enrolment, in any year than they received in the previous year, to provide stability and predictability.

We thank you for your time and would entertain any questions that you may have.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the NDP.

Mr. Michael Prue: On page 4 you made a statement, and I'm a little puzzled by it, so perhaps you can clear it up. You state, "We recognize that it was not the intent of the Ministry of Education to implement the primary class size reduction at the expense of elementary students in the junior and intermediate grades." It was the intent of the government to lower the class sizes in those junior grades, but they didn't give enough money to the school

boards, so how could their intent have been anything other than that?

Mr. Craig Smith: The understanding that we had from the Ministry of Education is that the impact of the primary cap should not come at the expense of junior and intermediate students. How that has unfolded in various places is a little different in each board. In our board, I think some of the flexibility that the board may have had in terms of the allocation of resources has led to this situation. So for example, the funding formula basically says in junior and intermediate grades you're looking at a 25-to-1 ratio, but we know, for example, that the current ratio in our board is something in the order of 26 or 27 to 1.

The other thing that skews the result is that classes that are split grades 3-4 are capped at 23. They're counted into the junior and intermediate average, so you can actually do two things at once. You can make the average look lower but actually have increased class sizes in those grades 4 to 8. So I think we have to be a bit careful with the statistics. There's improvement, and we think there are steps being made in the right direction, but we are a little concerned that when the funds actually get to the board, perhaps they're given a little more flexibly in terms of the allocations. Who's paying for that at this point are the students in 4 to 8, and we happen to represent those people as well. So there is a bit of a conflict there; you're quite right.

Mr. Michael Prue: The second thing, if you could explain it to me—this is found on page 7: "Beginning in 2001-02, a local priorities amount was added to the foundation grant. It was eliminated last year." You want it re-established. Why was it eliminated? I fail to understand the rationale for the government in doing this.

Mr. Craig Smith: I would also wonder why it was eliminated, and perhaps I'm not in a position to answer that question.

Mr. Michael Prue: How was it explained to you? You obviously must have questioned it.

Mr. Craig Smith: In general terms, we don't get a lot of consultation at the local level about those particular priorities. So I would think that we would want to speak with our provincial colleagues. However, we do recognize the value of that particular grant, because that's where you can give boards flexibility. I guess where we have an issue is where funds are allocated, particularly for the elementary panel, and then are shifted around to cover or to offset other costs. That's a constant discussion we have with the members of provincial Parliament and with our provincial organization: There needs to be a balance struck between the sweating of money that makes sure it goes where it needs to go, and some balance where the boards can reflect local needs. So I think there is an ongoing issue there. As to the specific question, I don't have a specific answer.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. Last but not least, my question is on your last recommendation: "that the funding formula be modified to ensure that no board receives less money in real terms"—and it goes on. This is perhaps the

biggest single failure, in my mind, of the funding formula, because boards with even a few students' declining enrolment can be really triggered badly. It's happening in downtown cores, it's happening in small communities, northern communities especially, with the number of kids attending. How much will it cost the government to implement this?

Mr. Craig Smith: I wouldn't have that particular information. What I can speak to, though, is our board is in a unique situation because, like most of the boards in the province, we are experiencing decline, and have been over a considerable period of time. One of the problems or challenges in our particular area is that, though the numbers are overall in decline, we have pockets of growth. So we're kind of caught betwixt and between in that we are a declining board, but we also have growth. So again it gets to the statistics. The overall is a decline, so we're getting all of those pressures, but we also have areas of growth that require an influx of resource. As to the specific numbers, I am not sure what the impact is on our board. I know that there have been serious issues here with the way the funding formula works as pupil-driven. When those numbers go down, obviously that has an impact on the funding and we'd like to see things that would offset that.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

1130

PEOPLE FIRST TILLSONBURG

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on People First Tillsonburg to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes available for your presentation. If you would identify yourself for the purposes of our recording Hansard, you could begin.

Ms. Della Derrough: My name is Della Derrough. I am here on behalf of People First Tillsonburg, and I would like to thank you for allowing me to speak today.

It was 1993 to 2004 that we did not receive an increase. We want to thank you for the cost-of-living increases that have been given to us in three out of the four years in your first term of office.

We need to make sure that people are given money for their bills. When the cost of living goes up, we have to cut back and are not able to pay our bills. The cost of groceries is expensive. Other people's carts are filled. If we bought like them, we would have to go into the utility bill. We have to buy cheap food. People have to go to the food bank, and you are only allowed so much; there is a limit on it. People have to go to the soup kitchen for meals. We don't like to be told that that is what you have to put up with when you are poor. We are not able to afford luxuries like computers.

People who live in London pay \$74 for a monthly bus pass. In Tillsonburg, we have to pay \$6 one way for a taxi. We can't pay for a cab or meals and a show. We don't have a bus service in Tillsonburg.

What can you give us to allow us to live in dignity? You have to wait five years before you can get a new wheelchair.

We are asking that you increase the ODSP so we are able to live like normal persons, normal lives, able to have a better life as the cost of living rises.

We encourage people to work, but some people don't want to work because the government takes the money back. It seems like the government doesn't care about us. When you work to gather the paycheque and then they take it back, it's not right. Little of the pension cheque money is left for normal retirement.

Change the drug card and dental card to cover it 100%. Whatever prescription the doctor gives you should be paid for, not a substitute but the right medication, or you have side effects.

There is not enough money for people with disabilities. They need someone there 24 hours for their disability so nothing happens to them. Continue having services and support. If a person doesn't fill out their papers correctly or is a day late, there is an interruption of support. Landlords are not friendly when they don't receive their rent. Please increase our ODSP so we can pay.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to us today. We need to be heard. People need to listen to us, and we need to have our ODSP increased.

Do you have any questions?

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the government.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Della, thank you for your presentation this morning, and to—is it Michael who is with you?

Mr. Michael Kadey: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Michael, thank you for being here. I didn't get the other young lady's name.

Ms. Helen Lee: My name is Helen.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Hi. Thank you, each of you, for being here and coming in from Tillsonburg.

Tell me just a little bit more, if you would, about People First Tillsonburg. How large is your group, and are most of the members of the group on disability?

Ms. Della Derrough: Yes, they are.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Do you know how many people are in the group?

Mr. Michael Kadey: We've got 12 people.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: That's a good size. You're representing some people in your community in a very effective way.

We appreciate very much the presentation you've made this morning, and specifically outlining the financial challenges that you face on very limited means. We appreciate, too, your comments that we've made some headway, even on the cost-of-living adjustment, over the past three or four years, particularly when it had been some time since you had seen anything.

I'm optimistic, and I'm hoping that you will have the opportunity to present to the cabinet committee on the consultations around a poverty reduction strategy. Deb

Matthews, who is one of our members, a member from London and a member—

Ms. Della Derrough: I know her.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: You know Deb? Okay. She's going to lead that process as the chair of the cabinet committee, but we need to hear from people like the folks from People First Tillsonburg. We need to hear it on the ground so the real needs of people are the ones that are getting to us. We've done some things that haven't necessarily helped you directly, like increases in the minimum wage. If you're not in a position to work, that's not going to help you very directly. So you need some very specific things. The commitment we've recently made to investing in dental care for those of low income may be of some benefit. It certainly has some benefit for others who find themselves in similar situations, but not necessarily because of a need for ODSP payments.

What types of increases do you think we should be making to the ODSP payments?

Ms. Della Derrough: Cost-of-living increases.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: At the very least the cost of living, and probably more?

Ms. Della Derrough: More.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: More would be better.

Mr. Michael Kadey: A little bit more. And let us keep what we earn; don't take it away from us. Let us have a normal life in dignity, like normal people who can work. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: So you encourage us to not be clawing back any earnings that you're achieving beyond your ODSP payment.

Mr. Michael Kadey: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Thank you so much for your presentation this morning.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for coming today.

The committee is recessed until 1 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1138 to 1301.

CANADIAN TAXPAYERS FEDERATION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): The standing committee on finance and economic affairs will now come to order. For the committee, our 1 o'clock presentation has cancelled, but we do have the Canadian Taxpayers Federation prepared to give their brief. We do appreciate your coming forward to do that for us at this time.

You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning following that. I would ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of our recording Hansard. You can begin.

Mr. Kevin Gaudet: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Kevin Gaudet. I'm the Ontario director for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for allowing me to present to you today. It's been a long time since I was in London. I did my MBA here at the Richard Ivey School of Business. I can only hope that your questions today will be as gentle as were my professors'.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is a national non-partisan, not-for-profit organization. We have 68,000 supporters across the country, approximately 12,500 in the province of Ontario.

The 2007 election platform document for the governing party was Moving Forward Together. Too often over the past years, though, “moving forward” has meant “moving spending forward,” and sadly this has meant leaving taxpayers behind. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation’s recommendations for the 2008-09 Ontario budget offer a taxpayer-friendly path forward, including a spending freeze, personal tax relief, debt reduction, greater accountability from Ontario’s crown corporations and more transparency in how tax dollars are spent.

Spending in Ontario has been climbing at alarming rates. Government spending is up to \$84 billion a year on programs, up from \$64 billion when the government took office only four short years ago. This rate of spending is not sustainable. During the government’s mandate, spending has grown by more than double the combined inflation and population growth rates, a benchmark that former Prime Minister Paul Martin had established as a target for financial spending. As a result, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation recommends a two-year freeze on program spending, followed by a spending cap limiting program spending growth to the maximum of the combined inflation and population growth rates.

Not only has spending been growing, but the government is spending beyond even what it budgets from year to year. As this slide shows, this practice is trending in the wrong direction. You can see that the ski slope at the end of the curve demonstrates that year over year, over-spending is increasing. The practice of shovelling cash out the door at year-end robs taxpayers and is denounced by the Auditor General. Therefore, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation recommends that in-year budgeted spending be made illegal, as has been done in some states like Washington.

Despite years of a strong economy, Ontario taxes have gone up and rampant spending has been enabled by soaring government revenues. Surpluses are now being run and taxpayers, we believe, should see the benefits through the elimination of the health tax.

The taxpayers of the future also deserve a break. As the Ontario government continues to mortgage against future taxes, total debt in Ontario continues to climb, up to over \$162 billion. That’s \$12,656 for each man, woman and child in Ontario, and interest on the debt eats over \$9 billion every year, which is just under \$25 million a day in debt interest spending. This spending erodes government’s ability to spend where necessary or to provide meaningful tax relief for beleaguered taxpayers in Ontario.

To resolve this, starting in 2009 and 2010, 1% of total revenue should be mandated to go to debt repayment. The interest relief should then be paid back to taxpayers in a tax-back guarantee similar to the policy advanced by the federal government.

Mr. McGuinty continues to believe that intervening in the economy by channelling cash directly to firms through corporate welfare schemes creates jobs. It does not. The practice should end. The government would save, according to our calculations, \$942 million per year in the process by the elimination of the myriad corporate welfare programs it runs.

The corporate welfare bums are not the only ones with their hands out. Mayors are also begging the government for more money and new taxing authority. With the average family in Ontario already paying 46% of their income in taxes, new municipal taxes are not the way to go, and they should be denied. Instead, to fund infrastructure in a principled manner there should be a gas tax accountability act, which would dedicate gas taxes to roads, bridges and highways. This would be a process that follows the legislation that’s been enacted in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

For too long, spending by ministers, ministerial staff and senior civil servants has had too little transparency and accountability. Posting ministerial staff and senior civil servant expenses and travel online every quarter would improve this situation. This applies equally for grants and contributions, which should be posted quarterly for each ministry, another process which is being undertaken at the federal government level and in Alberta currently.

Is there a clock, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I’ll give you a one-minute warning, as I do with everyone.

Mr. Kevin Gaudet: Okay, thank you.

Government spending is not limited to programs. Each year, billions of tax dollars flow through crown corporations with little transparency or accountability. Mechanisms must be introduced to strengthen the protection of these funds. Annual reports should be released directly to the public, with no interference from political ministers, within three months of the fiscal year-end. As well, like publicly traded companies, crown corporations should be required to hold annual public meetings.

