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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 18 March 2008

Mardi 18 mars 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 18 March 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 18 mars 2008

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

Ms. Laurie Scott: On behalf of the members of the official opposition caucus, I want to extend a welcome to all the community leaders who are here in Queen's Park today to discuss their local community health centres. I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to meet with the four representatives in my office from Brock and Oshawa before I was able to come down to the House. I am also pleased to bring forward their message and to praise them for the good work that they have done in their communities. As the name suggests, it's very community-governed, and issues from the community are brought forward: access to health care, health promotion, health prevention and health wellness, just to mention a few.

The meetings between the community leaders and MPPs follow the news that CHCs will play a major role in the province's new poverty reduction strategy. That certainly deserves to be questioned, given that this government is hanging its hat on the CHCs, who are here today to point out that they need more resources to meet the promises made by the Liberal government. Nearly 51% of the CHCs promised by Dalton McGuinty are still not fully operational. Adding further to this is the fact that after nearly eight years, almost 25% of the 150 family health teams promised by the McGuinty government are not fully operational.

Community health centres are held together by the great work of our nurse practitioners as well as other health care professionals. I want to point out that it was the PC government that paved the way for nurse practitioners in Ontario. We continue to support their vital role and their increasing scope of practice in dealing with the needs and demands of the people in Ontario. And let's not forget that it was also a PC government that originally established the multi-disciplinary family health networks, working with the Ontario Medical Association, back in 1998. So, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government, thank you very much for taking a good idea and re-branding it as your own.

We know that this is a Liberal government that is failing to provide our economy with the tools needed in order to be strong and work through those challenges.

We can't deny we have a serious problem looming, not least when it comes to the number of health care professionals we have in Ontario. Strengthening Ontario's economy—and this includes strengthening our rural communities, not omitting them—would give our health care system a much-needed focus: improvement of care for all Ontarians.

I want to commend again the work of the CHCs in all our communities. Especially in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, access to care through the CHCs has improved. We look forward to this government assisting them further.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to rise today to speak about the great work of the Association of Ontario Health Centres. AOHC is very fortunate to have Adrianna Tetley as its executive director, and Simone Hammond, their president, is even better than her predecessor.

As the past executive director of the CSCS—Centre de santé communautaire de Sudbury—I know first-hand the positive impact of Ontario's community health centres, aboriginal health access centres and community family health teams, particularly for northern and rural communities.

These non-profit, community-governed, interdisciplinary organizations provide much-needed access to primary health care. They employ, on salary, physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, dietitians, social workers, health promoters and community development workers, to name a few. CHCs, AHACs and community family health teams provide programs and services based on the social determinants of health tailored to the health needs of the community they serve.

I encourage all members to meet with the representatives from AOHC who are here with us today. In particular, I encourage members to visit and view, in the front parking lot of this Legislature, the AOHC's mobile satellite CHC that was recently launched by the NorWest Community Health Centres. This travelling van serves as an example of innovation for northern and rural communities. Finally, I look forward to seeing all of you tonight from 5 till 7 in the dining room for the reception.

IRANIAN FIRE FESTIVAL

Mr. David Zimmer: It's a great pleasure to stand here today and tell you about an exciting event happening this

evening in my riding of Willowdale. Tonight, over 10,000 people are expected to attend the Iranian fire festival at Mel Lastman Square, complete with one of the best fireworks displays in Toronto. I'm pleased to co-host this event with my colleague Kathleen Wynne. It starts at 7 and runs through till 10 o'clock.

The Iranian fire festival is an ancient celebratory tradition dating back to the early Zoroastrian period. The festival is a prelude to the Iranian new year, which we will celebrate this coming weekend. It's known as Nowruz and it marks the beginning of spring. The celebration includes the ceremonial jumping over a large fire; that's something that I tried last year. It brings you good luck in the coming year.

The Persian community used to celebrate this event at Sunnybrook Park. They've since outgrown it. It has now moved to Mel Lastman Square to incorporate more people and many different cultures into the festivities. Although fireworks have replaced the bonfire-jumping, the spirit of the festival continues.

I want to wish every Iranian in Willowdale, in Toronto, in Ontario and in Canada "Nowruz mobarak"—that means "happy new year." I and all Iranians in the GTA, but especially in Willowdale, invite you cordially to attend the fireworks display tonight.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Ted Arnott: The Ontario Legislature is finally back in session, having sat only two weeks in the past nine months, as the Toronto press quite rightly pointed out yesterday. While most opposition MPPs were busy working in their ridings, the McGuinty Liberal government was deliberately avoiding the scrutiny of the Ontario Legislature. It's no wonder, because the government lacks any comprehensive agenda to address the big issues and concerns facing Ontarians today. Instead they're trying to divert attention from the economic storm clouds on the horizon.

For almost three years now, our caucus has warned about the pending competitiveness crisis in manufacturing. Now it is here. The government ignored prudent warnings and now more than 180,000 people who have lost their good-paying jobs have paid the price for Liberal negligence. Two months ago, the finance committee undertook extensive public hearings and we heard what must be done in the upcoming budget. Our caucus pushed to eliminate the capital tax, reduce the corporate income tax, ease the regulatory burden and provide real tax relief for working families. In short, we need accountability, we need immediate and dramatic action, and we need it in next week's budget.

1340

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Pat Hoy: Ontario's economy is being challenged by the high dollar, the high price of oil and the slowdown in the US economy. The federal government missed an

opportunity to do more in its budget to strengthen Ontario's economic growth and to support agriculture.

Through the 2007 fall statement, the Ontario government has already taken significant steps to enhance the competitiveness of our provincial economy through a new \$3-billion economic stimulus package. This package includes a major tax cut for manufacturers and small businesses, new aid for farmers, funding for skills development and rapid re-employment services, and investments to renew essential infrastructure in both Chatham-Kent and Leamington.

Now, more than ever, both levels of government must work to enhance Ontario's competitive advantages and strong economic fundamentals as we compete for global investments, retain and create jobs, and assist our municipalities. The federal government must recognize the need for investments in Ontario's agriculture sector by providing their share of funding to strengthen risk management programs and help farmers, food processors and rural communities.

The Ontario government is here for our workers, our businesses and our farmers. It's time for the federal government to make needed investments today to strengthen Ontario's place in Canada and help Ontario families.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Norm Miller: With each passing day, the Premier reveals that he is more interested in photo ops than the state of Ontario's economy. Whether it's creating a new holiday at the expense of business or musing on parliamentary traditions like the Lord's Prayer, we see a Premier unconcerned with the economic conditions of this province.

Under the McGuinty government, Ontario has become one of the slowest-growing provinces in Canada and has reported growth below the national average since 2005, the longest string of underperformance in three decades. Ontario's growth rate in 2007 was the slowest in the country, with all five major banks ranking Ontario ninth out of 10 provinces for economic growth in 2008. For the first time in 30 years, Ontario's unemployment rate exceeded the national average, rising to 6.5% in December 2007. Talented workers are leaving Ontario in record numbers, with a reported net loss of over 36,000 people to other provinces in 2007. That's the biggest out-migration in Ontario's history. Ontario businesses are desperate for apprentices in every discipline.

The McGuinty government must act now by:

- eliminating the capital tax for businesses immediately;
- reducing the corporate income tax rate to a competitive level;
- providing some tax relief for small businesses;
- setting and committing to real targets to reduce the red tape burden for all businesses; and
- developing a strategy to address the skilled labour shortage.

We as a province can do better.

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS OF CORNWALL AND AREA

Mr. Jim Brownell: Recently, an important anniversary was celebrated in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. The Women Entrepreneurs of Cornwall and Area marked 10 years of excellence in networking and providing opportunities for local business women. This organization, formed in 1998 by a small group of women who realized the benefit of creating a forum in which women entrepreneurs could network, has flourished. Within that first year, their membership grew to 80; it now stands at 115 active members from the riding and beyond. This anniversary was recently commemorated by the Power of Women Conference, which showcased the business opportunities in the community and drew in 125 attendees.

For a minimal annual fee, the Women Entrepreneurs of Cornwall and Area offer their members a variety of services, ranging from opportunities to profile businesses to a listing in the Cornwall and Area Business Directory. Most important is the opportunity to network and make the connections that are essential to a growing business. The group is recognized for its excellence in this capacity.

I would like to commend the founders of this group—Pam Baxter, Mary Ann Delaney, Alice Ferguson, Sharon Fisher, Marg Hogan, Sharie Rowland-Gaucher and Sue Tarle—for their vision and congratulate the group for 10 years of excellence. I know they will remain a strong force in the business community for many more years to come.

For those wishing to find further information about this group, I encourage you to visit their website at www.wecornwallarea.ca.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

Mr. Charles Sousa: I rise in the House today to draw attention to the Conservative report issued yesterday by John Tory and the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook. The report stemmed from pre-budget consultations conducted by the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

I took a good look at the PC document, but unfortunately it's incomplete. For instance, in committee on January 30 the Conservative member for Wellington–Halton Hills stated that the McGuinty Liberals have “announced a strong commitment to attempt to combat the problem of poverty in Ontario.” I commend the member for a strong endorsement. Unfortunately, it wasn't included in the Conservative document released yesterday.

Also missing from the release was the member for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant's statement in committee on March 3, when he said, “Ontario has had a very good economic run in the last 10 years.” I would like to thank the member for recognizing our government's accom-

plishments on job creation and economic stewardship. But, sadly, the member's support was omitted.

Finally, the report failed to mention when my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East asked the committee to recommend “that the government maintain its prudent disciplined fiscal management to continue to improve public services and strengthen Ontario's economy while delivering a balanced budget.” The PC members on committee voted nay. I guess this isn't surprising from the party that left Ontario with a \$5.6-billion deficit. Recognizing these glaring omissions, I look forward to receiving the updated report from the Conservatives.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Community health centres, or CHCs, are non-profit organizations funded by our government that enhance community development by providing primary health care and locally focused health promotion programs. Today is CHC Day at Queen's Park, and I would like to sincerely commend the dedicated professionals who work at Ontario's CHCs for making our communities stronger.

Before being elected to the Legislature, I had the honour of serving on the board of the Centretown Community Health Centre in my riding of Ottawa Centre. It was here that I learned first-hand about the excellent work being done with communities to improve the health and well-being of Ontarians.

In my riding, we are fortunate to have three CHCs that help families access the care and support they need. The Carlington Community and Health Services centre provides medical counselling and health programs that include drop-ins, support groups, training, education and support for community initiatives. The Somerset West Community Health Centre takes a proactive approach to health care by providing outreach to individuals and groups in at-risk communities. They visit shelters, drop-in centers, seniors' buildings and homes, wherever the need arises. The Centretown Community Health Centre acts as a community leader by coordinating three city-wide programs: the community diabetes education program of Ottawa, lifestyle enrichment for senior adults, and GLBTTQ youth mental health counselling. There are 74 community health centres and satellites in Ontario. By the time all 103 CHCs and satellites are up and running, funding for CHCs will exceed \$300 million annually.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg the indulgence of the members. In the east gallery, we'd like to welcome Mr. Larry O'Connor, former member from the riding of Durham–York in the 35th Parliament. Mr. O'Connor, welcome back to Queen's Park.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

INVESTING IN ONTARIO ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 PERMETTANT D'INVESTIR DANS L'ONTARIO

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 35, Loi autorisant le ministre des Finances à faire des versements aux bénéficiaires admissibles sur les crédits affectés par la Législature et modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la transparence et la responsabilité financières, la Loi sur le ministère du Trésor et de l'Économie et la Loi de 1991 sur le Conseil du Trésor.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The minister for a short statement?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: During ministerial statements.

1350

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

Mr. O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to regulate the spreading and storage of sewage sludge and biosolids / Projet de loi 36, Loi réglementant l'épandage et le stockage des boues d'épuration et des biosolides.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Mr. John O'Toole: The intention of the bill is to amend the Environmental Protection Act to require that a person obtain a certificate of approval from the director before spreading or storing sewage sludge and other biosolids and products derived from them. The certificate of approval may be subject to the testing, recording and reporting requirements of the director, as they see fit.

This bill is implemented at this time in light of the proposed framework for the management of non-agricultural source material, NASM, and the discussion around that issue with the Ministry of the Environment.

716056 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2008

Mr. Norm Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr6, An Act to revive 716056 Ontario Limited.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 84, this bill stands referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY REPORTING ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE DEVOIR DE SIGNALER LES CAS DE PORNOGRAPHIE JUVÉNILE

Ms. Broten moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act to protect Ontario's children / Projet de loi 37, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille afin de protéger les enfants de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: This bill would amend the Child and Family Services Act to make it clear that sexual exploitation includes child pornography. If passed, this bill would make it mandatory for any person who comes across an image that they believe is or may be child pornography to report it, and the failure to do so would be an offence.

Les principaux éléments de ce projet de loi requièrent que quiconque a des motifs raisonnables de croire qu'une représentation ou un écrit constitue ou pourrait constituer de la pornographie juvénile doit communiquer promptement les renseignements dont il dispose à un organisme, à une agence ou à une personne désignée par réglementation, et la faillite de le communiquer est une infraction de cette loi.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT ACT (ASSISTANCE TO MUNICIPALITIES), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DES VOIES PUBLIQUES ET DES TRANSPORTS EN COMMUN (AIDE AUX MUNICIPALITÉS)

Mr. Yakabuski moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 38, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with respect to the

assistance that the Minister provides to municipalities / Projet de loi 38, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun à l'égard de l'aide apportée aux municipalités par le ministre.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. John Yakabuski: This bill, if passed, would compel the provincial government to treat municipalities in the same fair way that the federal government is treating them by sharing gas tax revenue with all municipalities, regardless of whether or not they have a public transportation system. I'm hoping that all members in this House will support this piece of legislation.

BUY IN CANADA FOR MASS TRANSIT VEHICLES ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 FAVORISANT L'ACHAT DE VÉHICULES DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN AU CANADA

Mr. Mauro moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 39, An Act to promote the purchase of mass transit vehicles that are made in Canada / Projet de loi 39, Loi favorisant l'achat de véhicules de transport en commun fabriqués au Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Bill Mauro: The purpose of the reintroduction of this act is to ensure that in the future, any municipality or procurement agency purchasing mass transit vehicles as described herein in the province of Ontario, when that municipality or agency receives funds from the province of Ontario, they will do so in accordance with the conditions contained herein. I look forward to second reading debate.

VISITEUR

VISITOR

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue au membre du Centre de santé communautaire de l'Estrie de Cornwall. Also, I would like to welcome everyone to the CHC reception tonight, from 5 to 7 in the leg dining room. Le Centre de santé communautaire de l'Estrie comprend, en plus du Centre de Cornwall, quatre satellites : Alexandria, Crysler, Bourget et Embrun. J'aimerais lui souhaiter la bienvenue.

VISITOR

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to draw members' attention to the

west public gallery. That's where Justin Searls is. Justin is a second-year political science major from the University of Akron, in Akron, Ohio. He's an intern in my office right now, and he is here as part of the Ontario Legislative Assembly intern program. Please say hello to Justin.

VISITORS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would like to welcome to the House three classes of grade 10 students from Marc Garneau Collegiate in Don Valley West. Welcome to the Legislature.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just like to take this opportunity to remind the members—I know that the introduction of guests is an issue that the House leaders are discussing. We welcome all the guests that are here and those that have not been introduced. I appreciate those that have given me a heads up, but I would be very happy to introduce those guests on behalf of all of us, so that if you were to present me with a list prior to question period, I would do that introduction on all of our behalf, so that we don't have to continually deal with points of order.

To the grade 10 class in particular, I made reference yesterday to grade 5 classes and how important it was for us to demonstrate to grade 5s how to act in a legislative chamber. I trust that we'll be conscious of the grade 10s that are here and the wonderful way that we will operate in this chamber. Welcome.

1400

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The economy is fundamentally strong and resilient despite the fact that it is currently being buffeted by a number of challenges. It is critical, now more than ever, to take every opportunity available to us to invest in Ontario.

Today I introduced the Investing in Ontario Act, 2008: "Investing in Ontario" because it would allow us to further our balanced approach—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): It didn't last very long. As I said in my statement yesterday, there is room for some gentle banter within this chamber, but if I can't hear the individual who is speaking, you can't hear the individual who is speaking. I think, not only for the benefit of the members but for the guests who are here visiting the chamber, let's give those members the opportunity to speak.

If they would add 30 seconds back to the clock, please.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It's "Investing in Ontario" because it would allow us to further our balanced approach to paying down debt while making critical investments in Ontario's economy.

This bill, if passed, would allow a portion of any unanticipated year-end surplus to both address priority public needs such as municipal infrastructure projects as well as reduce the province's accumulated financial deficit. Currently, all year-end surpluses go toward debt reduction. If the proposed legislation is enacted, we would use the regulation-making authority in the proposed act to direct the available portion of any year-end surplus in 2007-08 to municipalities for infrastructure priorities. This is a balanced way to reduce the provincial debt as well as better help municipalities to address their capital needs.

Let me explain what we would provide under regulations that we would make if the proposed legislation is enacted.

If the province were to achieve a surplus in excess of \$800 million, the first \$600 million would be used to reduce the province's accumulated financial deficit, and the remaining amount would be provided to municipalities for capital purposes. This means that municipalities could receive a minimum of \$200 million in additional capital funding—funding above and beyond the investments and supports the province already provides.

Through this initiative, we are demonstrating our government's commitment to treating municipalities as true partners in building a stronger Ontario community. Municipalities would have the flexibility to use the funding for their own capital priorities, whether it's to improve roads and bridges, expand transit or upgrade social housing.

Let me be clear: We will have accountability provisions in place, consistent with the province's new transfer payment directives. And to ensure that available funds are distributed in a fair and transparent manner, we are proposing to distribute funding to all municipalities on the basis of population.

We know that investing in municipal infrastructure not only addresses the capital needs of our community, but it creates jobs in the short term and builds prosperity in the long run.

We have heard loud and clear from our municipal partners that they support this proposed act and appreciate what it can achieve. That's because this would be on top of the growing annual funding that the province already provides to municipalities. For example, we are providing \$870 million in 2008 through the Ontario municipal partnership fund, we are saving municipalities more than \$900 million per year by 2011 through uploading the Ontario drug benefit and Ontario disability support program costs, and we are providing \$1.6 billion by 2010 in gas tax funding.