As you prepare your 2008-09 budget, you should keep in mind that the money you’re planning to spend comes from taxpayers. It should be guarded jealously and treated respectfully. We hope that if you implement these recommendations, you will start to move Ontario forward for taxpayers who have been left behind for too long.

Thank you. I’d be happy to take any of your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation. This round of questioning goes to the official opposition.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Mr. Gaudet, thank you very much for the presentation. Good to see you again. Thanks for making the trip to London as well to visit with the committee.

You make an outstanding point on pages 8 and 9 of your presentation, particularly about the rate of growth of government spending. You have a table called “A Mountain of Government Spending,” which shows that the Ontario government is 31% larger than it was five years

ago. Dalton McGuinty justifies the so-called health tax by saying he needs the money. Do you think that's borne out in figures?

Mr. Kevin Gaudet: Our economic analysis, which you can find on the last page of my report, does a costing analysis. What it boils down to, Mr. Hudak, is a question of priorities, of course, and as you can tell from my report, the priorities of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation are a little bit in divergence with those of the governing party at this point in time. Our analysis shows that the government has sufficient revenues so that it could immediately eliminate the health tax. Its current surplus is approximately \$2.3 billion, and with the substantial rate of growth of government revenues, there would be ample room moving forward to provide the elimination of that tax, especially if the government chose to put the reins on spending in other program areas.

Mr. Tim Hudak: As you've made the point well in the past, there has been at the end of every fiscal year a massive end-of-year spending spree, where the province tends to have \$2 billion to \$3 billion and more, and as opposed to reducing taxes or paying down debt, they spend it all. An important example of that was the \$1 million to the Ontario Cricket Association and that \$32-million slush fund. Do you have a recommendation to the committee with respect to end-of-year spending?

1310

Mr. Kevin Gaudet: The recommendations for end-of-year spending are that it ought to be illegal—it's a process that has been undertaken in Washington—except, of course, for an important exception, which is in areas of disaster emergency. It's a process that has been undertaken in Washington and has limited the rate of growth of government. The fundamental belief is that the tax dollars are better spent in the hands of taxpayers than in the hands of government. When governments make budget plans from year to year and then they choose at the end of the fiscal year in a March madness, if you will, to spend that money, few accountability controls are applied, as the Auditor General indicated—that it wasn't just the \$32 million that was a question in the so-called slushgate, if you will; it was actually between \$1 billion and \$2 billion of money that goes out the door. It's both money that isn't budgeted and has little accountability, and we would suggest that legislation precluding that practice would be in order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: One of your sections is, "No New Municipal Taxes." The McGuinty government, of course, has given the right to the city of Toronto to impose taxes in an assortment of areas. What's your view on rescinding that authority versus what some have said, to spread it out to other municipalities?

Mr. Kevin Gaudet: I believe there's a table in the document which elicits from our supporters at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation their interests on how to approach that. CTF supporters strongly suggest that the city of Toronto have taken from it its powers for taxation. As soon as the current mayor and council of Toronto acquired those powers and they came into force in early

January of this year, they've been running quickly to implement as many taxes as possible.

I'll remind you of a few of them. They've got the new land transfer tax, which duplicates the one we have at the provincial level; a vehicle registration tax, which duplicates the one at the provincial level; they have a new garbage tax. They've been considering things like a liquor tax, the new sidewalk tax by Adam Vaughan, a garbage bag tax, a battery tax. I'm sorry, I can't remember the whole long list—it's extensive—but they've been going crazy asking for new taxes.

I understand the Association of Municipalities of Ontario is preparing its report. It was supposed to be out early. Apparently it's coming out in the next couple of months, the date and time of which you may know better than I. It's widely speculated that that report may be requesting the authority for these taxing powers to be extended across the province. We look at Toronto as the epicentre for a tax quake and the concern, of course, is that that tax quake could have ripples across the province. We think that we'd like to see no other cities get those powers and that the province remove from Toronto its taxing powers.

Mr. Tim Hudak: On page 29 of your report, "Greater Accountability for Crown Corporations," you note that Ontario Northland, which runs a transportation system in northern Ontario, has not had an annual report issued in five years. The Lottery and Gaming Corp. is missing two annual reports. You talk about the problems there as well. I don't know if you had the chance to comment about the growth in a number of employees at the crown corporations. Do you want to elaborate a bit on the need of scrutiny in those?

Mr. Kevin Gaudet: I can't comment on the employee growth in all of Canada because I haven't done the analysis; I apologize. But with respect to the issue of the accountability of crown corporations, the concern, of course, is that there are billions and billions of dollars that are gone through the crown corporations—and aside from the fact that it's the law that these corporations disclose their annual reports, which I think ought to be sufficient reason for them to be disclosed, they're not. I have it on very good authority from individuals inside the OLG, for example, that the responsible minister and his office are involved in the writing of such reports, and I think that's an inappropriate practice.

There are a number of things that taxpayers don't get access to. For example, we don't know from the OLG how much money is at risk or has been lost by asset-backed commercial paper. You are all familiar, I'm sure, with the provincial write-down due to ABCP, and I'd like to know, for example, from that crown corporation or others. When you don't have annual disclosures like you do in publicly traded companies, we don't get access to that information, and that decreases the power of fiduciary reporting. The Sarbanes-Oxley rules that have been applied in Canada, or importantly applied in the publicly traded companies, aren't applying to crown corporations,

and I think there should be requirements to be changed to provide for them.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

COMMUNITY LIVING LONDON

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on Community Living London to come forward, please. You have up to 10 minutes for your presentation; there could be five minutes of questioning. I'd just ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Mr. Jim Hewett: My name is Jim Hewett. I'm a volunteer member of the board of directors of Community Living London.

Mr. Barry Bates was supposed to be joining me today, but like most people we support, he relies on public transportation, and I think that's the reason he's delayed. He is a member of our New Vision Advocates and has been receiving services from Community Living London for the past 16 years.

Community living is something most of us experience naturally, as part of our daily lives. We live in communities, our children go to neighbourhood schools, we have the opportunity to work at real jobs for real pay and contribute as productive citizens. But for many people who have an intellectual or developmental disability, community living is a dream, an objective yet to be realized. Some still live in institutions—and although we recognize and applaud the current government for closing those institutions, some are still there. Others may live at home but with little connection with the community around them. As children, they may be segregated in classrooms in schools far away from neighbourhood children. As adults, they are largely excluded from the workforce. At all ages, many face physical and social barriers that keep them from participating in the social, recreational and economic world around them.

For more than half a century, Community Living has worked to bring people and their communities together. We support individuals as they develop their capacity to live, learn, work and participate in all aspects of living in the community, and we help the community develop its capacity to welcome and support people who have not always had the same opportunities as the rest of us to participate in community life in meaningful, productive ways.

The direct service and support we provide is essential for many individuals and their families. Others simply need social or attitudinal barriers dismantled to enable them to make their way in the community. In both direct and indirect ways, supporting people to contribute and participate makes good economic sense and produces communities that are vibrant and strong. It's also the right thing to do.

Today, Mr. Bates—if he was here—and I have three key messages to present to you which deeply impact the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their

quality of life and the work of Community Living agencies all across Ontario:

There is a need for the government to increase ODSP income support—it's very interesting that I'm following the taxpayers' federation;

In order for Community Living agencies to continue the delivery of quality supports and services, the government must follow through on the commitments made to date to increase resources to the developmental services sector;

Finally, the government must commit to continuing the current process of transformation in the developmental services sector, based on the consultations it has had with the public since 2004.

I was going to turn it over to Mr. Bates and let him tell you a little bit about his life, but I'll give you a little snapshot.

First of all, I wanted to thank the minister for the efforts—

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Bates is right here.

Mr. Jim Hewett: We're running behind. I'm going to let Barry talk at the end.

I want to speak to the message of providing quality supports and services.

We all rely on the support of others to live our daily lives in the community. For a person who has an intellectual disability, the need for personal support may be greater than for others in society. Often, supports are needed beyond those that can be reasonably provided by family and friends, and typically, people rely on government-funded programs and supports to address these extraordinary needs. Without these additional supports, people are unable to participate fully in community life, their opportunities to participate as effective citizens are reduced, and in some cases their personal safety is put at risk. We, as a society, must ensure that supports are provided in an adequate fashion to ensure that people who have an intellectual disability are able to enjoy a reasonable quality of life.

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The average wage paid to workers who provide support to people who have an intellectual disability is approximately 25% below that paid to workers doing similar types of jobs in other sectors in Ontario. Workers who are not hired by an agency but who work directly for a family are typically paid far less again, often in the \$10-an-hour range.

In the 2007 provincial budget, the government committed \$200 million over the next four years to improve support to people with intellectual disabilities. In response to labour unrest in the sector through the summer, the government agreed to bring forward the 2% committed to address the wage gap in the fourth year of the budget commitment and to provide it to agencies this year. This provided a total of 6% on average to agencies in 2007-08.

In September, the Ministry of Community and Social Services reported to the developmental services agencies that it would be providing agencies resources necessary

to give front-line support staff a wage increase of \$2.40 an hour over the next three years.

What is the impact of these increases? In three years, the government could reduce the current 25% wage gap to approximately 17%. In the meantime, enrolment in developmental service worker programs at Ontario colleges is dropping and some programs have been suspended as more people choose career paths that promise a more reasonable living wage. The turnover rate for workers in this sector is more than 22% annually. Agencies like Community Living London are being asked by the government to expand services to accept individuals moving out of institutions. In order to fill this commitment, we need the government to continue addressing the wage gap. Quality supports and services require a committed response from the government to the workers who deliver these supports.

Our third message today is to urge the government to continue the transformation of supports and services. Our society has increasingly come to understand the right of people who have an intellectual disability to be included in our society. Likewise, people who have an intellectual disability are anxious to take part in society as fully participating citizens. Ensuring such inclusion demands that adequate levels of government-funded supports and services are available for individuals and families as they pursue meaningful and productive lives. Likewise, we need to ensure communities have the capacity to respect and support individuals' needs and goals.

The last time the government of Ontario undertook a comprehensive planning initiative regarding supports and services for people in this sector was in 1987—known as Challenges and Opportunities. The initiatives rolled out under the plan did not envision the extent to which societal and individual expectations would move towards full inclusion. In addition to the changing expectations with respect to inclusion, there's a growing demand for new supports and services in the province because of the growing and aging population.

In 2004, the ministry announced a plan to transform services for people who have an intellectual disability to reflect current expectations and to ensure that supports continue to be equitable and responsive to people's needs. A plan for the future of supports and services based on these consultations is expected later this year.

Here in London we have a waiting list of 254 individuals who need supports and services. Many of these individuals depend on their aging parents for essential day-to-day supports. On December 18, the mother of a man with Down syndrome in his 40s was interviewed on the CBC Radio show Ontario Morning. Frustrated with waiting lists and fearing the future her son will face when she is no longer able to provide supports to him, she stated, "If I'm going to die first, I'm taking him with me."

At Community Living London, we have an emergency space in our respite services to provide relief to families who are in crisis. This emergency space has been occupied by the same young woman since Christmastime

when her exhausted mother could no longer provide essential supports at home.

These examples highlight the need for ongoing dialogue with the public and a commitment to a process of community planning. The transformation of developmental services must not be seen as a one-time exercise but a commitment to ongoing planning. Furthermore, the transformation plan must be backed with a financial commitment that looks beyond band-aid solutions to emerging crises.

I will now turn it over to Barry for a minute.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): We have about one minute left.

Mr. Barry Bates: Hi. I'm Barry Bates. I thank everyone for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I would also like to thank the ministry for closing institutions at the present time.

I work at three jobs, and because I work at three jobs, a lot of the people I work with earn minimum wage over and above what I make. Because of that, I earn less because of the clawback of ODSP. Also there's—

Mr. Jim Hewett: Barry's not able to save money or live above the poverty line. His ODSP benefits remain more than 18% below what is needed for people to live above the poverty line. I think the big thing for Barry is that having a disability should not be a sentence to poverty.

Do you rely on a food bank sometimes?

Mr. Barry Bates: No, I don't, but I know those who do and I feel it's not fair that they have to do that.

Mr. Jim Hewett: What about a bus pass?

Mr. Barry Bates: I feel that most clients don't earn enough for a bus pass because of what ODSP pays them.

Mr. Jim Hewett: So you'd like to appeal to the minister to allow people who are working and receiving ODSP to earn enough to enable them to live above the poverty line?

Mr. Barry Bates: I would like to see people earn more off their paycheques or ODSP so they wouldn't have to go without each month.

Mr. Jim Hewett: Thank you, Barry. We'll take any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you very much. The questioning will go to Mr. Prue of the NDP.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much for the submission. I have questions, first of all, about the ODSP rates. We have had people here suggesting that there be a 40% increase, we've had people suggesting there be double-digit increases. The lowest I've heard is 10%. Do you have any recommendations on what kind of increase there should be in this budget year?

Mr. Jim Hewett: In this particular budget year—I mean, we're still looking to just catch up to where we started in the early 1990s—we're looking at about 18%. That's where we need to get just so we're at the same level as we were in the early 1990s.

Mr. Michael Prue: In 1993.

Mr. Jim Hewett: About 1993.

Mr. Michael Prue: I find the entire practice of the clawback to be morally reprehensible, I really do. There are some who have suggested in the past that people should be allowed, if they are on ODSP, to earn up to at least the poverty level. In this case, the first \$7,000 that you earn would not be clawed back. Is that a reasonable thing or should we end the clawback entirely?

Mr. Jim Hewett: I think it's very reasonable because the cost of living for an individual on ODSP—individuals we support—is extremely high. One of the big things we talked about is bus passes. For an individual on ODSP it could be 10% of their monthly allowance. Unfortunately, unless there's a medical reason, ODSP does not cover bus passes. Yet it's public transportation. We have gone to the city here for the past five years and asked them to help us with that and they say that is a provincial responsibility under ODSP; that is not a municipal responsibility.

Mr. Michael Prue: If the government wanted to help those with a developmental disability who are on ODSP, or in fact any disability, would you advocate the combination of an increase in ODSP to reflect 1993 standards and a commitment to end the clawback to allow people to at least keep money up to and including the poverty rate?

Mr. Jim Hewett: Yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: Those two things would be enough?

Mr. Jim Hewett: Those would be enough to get us going. What we'd require in the future is for ODSP to be increased at the rate of inflation.

Mr. Michael Prue: After that?

Mr. Jim Hewett: Yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. Not before that, after that?

Mr. Jim Hewett: After that, to get us up to the 1993 point and then the rate of inflation after that.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm particularly worried too that people do not see a career in terms of helping those with developmental disabilities. I know that many of the schools have cut back the courses because nobody wants to take them. In fact, people don't want to work in the industry, not because they don't want to help, not because they don't think it would be rewarding, but the financial remuneration is abysmal.

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Mr. Jim Hewett: It is. That's why we're not able to get developmental service workers in this sector, why it's very difficult. As we transition people from the institutions out, we are going to require more of them, not fewer of them. And yet those people who are currently working in the institutions may choose not to stay in this sector at all. So it's going to be very difficult for us.

Mr. Michael Prue: I understand that the people who work in the institutions now—they're OPSEU members—make around \$20 an hour.

Mr. Jim Hewett: Currently they make about 25% more than what they do in our sector.

Mr. Michael Prue: And that's what the worry is, because if they go into your sector out of the institution, they can expect about a 25% drop in pay.

Mr. Jim Hewett: That's correct. Now, with the adjustment that's being made, it'll come out to about 17%, but it still means that you're taking a major drop.

Mr. Michael Prue: I guess that's in part why some of the unions and the people are attempting to keep the centres open.

Mr. Jim Hewett: Oh yes. Barry lived in an institution for years and now he lives on his own. He lives in an apartment, in supported independent living.

Mr. Michael Prue: Remarkable, then. I think those will be my questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

FRIENDS OF CAPTIVE ANIMALS

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Friends of Captive Animals to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have up to 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning following that. I would just ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Ms. Vicki Van Linden: My name is Vicki Van Linden, and I'm representing a community group called Friends of Captive Animals. Thank you for letting us speak today. Friends of Captive Animals is a local group, and we are concerned about the treatment of thousands of wild animals confined in zoos and private collections here in Ontario.

We appreciate the commitment this government made in 2007 to regulate roadside zoos by mandating humane standards of care for captive wild animals. These new standards are urgently needed, as currently animals are poorly protected by the OSPCA Act, which was written in the 1950s. The way society views the status of women and children, for instance, has changed dramatically since the 1950s, and our understanding of the needs of animals has changed also. Unfortunately, the laws have not kept up with these changes.

Let's look at two important aspects of the new regulations that have been promised: Who will enforce these new regulations, and how will this enforcement be paid for?

First, let's look at why this legislation matters, as this explains why its enforcement is worthy of being included in the provincial budget. Previously, the lack of legal protection for captive animals has contributed to a negative image of Ontario; caused animals to suffer greatly in substandard conditions; put surrounding communities at risk due to possible escapes and disease transmission; placed additional burdens on municipal services such as animal control staff; harmed the environment due to fecal waste; and may have had a negative impact on tourism.

Here in London, we've received negative attention when a local zoo was criticized internationally for keeping a kangaroo in a small, barren pen. A headline in an Australian newspaper read, "Kangaroo's Cruel Canada Prison." I think that's hardly the kind of image we're trying to portray of ourselves. A recent allocation of one-

time funding by our provincial government to address these issues was a significant step, and we hope this good start will be followed up with a commitment to ongoing funding to enforce the new standards.

In the current system, the responsibility to protect captive animals is divided between the Ministry of Natural Resources and the OSPCA. Let's look at how this is divided. First, we'll look at native animals. The MNR has some jurisdiction over native animals, but is only mandated to ensure that the most basic of needs are met. MNR officers are not able to protect animals from the many forms of suffering caused by lifelong confinement in small pens and cages.

Currently, there is a licence fee to keep native wildlife, but it is only a token amount of \$100 and does not make a significant contribution to the real costs of overseeing these facilities. The OSPCA can act on behalf of a native animal only in cases of extreme cruelty or neglect. For instance, if a wolf or coyote is being beaten or starved, then the OSPCA could assist that animal. But under current laws, animals can be housed in conditions that dramatically fail to meet their social, physical and psychological needs. Often these animals suffer great distress, which can lead to destructive behaviours like repetitive rocking, bar-biting, pacing and self-mutilation.

Now let's look at exotic animals like monkeys and tigers. The MNR has no jurisdiction over these animals at all. The OSPCA is responsible for their protection, but operates under an outdated definition of "cruelty" whereby an animal can be in significant and ongoing distress and yet the OSPCA officer is unable to help. There is no licensing at all required for the keeping of exotic animals. In most areas, you must have a licence for pet dogs but you don't need a licence for a tiger, a lion or a cougar. Only very basic shelter, food and water are mandated and there is no formal inspection program to guarantee that even these basic needs are met.

The good news is that our provincial government has promised historic changes to this sad situation during this parliamentary session.

Who will enforce these new regulations and conduct inspections? We recommend that one service only must be empowered for all aspects of enforcement for both native and exotic animals. It will be more economical to have just one inspector, with jurisdiction over all species, visit facilities to enforce the new regulations.

The mandate of the MNR does not include non-native animals, so they would not be the service to take over these combined inspections. OSPCA officers are already trained to protect animals and the OSPCA is overseen by the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services but, unfortunately, it is not fully funded by this ministry. This gets to what some of the problems are.

Animal protection services are now funded partly by donations. The OSPCA does receive some funding from the province, and this was recently increased. However, protecting animals from cruelty and neglect is really a branch of policing, and a responsible society like ours should not leave any form of policing to be dependent on

donations. The OSPCA will need an increase in staff and funding to enforce the new regulations, and we ask that an ongoing increase to the funding of the OSPCA be included in our provincial budget.

However, the tax base should not be the only source of funding. A system of licences and fines can make a real contribution to the cost of enforcing the new regulations.

These are our recommendations:

(1) Licences should be required for everyone keeping captive wild animals. An animal that is in a private collection needs protection just as much as an animal in a zoo. Therefore, inspections should be required in both cases, and the licence fee should reflect the real cost of the inspection. True animal sanctuaries must be exempt from these fees as they provide a public good. They should be inspected, however, as transparency helps to protect captive animals. We will need to clearly define what constitutes a true sanctuary, and we've outlined how to do that in the handout.

(2) The enforcement officer should be empowered to write tickets for violations and to assign fines. We suggest that the OSPCA Act and other legislation contain penalties for various offences, such as lack of proper shelter or not providing clean water. If an officer notes a violation, then a follow-up visit will be required to see that that violation has been corrected, and the fine for this violation should contribute to the cost of the follow-up inspection. It's essential that inspectors have legal status to write tickets themselves. If they have to apply to another level of policing to have a ticket issued, the enforcement program becomes more costly.

(3) There should be a tax on the breeding of wild animals. Breeding is commonly done in zoos to provide a constant source of infant animals. Infant animals are used to draw in the public, but quickly become surplus adult animals. It is inhumane to discard or kill adult animals just to make room for new babies. It's also unfair for these animals to become a financial burden to the taxpayer or animal welfare charities. It's only fair that the people who are responsible for their birth carry more of the cost of their protection.

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This system of licence fees and fines will help to relieve some of the need for public financing but will not eliminate it. We believe it is just and fair that a progressive society like ours use public money to actively prevent cruelty to captive animals. We show the world our character by our policies and our public actions, and if we fail in this, we will portray ourselves poorly on the world stage.

Your government has already made significant steps in correcting this embarrassing situation. We encourage you and your government to continue this good work for the sake of public health and safety as well as the welfare of captive wildlife.

Thanks for this opportunity to speak with you today.

We just have a few images of captive animals in Ontario. Please take a moment, look at their pens, and look into their faces. The final image is of a wolf in a

progressive European zoo, and I think you may see a difference in the demeanour of the animal.

Here we have Tyson, the famous kangaroo that disappeared from the local zoo. This is the kangaroo that received international attention because his pen was so small he wasn't able to hop, which is his natural movement. We see that he's on bare ground; he doesn't even have grass to move on. This was Tyson's entire existence. He has now disappeared, and we believe that he's dead. We offered to purchase this animal and take him to a sanctuary, but we weren't allowed to do that. The owner of the animal simply has refused to say what has happened to him.

This is a Barbary ape from the Lickety Split Zoo. If you can see, this animal is all alone. See its little cage? That's not much of a life or a world. This type of animal is very, very social. Even the males contribute to the rearing of the young. So this would be as difficult a life as possible for a very social animal.

This is a native fox, and again, this is its life. This animal would normally move over many, many acres of territory each day, but this is its life.

This is a small monkey, I believe a capuchin monkey. This is a small primate, again from the Lickety Split Zoo. You can see the look on its face. I think you can see despair. It's kind of hard to see on the image, but there's a lot of suffering in that face.

This is the Barbary ape again.

This is the small monkey.

Another canid—we believe it's a fox.

This is a picture of a wolf taken in a progressive European zoo. You can see the demeanour of the animal. It's calm. It appears to be happy. We want zoos like that here in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. This round of questioning goes to the government and Ms. Aggelonitis.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you, Ms. Van Linden, for that presentation. Also, thank you very much for acknowledging our government's commitment to regulate roadside zoos, as well as the funding that you received to address the issue.

This committee is the standing committee to make some recommendations to our Minister of Finance. What kind of numbers can you give this committee that we can bring back to the minister?

Ms. Vicki Van Linden: I tried very hard to get those and had a long conversation with someone from the Ministry of Natural Resources, and I was just told that it's too premature. It's only a rough guess, from numbers that I've worked out, that we would probably need at least five additional humane officers in the field to enforce these regulations. Again, I've attempted to get these numbers, but it's my guess that, including training, vehicle and everything, it costs roughly \$90,000 a year to put a humane officer in the field. I know that seems a bit high, but it really isn't if we look at the overall provincial budget and the fact that we are lagging very far behind other developed nations in the way that we protect animals like this.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Would you like to expand on the true cost of inspection?