Our government has always taken a balanced approach to reducing the provincial debt while making strategic investments in the Ontario economy. We believe this is a prudent, responsible approach. We are building on our plan to strengthen the economy and taking every opportunity available to us to invest in Ontario.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE INFRASTRUCTURE MUNICIPALE

Hon. Jim Watson: The McGuinty government is working hard to develop and maintain a strong relationship with Ontario's municipalities. I want to offer my congratulations to Minister Duncan for his Investing in Ontario Act, which, if passed, would continue this government's support.

For example, we have progressive agreements with both the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, AMO, and the city of Toronto that set out that we will consult and co-operate with each other. When the Minister of Finance announced the proposed new act, Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion recognized this government's support for municipalities by saying, "This is just great. The province has done exactly what we've asked them to do."

Our government has introduced legislation in the past, including revisions to the Planning Act and the Municipal Act, that gives municipalities more tools and flexibility to act in the best interests of their communities.

Notre gouvernement a fait adopter des lois, dont les modifications à la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire et à la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités, qui confèrent aux municipalités plus d'outils et de la souplesse pour agir dans l'intérêt de leurs collectivités.

We are also proud to be back in the affordable housing business and to support local affordable housing initiatives. Just yesterday, the Premier announced that we will be providing \$100 million to repair existing housing stock, which will help nearly 10,000 of our fellow citizens.

We are also expanding Infrastructure Ontario's OSIFA loan program to include loans to municipalities for capital repairs to social housing—a first in this province. We are justifiably very proud of our partnership with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the city of Toronto in the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review. Even before the review releases its consensus report in late spring, we've been taking immediate action to support municipalities.

Nous sommes également très fiers de notre partenariat avec l'Association des municipalités de l'Ontario et la ville de Toronto dans le cadre de l'examen provincial-municipal du financement et du mode de prestation des services.

We are uploading Ontario drug benefit costs, and next year we will upload the cost of the Ontario disability support program. By the time this is fully implemented, every single municipality in the province of Ontario will

be saving, collectively, \$935 million from the property tax rolls.

We've also increased the province's share of public health funding to 75% and increased funding to strengthen land ambulance services.

We have also increased, as the Premier announced at the ROMA conference and the Good Roads conference, the municipal infrastructure investment fund that Minister Caplan announced, to \$450 million. This is helping communities restore and revitalize vital public infrastructure.

These are just a couple of the examples of our ongoing support and co-operation with municipalities in Ontario. The proposed Investing in Ontario Act is the latest step in this relationship, a step that reinforces our continuing commitment to strengthen Ontario communities, to co-operate with them, to get along with them. I'm very proud of this legislation and I'm sure all members will support it when it comes up for debate.

NUTRITION MONTH

Hon. Margaret R. Best: March is Nutrition Month in Canada. Nutrition Month reinforces the importance of good nutrition and the role it plays in good health. It is designated by the Dietitians of Canada.

The government of Ontario is working to increase access to nutrition-related resources and programs for healthy Ontarians. We are all aware that eating healthy food can reduce the risk of obesity and fight chronic diseases such as stroke, diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer.

As part of the McGuinty government's effort, we have invested \$10 million towards the action plan for healthy eating and active living for Ontario. Our plan includes the northern fruit and vegetable pilot, currently serving three weekly servings of fruit and vegetables to over 12,000 school-age children in the Algoma and Porcupine regions.

Our notgonnakillyou.ca initiative, an interactive website for youth aged 12 to 15, promotes healthy eating and physical activity, and EatRight Ontario is a telephone and website service that provides free access to dietitians. EatRight Ontario is available Monday to Friday from 9 to 5 by calling toll-free 1-877-510-5102. An online "ask-a-dietitian" is also available and will respond to questions.

1410

In partnership with Dietitians of Canada, EatRight Ontario offers advice on family nutrition, healthy weights, meal-planning advice for busy families, seniors' nutrition and disease prevention.

The Ministry of Health Promotion is also working in partnership with the Ministry of Education on legislation to ban unhealthy trans fats in school cafeterias and to ensure that items sold in school vending machines are healthy. We are working together because we are committed to promoting student health and making schools healthy places to learn.

On the occasion of Nutrition Month, I would like to recognize several students and their teachers from Wexford Collegiate School for the Arts in the riding of Scarborough Centre who have joined us in the House today. The students and staff at Wexford have accepted our healthy schools challenge. They are promoting healthier food choices in their cafeteria and encouraging student use of sports equipment through student-led fit fairs. They are one of more than 1,300 schools in Ontario that have risen to our healthy schools challenge. Congratulations to Wexford on being a healthy school. I appreciate your being here today and admire your commitment to making healthy food choices and being active every day.

As Ontario's Minister of Health Promotion, I encourage all Ontarians to make nutritious, healthy food choices every day. A healthier Ontario is a wealthier Ontario, and together we are building on that in this Nutrition Month and every single day of the year.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Tim Hudak: Let me first point out that this government now has decided not to try to pay down any debt—which is a shame—or very little of it, because—

Interjections.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —well, to go back on their debt payments, because as the minister knows, debt has gone up under the McGuinty government by some \$13 billion. We are now \$162 billion in debt. That costs an interest payment of \$9 billion per year, or \$1 million per hour, that could go into tax reductions or needed programs, but instead they're backtracking on any plan to pay down the debt.

Let's be clear about the nature of this bill. The minister could, at any time, transfer funds to municipalities in a predictable and transparent manner for capital funds; he simply has chosen not to. In this bill—let's be clear about this—he is putting municipal infrastructure at the back of the pack. After Dalton McGuinty gets done with all of his end-of-year, March madness spending, his famous end-of-year political slush funds, only then could municipalities get a slice of the pie, and only if cabinet were to decide so.

Let's think about some of those gems. Let's not forget about the world's most famous cricket club that asked for \$150,000. Dalton McGuinty gave them \$1 million in a transfer to try to buy political votes. And let's talk about various community centres like the Iranian-Canadian Community Centre, which received funding with no letter of application whatsoever, and groups that received money because they had connections in the Ontario Liberal Party. It's not what you do; it's who you knew.

Municipalities will now be at the back of the pack after Dalton McGuinty gets done with his friendly slush funds to those well connected to the party.

Let's not forget the mini-scandal last year when the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh got into a bit of hot water. He was the stool pigeon. Remem-

ber, he talked about how he accessed funds for his municipality from a fund that had no application and no transparency whatsoever? That was part of the Auditor General's investigation.

So I suspect that what we're actually seeing here today is a Liberal attempt to get around the Auditor General's review by deciding within cabinet which municipalities get the funding and how much. It's all done by regulations, as the minister knows. I think what we're going to see, actually, is another Liberal slush fund outside of the accountability parameters. As Dalton McGuinty himself likes to say, "We've seen this movie before."

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John O'Toole: It was over a year ago that the minister was proud to announce the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review. In fact, it's my understanding that they delayed that hearing until after the October 2007 provincial election.

Our leader, John Tory, called for that review to be done expeditiously prior to the budget. In fact, what has happened is that they're not going to release the report in the spring, as promised originally. It's not going to be released until some time after June.

My problem is that each day we get a different piece announced. The announcement today is a little piece for housing, a little piece for setting up another infrastructure group.

The real part here is that the provincial surplus slush fund, as my colleague said, was an announcement with no strings attached—another questionable set of circumstances around who gets the money, under what plan, under what application, or is it whom they know? That's the question.

My question is, where is the plan? Where is the plan from this minister to deal with the municipal service review? A little piece here, a little piece there, but no plan. I can tell you what municipalities—AMO and the Good Roads association—told me. They want stable, predictable, long-term funding.

I would encourage you, Minister, to in fact work with your federal counterpart, Mr. Flaherty, as well as Mr. Cannon. Work with them with a plan for Building Canada. You haven't agreed to that agreement to access federal funds to build the infrastructure in this province.

I don't see any plan here. I see an announcement here, an announcement there, but really no plan. I have to ask the Minister of Finance, as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to tell me what the plan is to upload responsibilities to the province and give responsibilities to the municipalities with their fragile tax base. This is just another sham, another crapshoot of who gets the money.

NUTRITION MONTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Minister Best for her statement on Nutrition Month. Good

nutrition is such an important determinant of health. As our health care system is struggling to deal with chronic illnesses, best practices tell us that good nutrition is always an important part of the solution, from primary prevention all the way to treatment.

But I would also like to remind the government of what Mrs. Leslie Whittington-Carter, from Dietitians of Canada, said when she presented at the standing committee on finance and economic affairs: There is such a lack of outpatient nutrition counselling and such long waiting lists that access is really compromised.

I'm pleased to celebrate Nutrition Month. I would be even more pleased to have access to dietitians.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Michael Prue: In response to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Never, I think, has this House seen such a bizarre bill; never has this House seen such contortions of trying to give away money to municipalities; never has this House seen such convoluted talk as has come from these two ministers.