Ms. Vicki Van Linden: Yes. I received a bit of an estimate from the World Society for the Protection of Animals, and in a smaller facility such as Lickety Split Zoo here, they estimate that the cost of an inspection and a follow-up would be maybe \$400. Now, some facilities are much larger, and in some facilities—for instance, a zoo that is in the Ridgeway area—it would probably take an entire day to do that inspection. So it's harder for me to assess that kind of fee, but I think it may be at least a couple of thousand dollars.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you very much for bringing your passion here today. No more questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

LONDON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): The London Chamber of Commerce. Good afternoon. You have up to 10 minutes for your presentation, and there could be up to five minutes of questioning. I would ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Certainly. I'll come back to the microphone in a second. I'm Gerry Macartney. I'm the CEO and general manager of the chamber of commerce in London, Ontario.

Mr. Chirag Shah: My name is Chirag Shah. I'm the president of the board of directors here at the London Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Kadie Ward: Kadie Ward, director of marketing and communications at the London Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Thank you, Mr. Chair and ladies and gentlemen, for the opportunity to present the views of the chamber of commerce. I will not spend time—I hope by now you all have a copy of this that's been handed out to you.

We are a membership organization, as I am sure you're aware chambers are. We have 1,000 member firms that belong to the chamber, some 2,000 representatives here in London representing some 60,000 employees. So we have a large constituency here in London and we act as the voice of business on their behalf.

There is a lot of information here today that we believe will be echoed—if you haven't received it already, you soon will—from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce having to do with new strategies in Ontario. It's not my position to read those to you today. Certainly, you can read them at your leisure and you'll get them again from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

We want to really talk about three things that we believe are vitally important for London's situation.

The government of Ontario last year, we believe, did a great job in helping us with the business education tax, and we want to thank the government for that right up-front. The efforts that the McGuinty government put through last year in reforming the business education tax

will enable London businesses to appreciate about \$32 million worth of savings between now and 2011. Budget permitting, and if you can see your way clear, if that could be accelerated in any way, that would really boost commercial activity in Ontario. So we're quite delighted to get that kind of break. If it could be moved along a little quicker, that would be even better.

Three things on the budget front going forward: I think you know, and you probably had presentations from other chambers and the city of London earlier today, that we need a new deal for municipalities. We need you to work with the feds and make sure that we get the kind of funding that municipalities need in order to offset some of the deficiencies that we're seeing right now in our budgetary process. You can do that in a number of ways. We've outlined that for you in terms of tax reform, health care reform etc.

The other thing that we're really desperately seeking help with is infrastructure. You know, if you've read the newspapers across Ontario, that London has had a particular issue with its underground infrastructure. We're talking the sinkhole, if I can use that expression. That's just one of a number that we anticipate happening underneath the roads of London, Ontario. I guarantee you those same situations are going to happen across Ontario in municipalities from Windsor to Ottawa.

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A \$123-billion deficit in infrastructure is not going to go away quickly, and although we appreciate the \$1.4 billion that's being dedicated to infrastructure, we fear it's not enough. So we need to work strongly with the federal government to make sure that we get the kind of funding necessary to offset that infrastructure deficit. We believe, in the chamber of commerce network, that infrastructure is the highway on which commerce travels. If we don't have that strong infrastructure, we're not going to have much commerce going on, and without much commerce, there's not much activity in the province of Ontario.

The third thing we'd like to chat with you about today is the debilitating effect that the arbitration process has on negotiating with our emergency services. In London, Ontario, we've experienced an approximate 28% increase in the cost of those emergency services just in the last four years. Some of you have been councillors, I know, in various municipalities throughout the province. It's very difficult for the council and administration to reconcile those kinds of costs when they're out of their control. Regrettably—I don't mean to insult our good friends from Toronto—quite frankly, those are Toronto problems. So when it comes to negotiating things like retention pay and other things in the Toronto police force or their fire department, we respect those issues and we understand what those issues are for Toronto, but they're not our issues and they're not issues for Ottawa and they're not issues for Windsor or Cornwall or Barrie or any other place. We have lost, I think, two officers in both those departments in the last seven years due to moving to other communities or attrition. We don't have

that issue, yet the arbitrator determines that if it's good for Toronto, then everyone must get that. Of course, when we target our local budgets to come in at 3%—Khalil, you're familiar with this—or less for our property taxes, yet emergency services are coming in at 6%, 8%, 9% per year, it's very, very difficult to balance the books.

We leave you with those three thoughts. If you could help us get a new deal for municipalities, help us, along with the feds, get some money for infrastructure to keep our cities running and our streets from collapsing, and also look at reforming the arbitration process in Ontario, we'd be forever grateful.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation. We'll go to the official opposition. Mr. Hudak.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Thank you very much for the presentation and the brief to go along with it.

On one of your main points, the relationship between the province and municipalities when it comes to locally delivered programs, as you know, the McGuinty government gave the city of Toronto new taxing authority in areas like parking, alcohol, hospitality, tickets, land transfer tax etc. Is it your view—and some have made this case—that taxing authority should be given to other municipalities like London?

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Although we haven't studied this to any great extent, we share the views of our local mayor, Anne Marie DeCicco-Best, who would say to you in candid terms, "No, thank you."

Mr. Tim Hudak: In fact, I oppose this and I voted against that measure. Aside from "No, thank you," what would the impact be on business if municipalities were given new taxing authority?

Mr. Gerry Macartney: It's hard to say because we don't have it, but you can speculate that if every municipality has broader taxing authorities, municipalities will tax where they feel they can get the tax from. Unfortunately, there's an imbalance that already exists in the province of Ontario insofar as who pays what for taxes. The very reason that we had to rebalance the business education tax was because it was unbalanced before—too high a proportion of that tax being paid by business and commerce, too little by residents. The same applies for development charges in most municipalities, sewer and water charges etc. There's a disproportionately high amount being paid by business, and business will argue back, "While we're happy to pay our share"—and we truly are—"we don't use the pools and we don't use those other facilities that the average taxpayer pays for." That's where the imbalance comes in.

So I don't think there'd be much interest on the business community's part to see local jurisdictions having more taxation authority.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The main reason why the business education tax was as it was found was because of historic decisions by school boards. School boards put those taxes mostly on businesses, and they're higher in some areas than in other parts of the province. Some have suggested an approach should be to give school boards back the

ability to levy taxes on local businesses and residences. Do you support restoring that taxing authority?

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Same answer: not interested.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Competitive energy costs are obviously important—a historic strength in the province of Ontario. The current government's plan is to shut down about 20% of energy supply by closing down Lambton, Nanticoke, etc. Another approach could be to actually invest in cleaner technology to clean up those smokestacks and continue to benefit from the power rather than this notion of closing them down any time soon. What's your view on those types of investments rather than closing down these plants?

Mr. Gerry Macartney: It's been our contention—and we've articulated this to the Premier on a number of occasions—that we can't prematurely close down those plants unless we have good, clean supply to replace them with. That hasn't taken place yet. So, unless and until that happens, we believe that the technology is there to burn clean coal. I can tell you for a fact, because I worked on this situation for a number of years in Sarnia, that the \$450-million scrubbers in those two plants down there work and that the stuff that comes out of the stack down there now, where the scrubbers are, is actually cleaner than the ambient air around the plants. So the technology is there and it always has been; it's just the will for people to look at that kind of technology and allow it to happen.

Are there better forms of electricity that are cleaner? Yes, there are, but you're not there yet. Until we get there, I think we have to look at that supply because we're precariously close to not having enough supply. You all know about the brownouts and blackouts that we experienced; we don't want to go through that again. I would argue that there are other technologies that we haven't pushed forward fast enough or hard enough, and I would include energy from waste in that scenario. We have this sort of closed-mindedness in the province of Ontario that says we can't do that, yet in the rest of the civilized world there are all kinds of examples of energy from waste facilities that are far cleaner than any technology that we have in this country. We need to open our minds and our eyes up to that possibility.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation before the committee.

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Thank you for the time; I appreciate it.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I'm advised that the Ontario Indian education councillors' association were snowed in yesterday and we don't know whether they'll make it here today, so we shall recess until one of the next presenters arrives.

The committee recessed from 1356 to 1416.

ABORIGINAL INSTITUTES' CONSORTIUM

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): The standing committee on finance and economic affairs will come to order. We're very pleased that our 3:30 presenter is here, the

Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning after that. I would ask you to identify yourself for our recording Hansard and then you can begin.

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: Greetings to all of you. My name is Lu Ann Hill, and I work for the Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium. The consortium is a group of First Nations-controlled-and-owned post-secondary institutions that operate in Ontario, in communities from Akwesasne in the east, near Cornwall, through to southwestern Ontario. The closest one to here is Anishinabek Educational Institute, which is delivering programming in the Muncey-Delaware First Nation. We have locations in North Bay, Thunder Bay, Manitoulin Island, Fort Frances and up to Kenora.

Our institutions deliver more than 150 different programs to 4,000 learners per year. The enrolments are steady, and at one point in time, we experienced a 92% increase in enrolment over a five-year period.

I mentioned that we deliver programming from east to west, and a little bit north. We have a number of campuses for the eight institutions. Plus, we deliver programming in locations in between those campuses. What we do is take our programming to where the students are located. That could be on reserve or concentrated in communities off reserve.

Our institutes are focused on student support, and they have achieved up to 98% success rates. Our students are mostly mature women with family responsibilities and jobs. We service a population that isn't being serviced by mainstream institutions. Many of our students will not leave their communities to compete for space in mainstream institutions.

Why are we so successful? Because we have small class sizes, culturally enriched learning environments, relevant curriculum, and faculty that address aboriginal learning styles.

We deliver our programs largely through alternative, intensive-mode delivery formats, outside of the full-time, day-to-day programming that you would get in many colleges and universities, because we're trying to address the needs of where the students are at and what they need at the time.

1420

The success of our institutions—and the oldest one, which has been in the news lately, actually, has been delivering programs in Ontario since 1985—has been recognized by both the provincial and federal governments. Our institutions have been receiving provincial grants on a year-to-year basis from Ontario since 1992.

What are our challenges? Our aboriginal communities, whether on reserve or off reserve, have an increasing number of needs as far as education and training programs; that's the number of programs and the breadth and variety of programs. The largest challenge is our institutions were not created by government and therefore they're not formally recognized and so not supported by government like colleges and universities. In effect, there is no source of adequate and sustainable funding any-

where. Our institutions operate on year-to-year funding from the federal and provincial governments.

Ontario established an aboriginal education and training strategy in 1991. This is the pot of money that aboriginal institutes rely on for core funding. Without this funding, there is no funding. Criteria to access this funding for aboriginal institutions say that you must create a partnership with a mainstream college or university. This is to ensure the students have a credential that's recognized by employers and by other provincial institutions. But in doing so, our institutions are placed at a very disadvantaged and subservient position to the colleges and universities. What happens is students are jointly registered as a rule, but because Ontario has a student application process, all of our students apply to this process, which means their tuition is paid to the partner college or university. It doesn't necessarily mean that the tuition that the student pays goes to the aboriginal institution where the student takes programs and receives services. It's a conundrum for us.

As I mentioned, Ontario has acknowledged the success of our institutions. We were successful as a consortium to advocate and have the provincial government set aside a specific allocation of funding just for access by aboriginal institutions, so we ended up not having to compete for funding with colleges and universities. However, out of the \$6-million fund, as we all know it by, even right until 2006, \$5.2 million of the \$6-million fund went to colleges and universities as incentives to deliver programs and services to aboriginal students. They received these incentives over and above operating grants, special-purpose grants and their tuition funding. In our institutions, we rely on these grants. Until 2006, \$800,000 was available to eight aboriginal institutions in Ontario. That was the provincial grant funding. In 2006, that increased to \$1.8 million. In 2007, it increased to \$2.58 million for eight institutions.

It's difficult when we talk with the province—and I've been at this a long time. I've been meeting with our institutions since 1992 and I've been working with them since then, so I've had many, many meetings with the provincial government and the federal government over this issue. Still today, with the Ontario funding that comes to us, this year our institutions received as little as \$1,527 per student to deliver programs. One of the institutions received \$11,000 to deliver a full-time university program over the course of the year. I said to the ministry staff, "How did you think we were going to do that?" because they know we don't get the tuition revenues unless we're successful at negotiating that money back into our institutions and they know we don't get operating grants. The person said, "Well, I guess I just didn't think."