The reality is that the municipalities across Ontario—all 480 of them—need consistent, secure, predictable funding, and they're not getting it through the body of this bill. What they need is for this government to recognize that the true load being borne by the municipalities is the \$3.2 billion of downloaded costs which, I acknowledge, were put on by a previous government, but which this government is very slow to upload. The upload they have announced before 2011 amounts to only some \$900 million. I want to tell you that they need the whole \$3.2 billion. Everything from Ontario Works to ODSP, everything from daycare to health to ambulance services is in the purview and prerogative of this government, not the municipalities. What they need is wise, prudent action to remove unfair costs. Instead, they're getting money if—if the surplus is above \$600 million. They are going to get absolutely nothing if the surplus is below \$600 million.

1420

We have to ask ourselves, in this time of financial insecurity that we are witnessing, particularly south of the border in the United States—over the last few days the finance minister clearly should have noticed a number of events transpiring that could cause and may cause harm to this province. He should have noticed that there is a meltdown. Bear Stearns, you know, was sold for \$2 a share yesterday. He should have noticed that the United States today is intervening in the market, something I never thought I would see happen. He should have noticed that there is a reduction in consumer goods. He should have noticed that the subprime continues in virtually every state of the Union. He should have noticed, looking at Ontario figures, that the spillover has started to affect Ontario.

Here is his great bill that maybe—maybe—there's going to be some money next year. One has to ask, is

there in fact going to be money next year? There may be a few dollars this year, but is there going to be anything in future years?

I had an opportunity to look at the bill, as it was handed over to us a few minutes ago. Section 2 leaves it to the finance minister to give the money to any person or entity; it does not clearly state that it's going to municipalities. So it gives the option in subsequent years, I would suggest, for him to give it to any person or entity that he chooses.

Then I looked at section 14.1, which says that this is going to be a retroactive expenditure. It will come before this House after the auditor has reported. So there is no opportunity for the Legislature to question it, either in the House or in committee. I mean, it's pretty good stuff.

Then I looked at section 4(1) of the transparency and accountability act, which he included in this bill, and which allows for a deficit, which I think this minister is heading for, if not in this budget then certainly in the next one.

I had an opportunity this weekend to read the comment from the Toronto Sun, and I don't think I could say it any better myself: "Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan is the Rube Goldberg of Queen's Park"—that's the guy who did the cartoons, building a complex structure that—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you.

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the members—there are certainly a number of issues I could address the House with, and I started yesterday. One of the things I plan on circulating is a list that has been prepared by the Table of what is acceptable and not acceptable when it comes to parliamentary language.

There was a comment made by the member from Niagara–West Glanbrook, in a reference he made to one of the members, that I know, in consultation with the table, I should have asked the member to withdraw. I would ask that he perhaps consider withdrawing that.

But I will share the list of unparliamentary language, because I think it is a good refresher for those members who are new and those who are veterans in this House, and I would ask that the member consider withdrawing the comment he made.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg the indulgence of the members to allow the pages to assemble for introduction. I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages, serving in the first session of the 39th Parliament:

Natalie Au, Oak Ridges–Markham; Adam Bernardo, Richmond Hill; Charat Choudhary, Scarborough Southwest; Madeline Ciuffetelli Muzzi, Etobicoke–Lakeshore; Alexander Coomes, Halton; Christopher Dimoff, Scarborough Centre; Chantal Duchesne, Brant;

Ramandeep Farmaha, Mississauga–Brampton South; Ela Hefler, Toronto–Danforth; Laura Kim, Kitchener–Waterloo; Samuel Kloppenburg, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex; Michael Kushnir, Niagara West–Glanbrook; Claire Leunissen, London–Fanshawe; George Li, Etobicoke Centre; Alex Mathews, Eglinton–Lawrence; Daniel Muzzi, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke; Tola Stewart, Northumberland–Quinte West; Fatima Sunderji, Vaughan; Magali Toy, Davenport; Jacqui van Warmerdam, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. Welcome to all of you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier and deals with his government's failed approach to the challenges facing our manufacturing sector. I do so in the wake of today's closure announcement by Shorewood Packaging in my hometown of Brockville, throwing 270 people out of work.

While we appreciate that there are external factors affecting Ontario's manufacturing sector, those companies are starting out behind the eight ball, hobbled by your regime of high taxes and excessive red tape. Meanwhile, the other provinces in Canada are cutting their taxes to give themselves an edge over our province. Premier, the path to competitiveness, from our perspective, and I think other provinces, is clear: lower tax rates, the immediate elimination of the capital tax for all business and getting a handle on the need for a reliable and affordable energy supply. What are you waiting for?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I look forward to the continuing opportunity to challenge the Conservative Party's assertion that the best thing we could possibly do at this point in time is to cut taxes. I want Ontarians to better understand the consequences of the option that the Conservative Party would have us weigh.

They're saying that we should cut corporate income taxes, to the tune of \$2.3 billion; they're telling us to eliminate the health premium, to the tune of \$2.8 billion. If we take those two alone, we're talking about a \$5.1-billion cut in revenues. Some 75% of all the money that we spend here on behalf of Ontarians is directed to health care, education and services for the vulnerable. You can't take \$5.1 billion out of the system and not close hospitals, not fire nurses, not make cuts to education, not drive up tuition fees and not proceed with further cuts to our social services.

We had a referendum on that in 2003, and I thought the results were very clear. Ontarians rejected that approach then, and I'm confident they reject it still today.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Yesterday, the Premier was talking about his recent trip to Belleville. What he omitted was a comment in an editorial in the Belleville Intelligencer, that what the Premier did not say is that

“the Ontario economy has already lost, and is forecast to lose, many more jobs than his program can hope to create....”

Since 2003, Ontario places last in the country when it comes to private sector job creation, but first in jobs in the public sector. It's unsustainable, and the sooner the Premier realizes this the better off we'll be. Why is the Premier refusing to take the steps necessary to get our economy back on the right track?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The other dimension that I think it's really important for Ontarians to understand is that not only are the Conservatives proposing that we cut taxes, but they're proposing that we cut the wrong kinds of taxes. They want us to cut corporate income taxes, which are payable by profitable Ontario corporations.

We have a different approach. What we are doing is eliminating capital taxes, which benefit businesses that are struggling and aren't making money. We are reducing business education taxes, which, again, helps businesses that are struggling. We're also enriching the capital cost allowance provisions, which, again, help businesses that are struggling.

1430

There is a world of difference between proposing that we cut taxes on profitable corporations and lending income tax support to those corporations which continue to struggle. We chose the latter option. That's the approach which has been sought by the manufacturing sector in particular. We will continue to work hand in hand with them to help them grow stronger with every passing day.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Some 180,000 manufacturing jobs lost since January of 2005 and counting—the Premier doesn't seem to understand that every new public sector job creates a new demand for tax dollars, but every new private sector job creates a new supply of revenue to fund our social programs, to pay for hospitals and schools. Competitive business taxes create the private sector jobs we desperately need in this province. The Premier suggests that this is an issue of political ideology, but it's really just good economic sense. And that's why, whether it is the Tories in Alberta, the Liberals in British Columbia or the NDP in Saskatchewan or Manitoba, they all recognize the importance of having competitive tax rates, and all those provinces are booming. Why won't this government relent? Why won't this government admit that it's wrong and stop choking businesses with the highest tax rates in the country?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just so that we bring a bit of perspective to what's happening to the Ontario economy: First of all, we have generated 450,000 more jobs—those are net new jobs—since 2003. That accounts for one third of all new job creation in our country: one third coming from one province, and that's something we can all be proud of. The unemployment rate today is 6.1%. When we first earned the privilege of serving Ontarians as their government, it was 7%. In January of this year, Ontario outpaced all other provinces in the country when it came to new job creation in the manufacturing sector.

So it is true that other provinces which are blessed with oil and gas to be found underfoot are doing well, and we congratulate them in that regard. But even though the cost of oil has gone up 80% in the last 12 months, and that's been good for other provinces, it's presented a real challenge for us here in Ontario. That's why we're proceeding with a five-point plan that includes, among other things, cuts in a thoughtful way to business taxes.

TAXATION

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I point out that for the first time in 30 years, Ontario's unemployment exceeds the national average. He should remember that.

My question, again, is for the Premier. Senior economists agree that Ontario's marginal effective tax rate—the highest in the country—is killing jobs, shutting down businesses and chasing away new investment.

The McGuinty Liberals are on the wrong track. Their oppressive tax regime and excessive red tape have Ontario's economy on a dead-end road. But they face an opportunity with the upcoming budget: They can change the direction. The course is clear: competitive tax rates for businesses, a reduction in red tape, and an affordable and sustainable energy supply. Will the Premier please advise this House today, since he's the one writing the budget, whether or not we'll be seeing any of the measures next Tuesday?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: That “tax cuts create jobs” is a fairly seductive, outdated, Reform-driven mantra. If there was ever any doubt, there is no longer any “progressive” left in this Conservative Party; it is obviously Reform-driven.