It's very, very difficult because we know, too, that in 2008 Ontario expects to support colleges and universities at \$9,669 per student. It's been a struggle all this time, and we ask, "When do we get to a point where there's fairness and equity?" We have students who would not

necessarily go to mainstream institutions; we have students who are not being serviced.

Even with these unfair partnerships with the colleges and universities—and mind you, there are exceptions. We have some very good advocates for our students and our institutions in colleges and universities. But overall, it's still a very unfair way to do business.

We've raised this issue with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities over and over again, from at least 15 years back, and they're still allowing it to happen. I don't know that that's a very good use of public funding when we have to pay colleges and universities to have these partnerships. There are fees; they charge fees, whatever fees they can get from us. We, as aboriginal institutions, should not have to pay to be a part of the mainstream system. That's what we're asking.

What we're asking you to do—I believe you're in a position; I haven't found that other people are in a position to make this change. We need some real change to make this a reality. What happens at the community level is, we have a lot of students who want to go to school. They want to get educated and they want to get good jobs. We have aboriginal institutions that are ready to deliver programs and services. We've proven our success.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about a minute left for your presentation.

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: Okay. We think we're a very integral part of Ontario's post-secondary system and we're asking for fairness and equity in funding and recognition. We're asking for an immediate removal of the cap on funding to aboriginal institutions; give us the same per-student funding as you're giving to colleges and universities. We're delivering provincially approved programs, the same as them. Work with the Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium to create a road map for the aboriginal institutions to access provincial funding. This was the recommendation of Ontario's review of the aboriginal education and training strategy. Follow up on it. Eliminate the unfair practices that exist in these partnership agreements. We asked the ministry to help and they're not helping. We ask that you take immediate action to end the jurisdictional volleyball that we get stuck in all the time. We go to the federal government for money for these institutions and they say, "We don't have responsibility for post-secondary. Go see the province." We go see the province, and the province was very adamant this summer to say to us, "Why are you at our doors? You should be going to the feds."

Like I say, at the community level, we just have students who want to get educated. We have students who want to go to school. We have institutions that are successful at that. So I'm asking for your help.

I also brought you—I see some of you leafing through it. We have started our own awards program and we have testimonials in here that I hope you'll enjoy from a student and a faculty member in each of our aboriginal institutions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. This round of questioning will go to the NDP and Mr. Prue.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much for your presentation. This is a conundrum, I think, that many people in Ontario have but ought not to have. In my view, and you can tell me whether you consider this wrong, people who live in Ontario of aboriginal descent, whether they live on or off the reserve, are Ontario citizens. Do you consider yourself a citizen of Ontario?

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Ms. Lu Ann Hill: I'm a First Nations person of a background that existed before Ontario, but yes, we do reside in Ontario.

Mr. Michael Prue: And if you live off-reserve, do you pay taxes to Ontario?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: I do live off the reserve and I pay taxes quite regularly.

Mr. Michael Prue: Is there any reason, in your view, that the Ontario government should not treat all of its Ontario citizens exactly the same in terms of education?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: In terms of education funding, I think they should be treated the same.

Mr. Michael Prue: You have not put an actual amount of how much you're seeking, but I've just tried to do the fast math. If your institute was given the same funding per capita as a college or a university gets for their students, you would be looking somewhere in the range of \$20 million to \$30 million. Would that be the range that would assist if you were treated the same?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: That would be a start. What we look at is the per-student funding that goes to colleges and universities.

Mr. Michael Prue: What you said was average \$9,000?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: Yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: And some as high as \$10,000. I know that some are less.

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: Yes, that's the average.

Mr. Michael Prue: So if you have 4,000 students, that would have to be approximately the range, if you were treated the same.

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: With equal funding?

Mr. Michael Prue: With equal funding. Are you looking for equal funding? I didn't hear that.

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: We're looking for equitable funding, yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: So who was it in the past, from the government, who told you to get away from the door?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Mr. Michael Prue: The last minister?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: Yes, the previous minister.

Mr. Michael Prue: That would be Mr. Bentley.

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: Yes. That was in July. We had never heard that until that time.

Mr. Michael Prue: In the first few days of the government, the Premier established a new minister responsible for aboriginal affairs. Has there been any movement

whatsoever since he came along to undo what Mr. Bentley had heretofore said?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: We have written letters, but we have not had a discussion about this issue. The other thing that complicates it is we wrote a letter to Minister Milloy at training, colleges and universities. We also wrote to Minister Wynne at the Ministry of Education, because they've now moved the aboriginal file from training, colleges and universities to the Ministry of Education. Because of the jurisdictional dilemma, we've also written to Minister Bryant.

Mr. Michael Prue: Earlier, in Kingston, we had Mr. Thompson come to see us. Is he part of your institute, or is he separate and something else?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: First Nations Technical Institute is one of our institutions.

Mr. Michael Prue: Because I did see, the following day, an article in the Globe and Mail—quite a good article, actually—talking about the closing of the technical institute due to lack of funding. Are there any institutes or other groups that are being funded within the aboriginal community?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: Institutions?

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, any other education—I mean, your group seems to be an umbrella group that Mr. Thompson's fits into.

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: That's right.

Mr. Michael Prue: Are you the umbrella group for all of the aboriginal institutions?

Ms. Lu Ann Hill: Yes. And our organization is actually mandated by the Chiefs of Ontario to negotiate with the federal government and the provincial government for these institutions.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. I think those would be my questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation before the committee.

DIETITIANS OF CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Dietitians of Canada to come forward, please.

Good afternoon. You have up to 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning, and I would ask you to identify yourself for our recording Hansard.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to be here this afternoon. I'm Leslie Whittington-Carter, and I'm the Ontario government relations coordinator for Dietitians of Canada. I believe Mr. Short has distributed a one-page handout. I do have a more detailed document that I've actually e-mailed in, but I thought that for the purposes of today's brief 10 minutes, probably a one-pager would help you just concentrate a bit on the top messages, so I hope you find that acceptable.

First of all, Dietitians of Canada is the national association for registered dietitians. We are regionalized, so I am primarily with the Ontario section. We do aim to

be the voice of the profession, the voice of registered dietitians across Canada. Our priorities, as you can see, are:

- to be a credible and reliable source of nutrition information for the public as well as for other health professionals;

- to create standards and tools to help sustain the profession; and

- to be the voice for helping to design health systems for Canadians.

We've had very good relations with the government of Ontario in contributing to a number of initiatives related to nutrition.

What I'd like to bring to your attention today is the issue of access to the advice of a registered dietitian. I think most people would agree that a healthy diet and advice on what you should and should not eat is key to health. We have support in that through the Ministry of Health Promotion. As you know, the EatRight Ontario dietitian advisory service, which was launched last year, provides Web-based or direct phone links to registered dietitians so people can call in and get their nutrition questions answered by a registered dietitian. It has been very successful in its initial phases. The people who call in are very pleased with the advice that they are given. It's practical. Other health care professionals are very happy with the fact that this service is there that they can refer people to. Because there is such a lack of an outpatient counselling area for nutrition counselling or it's such a long waiting list, for general nutrition advice they're very glad to have this free service available. Other health care professionals take advantage of the service to get their own questions answered as well so that they can have credible, reliable nutrition information to pass on to their clients in whatever profession they're in.

The one thing I would ask for you is to preserve the access to this, ensuring that the Ministry of Health Promotion has sufficient funding to continue the EatRight Ontario program, and as well to make sure that there is sufficient promotion of it so that the public and other health professionals, as I mentioned, are aware that the service is there and we can build it up even more. It has been very popular to date, but we really would like to see those numbers of calls and hits on the website going up even more.

The issue of access to registered dietitians is really complicated by the fact that right now we have a shortage of registered dietitians here in Ontario. There are vacancies across the province that can't be filled. Some of those vacancies are in remote areas up in the north and you can sort of understand that, yes, there are difficulties filling vacancies in some of those remote and rural areas. But right here in London there are issues with filling positions for registered dietitians. Even in Toronto or any of the other urban centres there are issues with filling those positions. Right now on any given day you'll find 40 to 50 vacant positions being advertised on the Dietitians of Canada job database. Those, of course, are only the ones

that do get listed there. There are a lot of other vacancies that are not necessarily listed there but filled through networking and so on.

The problem really, we feel, is directly linked to the lack of internship positions. In order to become a registered dietitian, you complete a four-year honours graduate degree in foods and nutrition and then you apply to a dietetic internship. Right now there are around 87 positions in Ontario for dietetic internships, so it's a competitive process. People put in an application, go through interviews etc. It's quite competitive. Right now only about 50% of our graduates are able to attain internship positions, so that means that we've got another 50% who have completed a four-year honours degree and done that component of it but are not eligible to finish their training because they can't get into a dietetic internship. The last slide there just shows a bit of a graphical representation of our projection over the next few years of the number of graduates from accredited programs versus the number of internship placements that are available.

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Couple with that the fact that we have a number of retirements coming up. Many of our practising dietitians in Ontario are getting to the age where they want to retire, and based on workforce data surveys that we've done, we're predicting that around 300 to 400 in the next five years are going to leave active practice for retirement, so that's going to cause a lot of other pressures on it as well.

We've also got increasing opportunities: family health teams, the dietitian and nurse diabetes teams, as well as community health centres. There are growing areas, as well as private practice areas, hospital programs etc. There are a lot of opportunities, because the public is asking for nutrition information and they want to get it from the professionals, from the registered dietitians. So the shortage is here now, and it's only going to get worse.

What I'm asking the committee for is a recommendation that will support increases in dietetic internship placements, either through hospitals or through other consortiums. We have had a proposal that has gone through health human resources, and we may be pursuing it in other forums as well. But I do ask for your support in helping to achieve some sort of resolve to this shortage of registered dietitians.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you have about our profession or about the current issues that we're facing. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you, and this round of questioning goes to the government.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Leslie, thank you for being here; an interesting presentation. I don't know a whole lot about the dietitians, in that sense—

Mr. Tim Hudak: Obviously.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Well, of course. Take a look. It's as good as it gets.

Just tell me, though, a little bit about the internship placements. Are they in the hospitals, primarily? Are they in private care? Presumably, the hospitals or who-

ever would have to request to have an internship program. I assume they would have to be funded to do that. Are the interns funded during the course of their time there? Because obviously that is where, I would think, some of the financial implications would fall into play.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Well, primarily, although not totally, it is hospitals that have the internship programs, so they have to go through an accreditation process by Dietitians of Canada in order to ensure the internship program meets all the requirements that we want for entry-level practice. So, yes, the hospitals apply and get accredited and then they accept interns through this competitive process of selection.

Now, what happens is that, no, the interns are not funded, so the internship program is really being funded out of the hospitals' global funding budget. So there are obviously pressures on the programs themselves in order to have adequate resources to run an internship program.

The other thing that happens is, because the interns therefore are no longer affiliated with an educational institution but with the hospital, all the things about workplace placement, WSIB—they are no longer eligible for any sort of student loans. They in fact have to start paying back any OSAP. So there are all sorts of financial issues, really, that come down to the interns themselves.

Some of the internship programs do charge a tuition fee in order to try to recoup some of the costs of providing an internship program. When I interned, we got a small stipend as an intern, but that has long gone by the wayside. So most interns now actually do have to pay a tuition in order to attend and get this training opportunity.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: You say approximately half of the graduates now can access an internship program?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Yes. Approximately half of the people who graduate from that four-year degree are able to be placed in an internship program.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: How many graduates are you talking about?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Somewhere around 150 in Ontario. There's Ryerson, Guelph, and Brescia here in London that have the accredited programs in Ontario.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Specifically, then, you would probably want the province to provide additional or dedicated funding for internship programs to accredited hospitals, or accredited organizations.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Yes, accredited organizations. Many of the hospitals have indicated to us that they're not able, given current resources certainly, to substantially increase the number of placements that they have available. Up in Barrie, we have a community-based internship program, so there are a few variations on the hospital model. But the hospital model, by far, is the most common in the province.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Thank you very much.

ONTARIO FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS' ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association to come forward.