Again, it's important for Ontarians to understand that what the leader of the official opposition is talking about is taking \$5.1 billion out of government revenues. You can't do that and not close hospitals, fire nurses, make cuts to education, drive up tuition, fire water inspectors and make further cuts to social assistance. We've seen that movie; we don't want to watch a rerun. We are not prepared to make those kinds of cuts. We're going to proceed to grow this economy in a responsible, thoughtful way that invests in our people, invests in infrastructure, invests in innovation and works with Ontario businesses.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: We've all given the Premier a GPS to get back on the right path, but he insists he wants to wander into the Bob Rae wilderness. Short-term bailouts for some businesses and cash infusions for others may smooth out some of the bumps, but they don't change the fact that we're on a dead-end road.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock.

This is question and answer. As I said before, there is some room for some gentle banter back and forth, but when I can't hear the question, you can't hear the question either. We all need to be able to hear that.

Start the clock, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The name Bob Rae seems to have sensitivity over there.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Municipal Affairs, I just made a comment about trying to keep it toned down a little bit in here.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think most of us would agree that sound economic policies could and should cross party lines. When the Tories in Alberta, the Liberals in BC and the NDP in Saskatchewan and Manitoba lower their corporate tax rates, they're saying they want to be in business. They're saying they're willing to do what it takes to attract new business because they know that's how you secure the tax revenues we need to fund our schools and hospitals. Why does the Premier insist on ignoring the obvious and keeping us on the wrong track? Why?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Tax cuts alone don't cut it. They don't cut it today, assuming they ever have in the past. The world has changed. We have a global economy, we have a knowledge-based economy, we have an economy where change proceeds at a relentless and breath-taking pace.

We have a thoughtful approach to growing the economy. We're investing heavily in the skills and education of our workers. I'm proud to report that since we first formed the government, we're now graduating 10,000 more young people every year from our high schools, who used to drop out; 100,000 more young people are going on to colleges and universities; and we have 50,000 more people enrolled in apprenticeships today than we had in 2003. That's just one dimension of our five-point plan.

We are also investing heavily in infrastructure. We have a 10-year, \$60-billion plan; 190,000 jobs alone are being created in the public transit sector as a result of our investments in infrastructure.

The Conservative Party can remain mired in the past and this antiquated notion that it's all about tax cuts. We—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Let's talk about another province, Quebec, facing similar challenges to Ontario with its manufacturing base. Quebec has a corporate tax rate lower than ours, and their economy is expected to grow faster than ours. Alberta, BC and Saskatchewan may be benefiting from the demand for natural resources, but their lower corporate tax rates are also attracting other businesses; all the more reason we need every competitive advantage we can find.

Reduce red tape. Kill the job-killing capital tax for all businesses right now. Get our marginal corporate tax rate down from the highest level in the entire country to a competitive level. The choice is the Premier's. Which one is he going to make?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Here are a few facts about Ontario today. We have the highest rate of post-secondary education of any population anywhere in the Western world, and we're proud of that. No province is investing more in innovation than we are—close to \$2

billion. No province is investing more in infrastructure than we are here in Ontario; again, it is \$60 billion over the course of 10 years. No province is devoting more money, more effort and more time to establishing good, solid working relationships with the business sector and with labour as well.

We are proud of this province. We believe it is filled with opportunity for the people who are living here, and we are proud to invite the world to come and invest here.

I'm a little bit concerned about the federal government saying that people should not invest in Ontario. My question to the leader of the official opposition is, is he with the people of Ontario in our hopes, in our aspirations, in our confidence in our economy, or is he with the federal government?

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: A question to the Premier. The London area used to have more than 40,000 manufacturing jobs—jobs that are vital to the local economy, including those involved in the manufacture of commuter rail locomotives. However, under the McGuinty Liberals, over the last three years London has lost more than 10% of those manufacturing jobs. That has taken an astounding \$160 million in wages out of the local London economy. My question is, how many more jobs will disappear from London before the Premier decides to do the right thing and pass the Buy Ontario bill that New Democrats have put forward to help sustain manufacturing jobs in Ontario?

1440

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The leader of the NDP raises an important issue. I think we all share a sense of responsibility when it comes to ensuring that, as much as possible, we use investments made on behalf of Ontarians to support new infrastructure, to ensure that that turns into as many Ontario jobs as possible. We will be making an announcement on that very point shortly.

But again, I want to raise something that I raised yesterday with the leader of the NDP. When I visited the Bombardier plant in Thunder Bay, the question that weighed heavily on their minds was not the one he is putting to me today. It was: Why weren't the NDP in support of investing in public transit, in support of investing in a subway system that would bring more economic opportunities to Thunder Bay and that plant in particular? That's the question that weighed heavily on the minds of people who are working at the Bombardier plant in Thunder Bay.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I don't know who the Premier was talking to in Thunder Bay, but what the workers really want to know is, why did the McGuinty Liberal government abandon Ontario's existing Buy Ontario policy in 2005? It's not just about Thunder Bay; it's also about the communities of Kitchener–Waterloo and Cambridge that are home to 60,000 manufacturing jobs—or at least they were. However, under the McGuinty Liberals, 6,000 of those jobs are now gone, which represents a loss

of \$300 million to the local Kitchener–Waterloo, Cambridge economy.

My question again: How many more jobs have to disappear from that community before the McGuinty government recognizes the error you made in 2005 and you reinstate a Buy Ontario policy to sustain manufacturing jobs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Let me tell you about some of the good news associated with the investments we are making in public infrastructure at this point in time. I mentioned a few times already today that we have a 10-year, \$60-billion infrastructure investment plan. There are 190,000 jobs that come from the public transit initiative alone.

But on top of that, of course, there are all kinds of repair and renovation projects going on at some 11,000 projects in our schools. I can tell you, Ontario workers are working on those construction sites. There are over 100 major hospital construction projects under way. Those are Ontario workers who are there, working on Ontario jobs. We are building 18,000 affordable housing units; again, those are jobs for Ontario workers. We're buying 469 new Ontario government vehicles. They've been ordered in February. Those will be built or manufactured in Ontario. So we're doing everything we can to ensure that as we invest in this economy, it actually translates into Ontario jobs as well.

Mr. Howard Hampton: It's interesting to listen to the Premier try to confuse the issues. The issue is about manufacturing jobs, not about a construction job somewhere, not about an operating job somewhere. It's about manufacturing jobs, the fact that Ontario has lost 200,000 good manufacturing jobs under the McGuinty government. And I'm simply asking, why won't you do what other jurisdictions have done successfully? The United States has a "buy America" policy. Even Mexico has a "buy Mexico" policy for transit equipment. Most of the European Union countries have a "buy domestic" policy. It works to sustain manufacturing jobs in urban transit in those jurisdictions.

How many more good manufacturing jobs need to disappear from Ontario before the McGuinty government recognizes the mistake you made in 2005 when you eliminated the Buy Ontario policy? How many jobs, Premier, have to disappear before you admit your mistake?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's been an unfortunate reality of North America at the beginning of the 21st century that we've seen, in fact, millions of manufacturing jobs lost from the North American economy. But I do want to say once again that we are investing heavily in infrastructure and that is translating into Ontario jobs. When it comes to public transit, we can say today that 82% of all the money that we spend on public transit is spent here in Ontario, and that 82% is translated into Ontario jobs.

I say to the leader of the NDP, I understand where he is coming from. We will be speaking shortly about a Buy Ontario policy, but I think more fairly a Buy Canada

policy. Given the limited manufacturing that is taking place actually within this province, if you take a look at what is happening south of the border, it's not a "buy in-state policy" but a "buy America" policy. We'll be speaking to the very issue that the leader of the NDP continues to raise.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the Premier tries to confuse the issues. He tries to lump in operating costs with construction costs and with manufacturing costs. This is not going to work, Premier.

For example, you attended another photo op today where you tried to say that the buses that are being purchased are overwhelmingly going to result in Ontario jobs. We called the bus company; we called the manufacturer. Do you know what they said? That 65% of the money that goes towards the manufacture of those buses will be spent outside of Ontario and outside of Canada. Why? Because most of the manufacturing is happening outside of Ontario and outside of Canada.

My question is simple. You say you want to spend \$17 billion on transit. Then the question is this: Will you bring in a Buy Ontario policy so that it results in the sustainability of more manufacturing jobs in Ontario? Or are you prepared to allow them to go to Mexico, to China or wherever?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We're looking at a base already of 82% which is being invested in the Ontario economy and being translated into Ontario jobs. Something else I want to draw to the leader of the NDP's attention: When I visited the Bombardier plant, they were rolling off the line there these double-decker cars for New Mexico and for Korea. I don't think the leader of the NDP is advocating that they should not be working in Bombardier to build rolling stock for New Mexico and for Korea, because that work is supporting good Ontario jobs.

I know that the leader of the NDP can afford to be reckless and to throw off caution when it comes to the assertions he makes, but I think we have to be careful and ensure at the end of the day that we don't compromise the Ontario economy and we don't lose Ontario jobs.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the Premier tries to confuse the issue. I've been at the Bombardier plant in Thunder Bay several times. You know and everybody else knows that if there's one cent of US federal money in a transit car contract for New York or Chicago or Los Angeles, then 60% of the finishing work on that transit car has to be done in the United States. All they end up building in Thunder Bay is the shell. Once the shell is finished, they ship it to the plant in the United States.

You should know that 98% of the subway and commuter cars ordered for German cities are manufactured in Germany; 100% of the subway and commuter cars for French cities are manufactured in France. They sustain good jobs in those jurisdictions. What does the McGuinty government have against sustaining good

manufacturing jobs in Ontario by bringing in a Buy Ontario policy?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the leader of the NDP's impatience on this issue, but I want to welcome him to Mr. Mauro's club. Mr. Mauro has been working on this issue for a long, long time now, and one of the very first things that he had to do was to allay fears on the floor when they heard that the leader of the NDP was opposed to a new subway line. They worried about their economic futures, they worried about their families and they worried about their jobs. Again, we are looking at this issue very closely and we look forward to making a very positive announcement very shortly.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, the reason that this is such an important issue is because your government, the McGuinty government, abandoned the Buy Ontario policy in 2005. Referring to Mr. Mauro, Mr. Mauro has been talking about a Buy Ontario policy, but nothing has happened for two years, now headed into three years. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of good manufacturing jobs are being lost. I simply say again, Premier: Look at jurisdictions around the world. They're spending billions of dollars on public transit, on urban transit. They have the good sense to leverage that expenditure into maintaining and sustaining manufacturing jobs in their own jurisdiction.

1450

The question is this: We've seen you make the wrong decision before. We've seen you delay on this issue. Will you support the NDP bill to bring in a Buy Ontario policy now, not next—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We will not be supporting the NDP bill. I think, carried out to its logical conclusion, it will compromise our economy and result in lost jobs. I'll find another opportunity, or the minister will find some other opportunity, to speak to that in more detail. We'll come forward with something which I think is thoughtful, reasonable, responsible and effective.

I can say, and I want Ontarians to know, that when it comes to public transit in particular, 82% of all the money devoted to that is presently being spent inside the province of Ontario and is being translated into Ontario jobs. The issue is, when it comes to rolling stock, the remaining 18%—what can we do, what should we do to squeeze as many Ontario jobs out of that as we possibly can?

As I say, we're giving that some very careful thought. We're looking at experiences in other parts of the world, and we look forward to making an announcement shortly that doesn't compromise our economy at the end of the day.

DEVELOPMENT FEES

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs: Minister, builders in Brantford would like to know where you stand with respect to extortion, the development fees that are being charged by the Haudeno-

saunee Development Institute of Six Nations. Your government has stated that the Haudenosaunee Development Institute has no authority to stop development or charge development fees, and yet we see the headline "Six Nations Can Make Developers Pay, Ontario Says" and reports that "10 developers have each paid a \$7,000 application fee to the Haudenosaunee Development Institute."

Builders wish to know, Minister: Where do you stand with respect to these HDI development fees and will your government stand behind the builders?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I want to give great credit to MPP David Levac, who brought together members of the community for the county, as well as the builders, as well as the band council and Haudenosaunee Six Nations, in the same room to talk to each other, to try and create the sense of community that, for so many years in fact, had been the pride of that community; that is, Haudenosaunee Six Nations living and working side by side.

This was an approach that tried to come up with solutions, not the divisive approach the member seems to be advocating, where you have to choose one side or another. I congratulate Dave Levac for doing that for his local community. I certainly will stand beside him and all the community—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Your government has also met with HDI and administrator Aaron Detlor. The Tekka newspaper says that you consider "working together with the institute to help consult on issues ... a positive step."

At 6 o'clock this morning, HDI protestors stopped a \$10.5-million hotel project in Brantford, demanding that builders pay upfront development fees. This is the eighth day that construction has been halted. This hotel could employ 50 people, let alone today's construction jobs.

Your government tells developers not to pay the fees and then tells them they're on their own. Minister, when will you actually take some action to end this extortion?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'd like to know what exactly the member is advocating. What is "action"? Is that telling the police what to do? This government is not going to do that. Is this action about directing police operations? No; that's not what we do. The Ipperwash commission recommended that operational decisions be made by police, and the government has a role to play not in terms of informing police but, as we disclosed, providing the funding necessary.

If what the member is asking is if we are going to work with Haudenosaunee Six Nations, the developers and the municipalities to come to a solution, that answer's yes. I put a call in to Chief Montour and tribal Council Chief McNaughton today, met with them last week, expressed to the band council and tribal council that this is an issue that is going to have to be addressed, because at the end of the day these are the communities that are going to have to—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, after the jailing of the chief and five Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation members, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Grand Chief Stan Beardy stated this: "The extreme positions of the government of Ontario in jailing First Nation leaders is an insult to the so-called new relationship with our people." He then added, "Once more, we are being moved out of the way, our valuable resources are being exploited and everybody is benefiting except us."

So here is the reality: The McGuinty government has now jailed First Nation leaders from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug and from Ardoch First Nation, who only ask that the McGuinty government fulfill its constitutional duty, as set down by the Supreme Court of Canada, to consult and accommodate First Nations.

Premier, is this the McGuinty government's new relationship with First Nations: to have the discussion between jail bars?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: This morning I spoke again with Grand Chief Stan Beardy, who indicated to me very clearly that he wanted to continue to work with the government, as he was meeting with chiefs this afternoon, to find a way in which we can ensure that First Nations who were not properly consulted by the mining industry at the beginning of exploration talks in fact are able to come to a position where they can come to an agreement and share in the revenues. That's why, with respect to KI, there was an offer to share in revenues, ensure that the exploration had supervision by First Nation-appointed archaeologists and by elders, would stay 100 metres away from the burial zones and sacred sites, would be provided with \$150,000 in order to engage in new talks on a new relationship.

I'll have more to say on that in my supplementary.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again the McGuinty government tries to hide behind something that is simply not true. The obligation to consult is not on the mining company. The obligation to consult, as set down by the Supreme Court of Canada, is on provincial governments—the McGuinty government. The trial judge said in his decision that it is completely unacceptable for the McGuinty government to say, "Oh, no, you just consult with the mining company."

This is a failure of the McGuinty government. The grand chief yesterday suspended talks with the McGuinty government. This creates more uncertainty for First Nations and more uncertainty for resource companies.

My simple question is this: When is the McGuinty government going to meet its constitutional duty to consult and accommodate First Nations, as set down by the Supreme Court of Canada, and stop blaming someone else?

Hon. Michael Bryant: The leader of the third party knows very well that the information he is providing to

this House is completely inaccurate. If there was ever a finding by the court that the government of Ontario had in fact violated the Constitution, do you really think the hearing would have ended up the way it did yesterday? No, it wouldn't.

The member seems to want to continue to divide communities when in fact this is a government that is trying to bring us together. The member knows very well that this government bent over backwards with three trips up to KI, with terms under the agreement conceded by Platinex that included guaranteed jobs, that included guaranteed revenue, that included talks around resource revenue sharing and land use planning. It was a package that was put together and presented to the community, and still remains before the community, that the community needs to make a decision about.

Mr. Howard Hampton: After the fact.

Hon. Michael Bryant: No, it was not after the fact, I say to the leader of the third party. He knows very well that it has been on the table for the last three months.

I would encourage the community—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Unfortunately, in my riding of Scarborough Southwest and across the province not all children arrive at school well fed and ready to learn due to various circumstances.

Children cannot succeed if they are hungry and are not getting the nutrition they need. They need a little help to achieve their full potential.

1500

I was pleased to have the Premier in my riding at Cliffside Public School on Monday morning and to learn that the government has decided to make a new investment in the student nutrition program to ensure that more kids are ready to learn and succeed in the classroom. Could the minister please outline the new investment and how it will help Ontarians, such as constituents in my riding, achieve their full potential?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member from Scarborough Southwest for his compassion and for his question.

We know that to have a strong economy we must invest in our greatest resource, and that's our people. We also know that it's critically important that we support our children so they have the best possible start in life and the greatest opportunity to achieve their full potential. That is why the Premier announced yesterday, at Cliffside school in Scarborough Southwest, a \$32-million investment that doubles the funding for the student nutrition program. This program already provides healthy meals and snacks to almost 400,000 children across the province, with over 80,000 children in Toronto, in 314 schools. This new investment will ensure that we provide further support to these schools and expand the program

to make sure that more children are ready to learn, that they're alert and ready to achieve their full potential.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: As a supplementary question, I would like to ask the minister about the role of the government in making sure that the hundreds of constituents in Scarborough Southwest who live in social housing units are also included in our plans to include all Ontarians in moving forward. I wonder if the minister could provide any further information regarding that role, especially with housing, as it is so closely attached to the poverty issue itself, if the minister could perhaps elaborate on that.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: I'm pleased that when the Premier made the announcement about affordable housing, the \$100 million province-wide will see \$36 million go to the city of Toronto for repair of social housing units.

We hear the braying from across the way in the NDP. Let me read you what the NDP were promising in Save Our Structures: "The NDP would allocate \$30 million a year to begin to clear up...." Under the leadership of this Premier, we've delivered \$36 million to the city of Toronto.

Let me quote Sharad Kerur, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association executive director, when he said, "While no one government can solve decades of issues affecting the current state and need for more affordable housing, this government is leading the way in finding solutions to improve affordable housing in Ontario. Today's announcement will make a real difference and demonstrates that the government has been listening"—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question, the member from Simcoe North.