Mrs. Brenda Lammens: It's a nice segue to have the dietitian speak before me, so now I can tell you about all the good fruits and vegetables that will keep Ontario healthy. Thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Brenda Lammens, and I chair the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. I am an asparagus farmer in Norfolk county. It's good to see a lot of familiar faces around the table today.

Ontario's fruit and vegetable growers have been suffering through some of the worst financial times ever. The reasons, while complex, all result from one simple reality: high costs coupled with poor prices. Whether it is caused by foreign subsidization, global trading, retail store consolidation or the high Canadian dollar valuation, the fact is that produce prices in the Canadian market have dropped. That amount, according to the Globe and Mail, is 6.5%.

On the input side, however, our costs continue to escalate. The growing demand for oil worldwide has lifted the price to \$100 a barrel. The demand for biofuels means a push to greater productivity for corn and soy crops, with a resultant spike in fertilizer prices for potash and nitrogen. As mentioned above, the increase in the value of the dollar has meant a decrease in the price of goods coming into Canada, forcing much of what we produce down in price. All of these factors, coupled with the 25% increase in labour costs facing our growers over the next few years, call into question the sustainability of our very labour-intensive industry.

Unlike the service sector in Ontario, whose members compete against each other for the consumer dollar and do so based on similar cost structures and can, as a result, pass on cost increases to the consumer, our farmers cannot. They do not compete with each other but rather with multi-national corporations operating in countries that do not share our high level of input costs. Yet it is these foreign products that set the price for produce grown here at home. As such, our growers have no mechanism to recover additional costs.

Three years ago, the Liberal government established the greenbelt to preserve precious farmland for food production for generations to come, a commendable objective indeed but one that requires saving the farmer, not just the farmland, if its objectives are to be met. This dilemma is not just confined to the greenbelt; it's province-wide.

Self-directed risk management was developed in the mid-1990s as an answer to the concerns of growers who did not have access to an affordable, if any, crop insurance program. It met with favour from the farming community and served its purpose well. It was a form of crop insurance financed by both the grower and the govern-

ment. The agricultural policy framework, APFI, which was introduced for the 2003 crop year, stipulated that all farmers were to have access to CAIS or production insurance. After five years, this still has not happened and over 2,000 Ontario fruit and vegetable growers currently have no production insurance available to them. The provincial government recognized its obligation to the growers and extended SDRM for 2006 and 2007. However, there is no SDRM or production insurance available to several thousand of our growers for the 2008 year.

Without these tools, our growers are left to fight the perils of nature on their own at a time when they can least afford to do it. It is important to understand that these losses also erode the margins of their CAIS program, making it less effective—a double-edged sword, if you will. SDRM needs to be extended until such time as our growers have access to affordable production insurance programming that covers all the crops that we grow. Annually, the cost of the provincial share is about \$5 million.

1450

Agriculture has changed. As mentioned at the outset, the margins for primary production have been shrinking, and for much of the fruit and vegetable sector, everything is at an all-time low. Never has there been a greater need to enhance the value of our crops through some sort of value-retention or value-added activity. This is simple enough, yet when this happens, our growers' properties are often reassessed as commercial or industrial. This reassessment penalizes those who have taken the initiative to retain or add value, who by their own actions have created jobs to the benefit of rural Ontario, who by their actions have added dollars to their income, which means less demand on government-funded safety net programs. The probability of reassessment, however, discourages others who see an opportunity to enhance their income but ask why, if that opportunity is only going to be taken away through increased taxation. It needs to be remembered that often these facilities are used to add or retain value for several weeks out of the year, yet they are taxed as if they were used 365 days of the year.

The government is to be commended for its actions this past year with regard to production facilities and the retail sales tax, but it cannot stop there. We ask that the ministry address the issue of retail sales tax on bunkhouses and, as well, the entire issue of unfair municipal taxation, by working with MPAC, the OFA and ourselves to develop and accept an updated definition of agriculture and agricultural processes. A proper definition will enable MPAC to do their job more effectively and reduce the time and cost of appeals. It will also send a strong message that the government of Ontario supports its farmers and encourages them to find new ways to enhance their income. Failure to do anything will simply increase the demand on ad hoc safety net programs.

As just mentioned, agriculture has been caught in an enormous cost/price squeeze. In this regard, horticulture is no different than grain and oilseed farming, but where

we are different is in our use of labour. According to Agricornp figures, labour amounts to about 6% of sales in the G and O sector but shoots up to over 25%, on average, in the horticultural sector, with a range of 15% to 45% of sales, depending upon commodity. Notice that I said percentage of sales; not percentage of expenses. On a tender-fruit farm, labour amounts to approximately 65% of their annual expenses. Any way you reference it, labour is a huge expense. By March 2010, our labour rates are anticipated to increase by some 28%. The increase alone will represent an additional cost to our farmers of about \$90 million annually—and that's an increase to what we're already paying—or 8% of our current farm gate value. This would not be serious if, like the service sector, these costs could be passed on to the consumer, but in our case there is no mechanism to do so. As mentioned earlier, it is not Ontario farmers who set the price for our commodities but, rather, the retailers, who often buy product from the cheapest supplier; and these foreign producers do not have the same input costs. Being caught in the middle between escalating input costs and reduced prices is obviously not sustainable.

We must enact, as was once done for the G and O sector, a horticultural RMP-like program that looks at costs and prices and will trigger a support payment to growers when the trigger level is met. Due to the diversity of crops and marketing mechanisms in our sector, it will not be easy, but it is, I believe, quite doable. If not, we will have to look at re-establishing the old edible-horticultural top-up to assist farmers during these struggling times.

Failure to act will mean the end of the fruit and vegetable industry in Ontario as we know it today. Earlier this month, CanGro announced the closure of two processing plants here in Ontario: one in Exeter used to process vegetables, as well as the last peach/pear canning factory east of the Rockies, situated in St. Davids. In addition to 300 to 400 direct job losses, there is no home for approximately 1,000 acres of clingstone peaches and about 900 acres of pears. In addition to these two plant closures, in the past seven months we have also lost the grape juice processing plant in St. Catharines, and the last sweet cherry briner east of the Rockies has also closed its doors.

Ladies and gentlemen, we live and work in a high-cost-of-production society, but as farmers and food processors alike, we cannot keep absorbing these high costs if we cannot recover these dollars from the marketplace. Failure to act, as mentioned earlier, will mean the end of our industry, and all of the good intent of saving farm land for future generations will be wasted. Furthermore, we will be forever dependent upon other nations, usually the cheapest producers, to feed us and the generations that follow. That is not a thought that I am comfortable with. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation. The questioning will go to the official opposition, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Brenda, for your presentation on behalf of the OFVGA. You've indicated labour is 65% of the annual expense for tender fruit, and we're looking at an add-on of about \$90 million a year. I know in the debates a number of years ago on minimum wage we would look at Michigan, Ohio and New York state as competing and neighbouring jurisdictions. The world has changed in the last very brief years, and I feel we should be looking at the minimum wage in countries like China and India. I see cans of peaches from South Africa and Greece, for example. Any thoughts on that? Are we provincially not thinking globally, as we should be, as far as wage rates and competition?

Mrs. Brenda Lammens: Toby, I don't think that we have gone to that extent yet to be comparing with Third World countries, but we definitely should be because that's who we're competing with in the marketplace. It's not just minimum wage, it's also regulation on pesticide use and labour; not only in costs but also in the ethics of the labour that is being used. But yes, we certainly should be making that comparison.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Just quickly, the self-directed risk management, we seem to be caught—and all of that has wrapped up. There doesn't seem to be a replacement. As farmers, you would be trying to secure a type of insurance, like asparagus, for example. That's probably one of the earliest harvests, strawberries by June. What is the deadline for us to get something in place for insurance for these kinds of crops?

Mrs. Brenda Lammens: December 31, 2007.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Okay.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Mrs. Lammens, thank you very much again for an excellent presentation. You mentioned a number of things that are very dear and near to the heart of a good number of my constituents. The closure of CanGro is significantly impacting Niagara as well as across the province; the Exeter plant is closing as well. And you mentioned the sweet cherry processor and the loss of Cadbury Schweppes.

This means that a couple thousand acres, when you total up all of those areas that are currently in the greenbelt, will no longer have a market for their production. Effectively, this is the first test of whether the government is committed to the greenbelt or not. SDRM, while very helpful, and I'm supportive of that, won't be helpful if they have no market whatsoever for their products.

What do you think the province should do for these farmers who are now without a market because of these closures, who find themselves totally constrained by the greenbelt to do anything else?

Mrs. Brenda Lammens: About six years ago, the asparagus industry went through this very scenario. We used to have six processors in Ontario that processed asparagus and we got down to one, and then we ended up with a processor in Quebec who could not compete with landed product. It just wasn't feasible because the product that was coming in from South America was cheaper. At that time, just to share what happened to our industry, all of the processing asparagus ended up on the fresh

market, which distorted the price and the fresh market price was driven down. It was mayhem, and I can see in the tender fruit industry that this is probably what's going to happen. Even though these are processing varieties, they will somehow end up on the fresh market.

I guess the challenge has been put to us that maybe we need to be looking at someone to take over these canners. That's really not the job of the Ontario fruit and vegetable growers. Because we're such a diverse group, how can we look at doing that, as the pork industry is doing, trying to attract someone to come in and open up processing plants here for their industry?

How can the government help here when we don't have any production insurance? I guess that we're really under a lot of pressure right now to get some type of program developed so that realistically it can deal with the sustainability of our producers. In situations like this, if we did have an RMP program like grain and oilseeds, we probably could address this type of crisis. It certainly wouldn't take away all of the financial hardship, but it would help—which is better than nothing, which is what we have right now.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation.

Mrs. Brenda Lammens: Thank you.

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LONDON DISTRICT CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the London District Catholic School Board. Good afternoon. You have up to 10 minutes for your presentation. We could have five minutes of questioning. I would ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Mr. Tim Holmes: Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Tim Holmes and I am the superintendent of business and treasurer of the London District Catholic School Board. I'm joined in the audience by our director, Wilma de Rond.

We recognize and acknowledge that the education sector has been one of the favourite sons of the government and that this sector has, in the past few years, received significant additional funding so that we could achieve and deliver the goals of the government. We believe that together we have put the faith of the government and the additional monies to good use and that we can all take pride in the improvements we have effected in education. We have achieved improvements in literacy and numeracy and in learning generally.

But while we have all been concentrating our best efforts on improving learning, which of course is a very worthy goal, a demographic problem has become an increasing menace which threatens much of what we have achieved. That menace is called declining enrolment.

Coming from Scotland, 14 miles from St. Andrews and nine miles from Carnoustie—actually, the Royal and Ancient Golf Club used to be one of our audits—I often think in golf analogies. I liken the current situation to a foursome heading out on the auld course on a fine Scottish morning: The sun's shining, beating down; everybody's happy; they're having a great round. As a matter of fact, all four of them are having the rounds of their lives. But by about the 10th hole, the storm clouds start coming in off the North Sea—as they frequently do in St. Andrews, actually—and with each hole, the thunder and lightning get more and more threatening until you just know that the foghorn is going to go off any minute and ruin the best round of your life.

Well, I believe that the storm clouds have been gathering for the past couple of years and we have ignored them to this point, but the starter's hand is on the foghorn button and it will blow any minute.

This brings me to the brief presented to you today, which we would ask you to consider. The background to the situation, as you probably are aware, is the declining enrolment, and its wide-ranging effects on many aspects of educational funding are undoubtedly the most significant challenge facing Ontario's school boards today. It is now a reality at virtually every school board in Ontario, and a resolution of this growing and serious problem has now reached such urgency that many school boards face financial exigency if it's not solved.

We do need to upgrade benchmarks etc., but without some resolution of the declining enrolment problem it's unlikely that we're going to avoid program, service and staff reductions in 2008-09, which, as I mentioned in my introduction, I think would be indeed extremely unfortunate, because it would undo a lot of what has been achieved.