POLICE OFFICERS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, you are aware that two very important events have taken place in the federal Parliament recently that support public safety in our country. To begin with, Bill C-2, the tackling violent crime bill, was finally passed through the Liberal-dominated Senate. Secondly, the federal government created the new 2,500 front-line police officers program that will see \$156 million allocated to our province over the next five years, that will assist police services in hiring 1,000 new police officers, including 500 non-municipal contract officers to the OPP. Minister, are you prepared to participate in the federal front-line police officer program?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I'm very, very happy to stand and put Ontario's position forward. We are not satisfied with the commitment the federal government has made with regard to policing, not only in Ontario, but across Canada. Their plan fails to fund these police officers in perpetuity. I simply ask Minister Day to use the McGuinty model, to use the model that our government used when we funded 1,000 officers for the life of the officers.

That translates to \$68 million a year. The federal government does not want to make that commitment, and I look forward to telling the members of the House what the reaction of the policing partners in Ontario is to that failed plan.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Minister, the federal police program is a kick-start program, and you know full well that it will assist police services in hiring front-line officers across our country. I understand that the program is the first of its kind in Canada and it will be subject to review later on.

Minister, I wanted to point out that you never funded 1,000 police officers; you funded 35% of them—\$35,000 on a \$100,000 officer. I am informed that you have to publicly announce whether or not you will participate in this program by March 31 of this year. Are you prepared to stand in this House today and announce that Ontario will participate in the federal government program that will see \$156 million provided to the province of Ontario over the next five years for public safety and community safety? Yes or no?

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: Thank you, Speaker, for allowing me to respond. Let me start off the response by telling the member across the way what the Canadian Police Association said in their press release of March 6, 2008:

"'Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day has fumbled the ball and failed to deliver on a key government commitment,' said CPA president Tony Cannavino. 'We have been waiting two years for this minister to deliver on the Prime Minister's promise, and we are disappointed by the short-sighted and inadequate response.'"

We will continue to lobby the federal government to do their part to ensure that we put at least 1,000 police officers on the streets of Ontario, that they fund this program properly and that they fund it for the life of the program, because I know that's what our policing partners want us to do.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. The Association of Ontario Health Centres—many of their members are here today—is asking the government to commit to completing a province-wide network of community health centres and aboriginal health access centres. They are asking the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to establish no fewer than 20 new community health centres and AHACs per year over the next four years.

Will the minister agree today to support the AOHC request so that all Ontarians can have access to primary health care services?

Hon. George Smitherman: I'd like to, as others have, welcome the Association of Ontario Health Centres to the Legislature. I'm enormously proud to have been in the privileged position, as Minister of Health in the McGuinty government, to be doubling the number of

community health centres in the province of Ontario after eight and a half years when they not only received no additional base funding under the Conservatives, but, in fact, there were no community health centres added.

I can tell the honourable member and those in the gallery that our commitment with respect to community health centres is to build out those 28 which are in various stages of emergence in the province of Ontario, which will bring us to 103, which is a doubling of the number that we had. To date, over four years, we have invested a 71% increase, and by the time we've concluded, with those 28 coming to life, the increase over six or seven years will be something like 130% or 140% in additional funding. That stands as a very firm commitment to the community health centre model, and I look forward to offering more information by way of supplementary.

M^{me} France G linas: As Minister Smitherman has mentioned, there are new CHCs and AHACs presently on their way. They are scheduled to open in 2009.

Experience shows us that it takes about two years from a funding announcement until the doors open on a new CHC. Ontarians need a commitment from the minister today. So I ask again: Will the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care agree today to support a province-wide network of CHCs and AHACs so that all Ontarians have access to primary health care services?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do want to say that I'm proud to have been part of a government that has added primary care for more than 500,000 people through our first four years in office. In our campaign platform, which we are seeking to adhere to very, very substantially, I can confirm that our commitment is to add 50 additional family health teams, which find their core values very similar to community health centres.

1510

Further, building on the model in the member's very own home community of Sudbury, it's our plan to add 25 nurse-practitioner-led clinics. These, combined with the 28 further CHCs to come to life, will provide Ontarians with enhanced access to family health care and will create that comprehensive network that the honourable member and the association are asking for.

So I can confirm that it is our government's plan to create the most comprehensive model of comprehensive family health care across the breadth of Ontario.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Honourable George Smitherman. I believe that one of the most effective ways to provide meaningful health care to improve the lives of individuals is through a community-focused model. The staff at Rexdale Community Health Centre in my own riding of Etobicoke North, for example, and community health centres across Ontario do just that every day. By taking a more holistic approach to health through addressing the social determinants of health, including

shelter, education, economic and employment security, safety of food and environment, we can achieve a healthy and successful Ontario. Considering the government's approach to integrated and comprehensive health care for all, I would ask the Minister of Health: What have we done recently to support and improve these innovative approaches to health care for Ontarians?

Hon. George Smitherman: It does seem very appropriate that on a day when the community health centres are here, members from all parties have expressed their commitment. But the members of the opposition party had eight and a half years in government and they demonstrated very little commitment to community health centres during that period. On the other hand, we're in the midst of doubling the number of community health centres. Our commitment remains on that basis. It is most certainly the comprehensive nature of the care, the interdisciplinary approach, which is also very preferable to our health care workers.

I want to acknowledge that in the Etobicoke North community of the honourable member, there's a very substantial investment going on of expanding community health centres into some communities that really need the help. One added feature of the community health centres that is sometimes passed over is their social development capacity, their community development capacity. Those community health centres also have the opportunity to build on the Pathways to Education initiative, which isn't just about health care but about improving the nature of the community and enhancing opportunities for progress for many Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Interjections: He gets a supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary, the member from Etobicoke North.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I'm sure my constituents in the riding of Etobicoke North would like to know from the minister how the McGuinty government will continue to address barriers to primary health care in my riding of Etobicoke North. For example, in July 2006 our government awarded the Rexdale Community Health Centre two satellites, one in the James Town area and one in the Kipling-Dixon area, as part of the overall community health centre expansion plan. Could the minister tell this House what the impact is and what your vision is of such satellites across Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: It was interesting to see the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock wanting to stand up and ask a question, because for eight and a half years no one in that party wanted to stand up for CHCs, and as they were developing their platform no one wanted to stand up for health care because they were proposing a further \$3-billion cut, because the Tories like to do things the same.

In the Etobicoke North community, two new satellites are coming to life. These will help communities like the Somali community at Kipling and Dixon and the South Asian community—very prominent in that part of On-

tario. We think it's important to continue to build these capacities in communities.

With respect to the honourable member, who is a medical doctor, I want to applaud him for the efforts he has been involved in as a doctor from the South Asian communities, working with those communities, especially to highlight the particular risks of cardiovascular disease, which are far more prevalent among South Asians. Community health centres are a very good example of how we can address very particular community challenges on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis.

RAIL SERVICE

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The recent federal budget announced funding for commuter rail service between Peterborough and downtown Toronto, which includes stops in rural and urban communities along the way. Minister, do you support a commuter rail line running from Peterborough to Toronto?

Interjections

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Order.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Would you like me to ask it again?

To the Minister of Transportation: Do you support a commuter rail service running from Peterborough to Toronto?

Hon. James J. Bradley: It was an interesting proposition. When people made telephone calls to officials to find out what it was all about, there didn't appear to be any answers forthcoming. We heard about it, subsequent to the budget. I've spoken to our good friend over here—can I use his name?—Jim Flaherty. I spoke to him. I was with him this morning at an event, and we were chatting about many things. But we haven't had any detail at all as to how this would work or what the proposal was. So we await detail. When we receive the detail—

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: You're getting prompted by Mr. O'Toole. Mr. O'Toole is giving her the answer now.

When we get the kind of detail that is needed, we will be able to evaluate the project as it should be evaluated—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Mr. Minister, this has been talked about in the Peterborough area for 20 years that I can remember. I'm sure the member from Peterborough has a lot of information, but if you need more, we can send it over to you. If you didn't hear the first part of my first question, it was announced in the federal budget.

We've heard transportation announcements for urban Ontario. Are you saying there's no plan for transportation for people in rural Ontario—just urban Ontario? You know the growth that has occurred in the Peterborough, Kawarthas and Durham regions. This is good for the people and for the communities; it's good for the environment; it's good for the economy, the infrastructure, the municipalities and the people it affects.

Minister, we'll get you as much information as you need. The member from Peterborough is already on

record as supporting the train service; I certainly support the train service; we're waiting for you. Do you support the commuter rail service from Peterborough to Toronto?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think the member is correct in saying that information has to be provided. As I say, when officials called officials, nobody seemed to know what it was all about. There seemed to be some free-lancing.

Interjections: No, no.

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's unfair of me.

I can understand why my good friend and fellow Irish-background person, Jim Flaherty, would want it to go through the north end of his riding. I understand that very much. I have a good deal of respect for federal and provincial members of the House.