There are many effects of declining enrolment on the financial affairs of school boards, and the first one of course is on operations, because the grants for student needs—the famous GSNs, as they're now called—are primarily enrolment-driven, and even small declines in enrolment have a severe negative effect on revenues. Unfortunately, board expenditures do not follow the same pattern, as they tend to be fixed within certain blocks. Even though there may be enrolment declines overall in a board, the decline at the school levels is often less dramatic and does not allow boards to reduce some expenditures, principally the principal, teachers etc., to the same degree and in the same time cycle.

A very quick understanding would be that if a board like ours loses one student per class, which is minimal, the overall effect on board finances is very dramatic, but quite frankly, you won't be able to save any money, because one student less in a class in most cases will mean that you will not be able to reduce teachers.

I wouldn't like to suggest to you that there isn't a declining enrolment grant currently in place; there is. But unfortunately, it's totally inadequate to address the fact that most board expenditures either do not decline with

reductions in revenue or fall at a much slower rate than enrolment.

The effect of declining enrolment is also on our capital, on our accommodation grants and new pupil places. The funding for capital is really hit by two things: It's hit by declining enrolment, which reduces the grants that we have to do new construction, but it also reduces the board's ability to pay, over the 25-year life of debentures, the repayment of the capital cost. So we're hit two ways there.

There's also another problem, which is not really declining enrolment but is exacerbated by declining enrolment: the fact that the benchmarks for construction are totally—and I mean totally—inadequate. They have been increased once since amalgamation, whereas construction costs are rising by an average of—on page 3 of the document—4.25% per year. Some years have actually been higher than that, but on average that's what it works out to be. This is documented; this isn't hearsay. This is documented by the construction association. We found in our last few projects that when we go out on tenders, we are underfunded on the benchmarks by about 25%.

You can see that we don't get enough money per pupil, and as the number of pupils falls, there is what I call a double whammy. Those really are the problems that we face on the capital side. So if the capital funding is designed to provide permanent accommodation for all students, really it means that we do need some fairly drastic overhaul of the funding mechanism, including declining enrolment.

The first recommendation on page 5: The Ministry of Education has in the past acknowledged the significant and detrimental effects of declining enrolment on school board finances, yet has not taken steps to effect a long-term solution. School boards and the ministry must together address the long-term effects of the growing phenomenon of declining enrolment. It is a difficult problem; there's no question about it. It will take a lot of great minds to find a solution.

We must find a way to soften the blow of declining enrolment and allow boards to react to it within some reasonable time frame. There's no question that funding should fall when enrolment falls. Right now, we get compensated on average about 10%. We cannot cut 90% so that the 10% would be sufficient. So the board recommends the creation of a task force comprised of ministry and school board personnel, and anybody else who is willing to try to help us, to examine all aspects of the matter and formulate recommendations that will address the school board's concerns.

There is a second issue that's not related to declining enrolment, but again, it's exacerbated by declining enrolment: the cost of testing for lead in water, which is also in the brief. In 2007, you may recall that the Ministry of the Environment—i.e., a part of the province of Ontario's ministries—introduced amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act, which, among other things, requires that school boards conduct annual testing for lead, which makes sense, and implement enhanced daily water flush-

ing protocols. That's where I believe the problem lies. No additional grants were provided to school boards. The cost of compliance will vary by school board, depending on their internal set-up. In the case of our board, our costs are about \$495,000 annually, mainly because of our staffing. Our staffing is pretty well fully utilized, and to add on a big load like this would cost us a pile of extra money.

In addition to the extra cost, the increased water consumption which is necessary for flushing has also raised environmental concerns for the public and local conservation authorities, who have raised questions about the increased consumption of this valuable resource. We estimate that we pour down the sinks every day the equivalent of six large swimming pools. We are probably pretty close to an average school board in the province. There are 72 school boards in the province. We operate 200 days, a bit more than that. Even taking 200, what we're talking about, on an annual basis, is pouring down our drains 3.28 billion litres of drinking water or three million cubic metres of drinking water.

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It's kind of an aside, the quantity of water, because that's not really why I'm here; I'm here to get funds for it. But I find it strange, quite frankly, with such a strong environmental lobby in Ontario, that this issue has not been raised.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about a minute left for your presentation.

Mr. Tim Holmes: Actually, I'm quite prepared to wrap up now. Again, I thank you for your attention and I certainly welcome any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation. The questioning goes to the NDP.

Mr. Michael Prue: I just want to be clear on the flushing down of that six swimming pools full of water. Is that as a result of flushing or is that as a result of flushing plus old and leaky sewage pipes?

Mr. Tim Holmes: No, that excludes any loss—

Mr. Michael Prue: That's just the flushing.

Mr. Tim Holmes: Yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: Goodness. That's an awful lot of water to be flushed. Are they flushed every day?

Mr. Tim Holmes: Yes. Even Saturdays, when—

Mr. Michael Prue: How old are the schools that would still have lead pipe?

Mr. Tim Holmes: I don't think that appears to be the issue with the legislation. The legislation basically ignores that. It applies to all buildings. It doesn't matter when they were built and whether they have lead pipes or not.

Mr. Michael Prue: So even if there's no lead, you're required to flush the pipes every day?

Mr. Tim Holmes: Yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: Sorry; I was totally unaware of that.

Mr. Tim Holmes: Actually, I think you raised a very interesting point. I think most people are, quite frankly, unaware of the effects of this. Nobody would argue that

we should be careful about lead in water, because it can have an effect. All I can tell you is that even the experts won't publicly go on record, but they will, speaking one on one, indicate that they have some concerns about this whole issue.

Mr. Michael Prue: And there is a directive coming out of the ministry requiring you to do this each and every day.

Mr. Tim Holmes: This is the current directive, yes.

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, I think I know a way that the government can save millions of dollars, then, across the province.

Mr. Tim Holmes: But, quite frankly, you should be aware that the cost of the water is not the major part of the cost that we are claiming to be reimbursed for.

Mr. Michael Prue: Well, no. It would be the cost of someone coming in to do the flushing. Somebody would have to come in and turn on all the taps, go around the school, and then, when they're finished, go around and turn them all off.

Mr. Tim Holmes: That's correct.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. I think I know one recommendation to save some money. I could agree, if there was a test showing lead in the water, as an interim measure. But even in the long term, it would make more sense to get the lead out of the pipes, to replace those leaded pipes with safer copper or PVC pipes or something. Anyway—

Mr. Tim Holmes: It is a complex issue, though.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes.

The second one: You made a very strong statement, and I wrote it down as fast as I could write it. "The benchmarks for construction are totally inadequate." I think you said something to that effect.

Mr. Tim Holmes: That's been generally the presentations that have come from school boards and trustee associations for the past few years. It has been an increasing problem as construction costs have risen higher than the benchmarks.

Mr. Michael Prue: I am at a little bit of a loss, in declining enrolment, on how much construction is actually taking place. Is this reconstruction of old facilities that need to be updated or is this brand new schools?

Mr. Tim Holmes: All of the above.

Mr. Michael Prue: All of the above. And so how much reconstruction is taking place on inner-city or older schools across your jurisdiction?

Mr. Tim Holmes: We usually do about two major renovations or additions in a year. We haven't built a new school for—Wilma, correct me—about maybe three years.

Ms. Wilma de Rond: The last one was Catherine of Siena. It's a little older than that.

Mr. Tim Holmes: Yes, I think probably four years. I was here in London when that happened, so it's probably about four years since our last one, and then probably a year before that we completed a high school. So we're not doing a lot of new construction but we're doing a lot

of additions to schools, often because of primary class size reductions.

Mr. Michael Prue: What can we tell the finance minister needs to be done in order to make sure the benchmarks are adequate? Let's change it to the other. What would have to be done?

Mr. Tim Holmes: Just that, really: a change to the benchmarks. It's fairly simply done. I understand the Ministry of Education is becoming more accepting of the fact that the benchmarks are inadequate and they are proposing that a study be undertaken. I think it's going to take 18 months to two years to complete, but I'm not sure we have the luxury of that much time.

Mr. Michael Prue: Do you already have a recommendation that wouldn't need 18 months to two years of study, or do you think that this study is actually needed?

Mr. Tim Holmes: I think the study would probably be a wise idea, because right now there's not a standard set of specs for schools or for additions, and I think the ministry would like to see that, because the results of tenders can vary quite a lot. I just told you our experience about 25% underfunded, and that's without the financing costs, which would actually increase that. So I think you've hit the nail on the head. I think there are two real solutions to this. One is an immediate increase in the construction benchmarks, probably reasonably modest, until the study is completed, which would probably provide a more definitive answer.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

POLICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I call on the Police Association of Ontario to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have up to 10 minutes for your presentation, and there could be up to five minutes of questioning. I would ask you to identify yourself for our recording.

Mr. Bruce Miller: Thank you. My name is Bruce Miller. I'm the chief administrative officer for the Police Association of Ontario. I was also a front-line police officer for over 20 years in the city of London prior to taking on my current responsibilities about eight years ago.

The Police Association of Ontario is a professional organization representing over 31,000 police and civilian members from every municipal police association and the Ontario Provincial Police Association. We've included further information on our organization in our brief. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input into this important process.

Ontarians have a right to feel safe in their homes, on their streets, while at play and in their schools. Safe communities create trust and comfort and attract investment, which can only lead to a stronger province. While appreciative that there are many demands for funding, we believe that safe communities are a priority for the citizens we serve.

In November, we released a public opinion poll that we commissioned across Ontario, done by Innovative Research Group. The complete poll is copied in our submission, and it's also available on our website. Some of the highlights include the following:

Ninety per cent of those polled agree that Canadian laws and eligibility for parole should be toughened to make persons convicted of crimes of violence and gun crimes more accountable for their actions;

One in four Ontarians feel that they or a family member will be physically attacked within the next five years;

An overwhelming majority say that gun violence has worsened during the past five years;

A majority of Ontarians believe that municipal governments should increase funding for police services;

There's very strong support right across the province for increased funding for the OPP; and

Finally, half of Ontarians feel that crime has increased in their community in the past five years.

Policing is dependent on professionally trained personnel. This is reflected in the fact that staffing accounts for approximately 90% of all the costs in the operating budgets of police services across the province. As you know, in Ontario, these costs are borne by municipalities and the province.

It's been our experience that, for many reasons, municipalities are constantly looking at ways to lower the budgets of police services. Meeting taxpayer expectations for high-quality, professional policing is compromised by these budget restraints and cutbacks. We simply can't continue to provide the level of policing that people expect and demand within the current staff complement.

A recent HRDC study on policing points out that crime is becoming more sophisticated, organized and technically complex. Criminals are using cutting-edge technology, and the police are hard-pressed to keep pace. Criminal organizations do not face the budgetary restrictions that are faced by police agencies, which may prohibit or delay the acquisition of equipment or personnel. Often, investigations into these matters are very time- and resource-consuming. We're playing catch-up to the criminal in many instances.

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The same study points out that while the range of duties has expanded for Canadian police, the increase in the number of police officers has not kept pace with the rate of population growth over most of the last decade. The effects of budget constraint are felt in every aspect of policing, from training to occupational health and safety, and are intensified by rising costs and expectations.

Too often, the job of police work is about satisfying paperwork requirements and complying with regulations which, although necessary, increase the workload of police personnel. Officers must ensure that all statutory requirement steps are satisfied, a fact amplified by the Supreme Court of Canada decision that obligates crown attorneys to make full disclosure to all affected parties. It's become a paper nightmare for investigators.

All of these regulatory and statutory requirements underscore the need for additional police personnel and resources.

We are indeed fortunate in Ontario that two successive governments have recognized the need for additional police officers and have acted to put 2,000 new police officers on the street. The challenges faced by policing remain and an additional influx of officers is needed.

The federal government committed to putting at least 2,500 new officers on Canada's streets. We believe that Ontario should be given its rightful share of the funding for new officers based on its population base and that those officers should be distributed to Ontario's municipal police services, First Nations police services and the Ontario Provincial Police. With 40% of our country's population, we would expect that Ontario would receive at least 1,000 new officers under this initiative.

We also believe that funding for this initiative should be long-term and not just limited to a short, finite period of time. We have been frustrated over the length of time that it has taken to move this initiative forward. We would urge both the provincial and federal governments to return to the table and move this matter forward, and we'd like to ask for your support on this.

Safe communities attract business and growth. We need to ensure that Canadian communities continue to be safe and to prosper. Twenty-five hundred new police officers can only add to that sense of prosperity.

The other area that we would like to address concerns court security and prisoner transportation. Some groups have expressed concern over who should be responsible for providing this necessary service.

Court facilities pose unique problems. Emotions can run high during court proceedings. Those accused who are remanded in custody tend to be held as a result of having been charged with crimes of violence and/or those with a history of violence. The potential for tragedy always exists. These complex challenges demand the attention of fully trained and accountable police personnel.

This is reflected by a just-released study by the Correctional Service Canada Review Panel. Some of their findings included the following:

There has been an increase of more than 100% in the proportion of federal offenders who are classified as maximum security upon admission;

One in six federal inmates have known gang and/or organized crime affiliations;

About four out of five offenders arrive with a serious substance abuse problem; and

Finally, 12% of male offenders and 26% of female offenders are identified as having serious mental health problems.

The PAO strongly believes that court security and prisoner transportation is a core police responsibility. We need to ensure that these duties continue to be performed by accountable, fully trained professional police personnel in order to safeguard our communities.

I'd like to thank the members of the standing committee for allowing us to appear before you again. I'd be pleased to answer any questions anybody may have.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation. The questioning will go to the government.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you for being here today; I appreciate that.

The government has invested over \$68 million in funding for guns and gangs; \$37 million of that has been put towards 1,000 new officers across Ontario; about \$12 million in funding for implementing anti-violence intervention strategies for those communities outside the GTA, like Brantford, Halton, Hamilton, Niagara, Essex county, Durham, Kenora and here in London; and we have about \$5 million in funding for the continuation of the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy now, as well as funding for about \$31 million in community-police partnerships.

You're asking for tougher laws and tougher enforcement fighting the gangs, getting the guns. Are the partnerships working? Are we doing enough with respect to—I know you're asking for a lot more and we need to do more. We have to do something better with the federal government as well in terms of cracking down on hand-guns. These partnerships that have been put in place—what are your impressions?

Mr. Bruce Miller: I think we're fortunate in Ontario that not only the government but all parties have worked to make our communities safer. I mentioned earlier that we've had two successive governments put 1,000 new officers on the streets. We've also been fortunate that when addressing issues such as guns and gangs, private security legislation, and I know, in the case of police, our blood samples act to help make the job our officers do safer—we had support from all three parties on those issues. So I'd like to thank everybody here and all their respective parties for the support we've had.

I'm really here today to just ask your support to help move the federal initiative forward—it's been slow and frustrating—and also to raise the issue of court security and prisoner transportation, which some of the members around this table know comes up every now and then. But we very strongly believe that it's a core police responsibility and should remain there.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I have no further questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Bruce Miller: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

N'AMERIND FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the N'Amerind Friendship Centre to come forward, please. First of all, let me thank you for coming in early this afternoon to meet with our committee. We appreciate that very much. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning after that. I would just ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of our recording Hansard. You can begin.

Mr. Chester Langille: Thank you. My name is Chester Langille. I'm the executive director of the N'Amerind Friendship Centre.

I don't have handouts for everybody. I do have one that I'll submit to the committee afterwards and I do have electronic copies, if you're interested. My presentation is on the positioning of Ontario for long-term growth, and the development and inclusion of a healthy, vibrant aboriginal population.

Aboriginal people are overrepresented in every social area, and disparities in equity and quality of life are reflected in suicide rates, poverty, unemployment, chronic illness and mental health, obesity, justice, education, housing and homelessness, the mortality rate, addictions and child welfare. This is not new information, as these issues have been reported for generations. These issues that plague aboriginal people find their roots in colonization, direct impacts of the Indian Act, residential schools, assimilation policies, systemic discrimination and racism.

The challenge of past governments to address these complex issues has resulted in Band-Aid solutions, patchwork funding and the continuation of significant disparities between the quality of life of aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples. Root causes of social inequity must be addressed to create any lasting change.

In Ontario, the mainstream population is aging, with baby boomers rapidly reaching retirement. The growth rate is declining, where the average family has one child. Projections of our future economic health reflect concerns of a growing labour shortage, an increased tax burden on families, an increased burden on the health system and the vanishing of the middle class.

In many areas, we're currently seeing a crisis unfold as these projections become reality. For example, school boards across the province are developing capital planning strategies as they must consider closing surplus schools, many of them built to support baby boomers over 50 years ago. In the wake of declining student enrolment, school boards struggle to sustain aging buildings with vacant space, unable to afford to build new facilities or provide extracurricular programming.

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Conversely, the aboriginal population is growing rapidly with the continued progression of urbanization. Aboriginal families have more than twice the children as mainstream families, with the majority of the population being young. The greatest segment of the aboriginal population is moving into the labour force, while the greater segment of the non-aboriginal population is moving into retirement. However, 50% of the aboriginal population is not achieving a grade 12 education. The consequences of this result in increased unemployment, addictions, child poverty, child welfare involvement, conflict with the justice system, homelessness, chronic and mental health disorders and high suicide rates. Additionally, this applies significant economic stress on the system, requiring significant financial supports for policing, the courts, corrections, the health system, the child welfare system and

other components of the social service net to address these social impacts.

To address Ontario's economic needs for future sustainability and growth, the urban aboriginal population must be included as contributing participants. To ensure this outcome, education is the key tool to addressing the root causes of social inequity for aboriginal people.

When considering the role of education in addressing social disparities, it cannot happen outside of the direct involvement of aboriginal people. Our approaches to education are holistic, recognizing the interconnected relationships between family, community, health, justice, employment and social well-being.

Additionally, to avoid patchwork funding and Band-Aid solutions, the Ontario government must pursue an interministerial approach, where numerous ministries share responsibilities in various social sectors. Also, an effective education model must recognize specific differences, needs and approaches for aboriginal people. For example, effective education must address the three primary reasons aboriginal students do not succeed: the lack of cultural relevancy in the existing curriculum, the mobility of urban aboriginal people, and social issues taking precedence over education.

To ensure aboriginal student success, a strategy must be implemented that addresses the complex needs of students. This is not unknown to us. Successful models do exist. However, most of these models exist in other countries such as the United States and New Zealand. Even some of our other provinces such as Manitoba, Alberta and BC have existing models of aboriginal education which are highly successful. These models are cultural immersion schools which support languages, traditional practices and culture in a format that meets provincial expectations.

In Ontario, friendship centres are in a unique and ideal position to address aboriginal education, as was identified in a master's thesis entitled *Validating a Claim for Aboriginal Immersion in Canada: A Case Study of Wiingashk Alternative Secondary School*. Friendship centres are urban aboriginal organizations that provide cradle-to-grave social supports for urban aboriginal people. Opportunities and capacity exist to develop cultural immersion models of education that will address community development needs for urban aboriginal people, resulting in greater participation in the economic development of Ontario. The development of an aboriginal education model requires a strategy that will consider numerous factors, including:

- culturally relevant curriculum;
- recruitment of aboriginal teachers;
- aboriginal languages;
- cultural immersion schools;
- urban aboriginal trustees, which would require legislative change;
- urban aboriginal child welfare support and utilizing existing census data to support these changes;
- aboriginal child care;
- lack of aboriginal child care spaces;

—aboriginal languages and relevant curriculum for child care;

—capital funding for developments of day care and capital immersion schools;

—child welfare funding for aboriginal child welfare supports;

—for youth, consistent funding for youth supports.

In conclusion, the totality of social disparity and inequity for aboriginal people stems from impacts of loss of identity. For urban aboriginal people it is even more pronounced as we face a distinct disconnect from our community, where culture and language supports are not accessible to us. We move from unstable conditions in First Nations to urban centres seeking greater opportunities in education, employment or health, only to find limited opportunities, lack of cultural supports and discrimination.

How can Ontario address these issues? Funding needs to be directed to urban aboriginal community development. This is what friendship centres are about. The recently released final report of the urban aboriginal task force outlines recommendations for provincial government that identifies specific needs to ensure our contribution and sustained growth for Ontario's economy. To ignore the recommendations which were developed to address projected crises will result in not only continued disparity but the realization of the need to include the urban aboriginal population to sustain Ontario's economic well-being. By contributing to the healthy development of the urban aboriginal community, Ontario will cultivate an invaluable contributor to the province's future economic progress.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. This round of questioning will go to Mr. Arnott.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much for your presentation. It was excellent. We appreciate your advice. I assume your friendship centre is in London, is that correct?

Mr. Chester Langille: Yes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: How big is the urban aboriginal population in London?

Mr. Chester Langille: Based on the 2006 census data that was just released, it identified 6,200 aboriginal people living in the city of London. The one thing about the data is that when it was released, I had taken a sample group based on our clients, our membership and our staff to determine the number of aboriginal participants in the census, and 64% identified that they did not participate. So those numbers are very conservative. Additionally, I was able to obtain some information regarding the census data, which I'll hand in as well, that did a breakdown based on where the aboriginal population lives in the city of London. For example, although based on the numbers they make up 1.4% of the population, based on Stats Canada's information, there are certain pockets where the aboriginal population makes up 10% of the population in the city.

Mr. Ted Arnott: You said that the friendship centre exists to extend social supports for the urban aboriginal

population. Can you describe in more detail what kind of services you provide?

Mr. Chester Langille: Absolutely. For example, we provide prenatal support and a healthy babies program. We have a family support program for ages up to six years. We have an Akwe:Go program for ages seven to 12. We have a youth program. We have a lifelong care program. We have a criminal court work program, family court work and community justice. We have Wiingashk secondary school. So our supports are, as I mentioned, cradle to grave. We have a wide range of supports to address social issues for students, youth and adults.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Well, we wish you well in your work. I know Mr. Hudak has a question or two for you.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Mr. Langille, thank you very much for the presentation. I'm from Niagara, and we have a very strong native friendship centre in Fort Erie that you may be familiar with. It's a very active member of the Niagara community—very successful programs through there.

As you know, there's a debate right now in the city of Toronto about an Afrocentric school. There's a First Nations school as well in the city of Toronto, so the province is consumed by this debate. There's a fine line, I think, between providing services based on a group or general population. You mentioned a couple of things, like the importance of aboriginal daycare and education programming. Is it your view that they should be separate for First Nations people, or should there be special segments within the general population, say, within a school or within an existing daycare system?

Mr. Chester Langille: I think that based on existing models—and successful models, just to give an example, with the Wiingashk secondary school that we have at N'Amerind. We deal with kids that are high risk, so we have expectant parents, young parents, kids involved in the justice system, kids who normally drop out, crown wards. These are the youth that we normally deal with. Their graduation rates are at 10%; about 10% normally achieve a grade 12. Through our program, which is culturally relevant and is in partnership with the school board, our success rates are 80%. This is matched only by mainstream students who are not at risk. That's based on cultural relevancy.

When you look at providing the identity—for example, a culture camp that we held. These are kids who are disconnected, who never received their spirit names, their clans, their colours, which directly relates to who they are, their identity. When they receive those, it transforms them. We provide those specific supports, those cultural supports, and it impacts their success and their identity of who they are. Those are the most active kids that we have, and the most successful.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Help me understand. Is that school program at the native friendship centre? Is it a separate structure associated with the public board? Help me understand how it is actually set up.

Mr. Chester Langille: It's a partnership between us and the Thames Valley District School Board. It's an

alternative school, and we're expanding it. The one thing is that basically the students are attached to a primary school, to a main school. Because they can't succeed in a mainstream school, they attend our school, and they graduate following successful completion of their credits. Our school is full time, so upon their successful achievement, they're graduated by their home school.

Mr. Tim Hudak: And for things like extracurriculars, whether it's sports, school newspapers, those types of activities, do those activities take place within the public school system, with the non-native kids, or is it separate in that respect as well?

Mr. Chester Langille: This would be open to anybody who wants it, but we primarily service urban

aboriginals because we only have limited capacity. The size of our school—we have one teacher, for example. We actually have a waiting list long enough that we can double our class size. But what we're looking at developing, and what we've been working on for the last two years, is a cultural immersion school, which is culture-based but open to all people.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

We are adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1539.

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