What I have to tell you is that when I was at the ROMA convention—the Rural Ontario Municipal Association—along with Good Roads, I heard many pleas from people in the rural areas. They would have suggested that their pleas were more important than the initiative that was discussed. I'll have to check with all of your members who are from rural areas to see if they think it's a priority.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question for the Premier. Does the Premier believe that elementary schools play a significant role in sustaining a vibrant community?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes. It is self-evident by our actions in the last four years that we believe education is a cornerstone of our democracy, a cornerstone of our communities. We have put more than \$4 billion into education: nearly 9,000 new teachers and upwards of 5,000 support workers. We have provided smaller class sizes for our youngest students. Our commitment in our platform to extend the learning day for four- and five-year-olds, to increase homework help and to continue to provide resources for grades 4 to 8 students demonstrates that we are committed to our publicly funded education system in our rural communities, in our urban communities, across the province.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The question is back to the Premier. In Hamilton, 17 Catholic schools and dozens of public schools are on the chopping block as we speak. The bottom line is that these schools are in some of our most vulnerable downtown neighbourhoods. The McGuinty government promised not to close any more schools a couple of years ago. In fact, they have policies that speak about encouraging growth in our older urban centres; that's their policy.

1520

Will the Premier explain why his government is sitting on the sidelines when closing schools goes against so many purported sustainability goals of his government? Will he step in and stop these school closures immediately?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It would in fact be irresponsible for any government to tie the hands of local school boards to make decisions for their communities. We believe in local school boards. We believe in the efficacy of school boards.

The issue confronting 60 of 72 boards in this province is declining enrolment. The fact is that our province is showing a demographic shift, and the reality is that we have put policy guidelines in place in order to allow boards to make the decisions that make the most sense for their communities.

I'm sorry that the member opposite has no faith in the trustees and the school boards in her community. The reality is that we have to work with our school boards. They understand what's going on in their communities and we need to continue to put resources in place—\$4 billion over the last four years. In the face of declining enrolment, we have continued to increase funding and we will continue to do that.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Khalil Ramal: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Recent statistics show that more than a quarter of a million people in this province earn the minimum wage or less. That's about 5% of our population, and of that 5%, almost 60% are women. The minimum wage earners work mostly in the accommodation, food service and retail trade sectors. Minister, can you tell us please and explain to us what you are doing to support those people?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member from London–Fanshawe—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the NDP caucus to come to order, please.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I would like to thank the member from London–Fanshawe for that question and for his advocacy on behalf of Ontario workers, not only over the last number of months but over the last number of years. I thank him for that. He's worked very, very hard.

I'm proud of what this government is doing and has done to make a difference in the lives of Ontario's lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers. As members in the House may know, on March 31 our minimum wage will indeed be going up again another 75 cents. It will be going up from \$8 to \$8.75. This government, since we've taken office, has taken the minimum wage in this country from among the lowest in Canada to the highest, as of March 31. That's something we're very proud of, something that we believe will help vulnerable workers right across this province.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Minister, for your work on behalf of all the people in the province of Ontario. I know that people in my riding of London–Fanshawe are going to like this news because it's going to make a positive result in their lives. But we have some kind of concern from business people. They told us they are not able to absorb this increase. Can you tell us how you can deal with this issue, Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: As I said earlier, we're proud that the McGuinty government has indeed moved Ontario from among the lowest minimum wages in the country to right up to the very top. At the same time, key to doing this has been the fact that we've done it in a balanced, gradual yet decisive way, ensuring that small businesses have ample notice in time to adjust to these additional cost pressures.

That stands in stark contrast to the approach that the NDP want to take. They talk about wanting to protect jobs in this province, yet they advocate a policy that would hurt the very people that we're trying to help. The balanced approach that we're taking is the right approach for the province, it's the right approach for vulnerable workers across this province, and it's the right approach for our economy.

HOME HEALTH CARE SUPPLIES

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question is to the Minister of Labour. On March 3, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board changed their purchasing policy so that many independent health care suppliers are effectively shut out from supplying WSIB clients with medically necessary home health care products such as wheelchairs and ostomy supplies. All these purchases now need to be made at one of only three approved preferred suppliers. This policy shift severely reduces accessibility to the products for those that need them, particularly in rural and northern Ontario. It is also negatively impacting on small business in rural Ontario like Professional Mobility and Medical Supplies in Simcoe, Ontario. What are this government and this minister going to do to make sure that people who need medically necessary products and supplies and live in rural Ontario can get them in a timely and effective manner?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member for the question. I also thank the member from Niagara Falls for bringing this question up at an earlier date. It has given me an opportunity to sit down with the chair of the WSIB and discuss this particular issue. The WSIB has informed me that they've developed this purchasing policy that provides better customer service for injured workers and at the same time saves money for the system as a whole, which we know is paid for by employers across this province. The WSIB, which is an arm's-length organization of this government, has developed this policy to ensure that workers can access the equipment that they need in the easiest way possible. With this policy, all they need do is now pick up the phone, dial a number and within 24 hours they will have their supplies and equipment delivered. It's a great policy for the workers of this province and—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Robert Bailey: This issue is impacting people all over rural Ontario. To echo the words of the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, if you live in Tobermory right now and are on WSIB and incontinence or ostomy supplies, you have to drive to Barrie to get them—that's

a drive of almost two hours. This policy shift by the WSIB effectively means those products are no longer accessible to people in rural Ontario. Why have you allowed the WSIB to cut people in rural Ontario off from getting these medically important products and supplies?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member opposite is painfully misinformed when it comes to this policy. What this policy does is give injured workers the opportunity to be able to pick up the phone and order equipment and supplies—supplies that they would normally have to get off the shelf. We are not talking about things that need to be fitted. We're talking about supplies that injured workers need. And they need not reach into their pocket like they would've had to under the old policy and pay up front. The WSIB is directly billed through the companies for these particular items. The items will be delivered within 24 hours. It's a better policy for the worker, it's a better policy for the WSIB and those that pay the freight for the WSIB, the employers, because it will save money in the long run. It's a similar policy that veteran affairs has in Canada and similar to the policy used by other workers' compensation boards across the country.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to present this petition presented to me by Mrs. Moira Davidson of Richmond Hill, who collected 817 signatures, at St. Mary Immaculate Church. It reads as follows:

"Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

"Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord's Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord's Prayer as part of its daily proceedings."

I'm pleased to affix my signature in support of this petition.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm pleased to present this petition from the people from Kingston, and I read:

"Whereas the Ontario government has continued the practice of competitive bidding for home care services; and

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care

delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

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"Whereas competitive bidding for home care services has decreased both the continuity and quality of care available to home care clients; and

"Whereas home care workers do not enjoy the same employment rights, such as successor rights, as all other Ontario workers have, which deprives them of termination rights, seniority rights and the right to move with their work when their employer agency loses a contract...."

So they petition the Ontario government to:

"(1) to immediately stop the competitive bidding for home care services so home care clients can receive the continuity and quality of care they deserve; and

"(2) to extend successor rights under the Labour Relations Act to home care workers to ensure the home care sector is able to retain a workforce that is responsive to clients' needs."

I support this petition and I affix my signature to it.

DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I present to you today about 400 signatures which were presented to me during the rally held at Queen's Park on January 16.

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the land of the David Dunlap Observatory in Richmond Hill is of historical and heritage significance;

"Whereas the land was donated in trust by the Dunlap family to the University of Toronto in 1935, and the pre-Confederation farmhouse is still standing;

"Whereas the observatory, featuring the largest optical telescope in Canada, has been the site of great scientific discoveries; it has been a place of learning not only for the students of the University of Toronto but for the general public as well;

"Whereas the observatory has been recently declared by the University of Toronto as 'surplus' to its academic needs and subject to sale for development; and

"Whereas the observatory sits in an incredibly unique and beautiful 180 acres of green space, the largest such space in the town of Richmond Hill, with trees, birds, animals, plants, insects and butterflies in the middle of a rapidly urbanized area;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect such a property of historical, scientific and natural significance from being used as commercial development."

I signed the petition.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition that has been signed—I would say "by almost all the people in my riding," but it's not quite that many—by a great many

people in my riding. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I affix my signature as I agree with the petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kuldip Kular: This petition is to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative, intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

"That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to 'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I agree with the petitioners, and I put my signature on the petition as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We've got a lot of petitions, and we only have eight minutes left. You don't have to read the whole petition. I recognize the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition from the Dundalk Wesleyan Church, and I'll be quick.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature....

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Mr. Kim Craitor: I'm pleased to read this petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas over the past 25 years, obesity rates have more than tripled for Canadian children between the ages of 12 and 17; and

"Whereas in Ontario, less than half of students beyond Grade 9 take gym classes, a small fraction are involved in school sports programs, and adolescents who are inactive at school are unlikely to be physically active elsewhere;...

"Therefore we, the undersigned concerned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Education add a second compulsory physical education credit for secondary schools."

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the thousands of citizens in my riding who have signed this petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current Liberal government is proposing to eliminate the Lord's Prayer from its place at the beginning of daily proceedings in the Legislature; and

"Whereas the recitation of the Lord's Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century; and

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message of forgiveness and the avoidance of evil is universal to the human condition: It is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

"Whereas recognizing the diversity of the people of Ontario should be an inclusive process, not one which excludes traditions such as the Lord's Prayer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature."

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to read this petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that was sent to me by high school student Brianne Westland, who lives in Meadowvale. It reads as follows:

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital

project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I’m pleased to support this petition, to affix my signature to it and to ask page Fatima to carry it.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty has called on the Ontario Legislature to consider removing the Lord’s Prayer from its daily proceedings; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer has been an integral part of our parliamentary heritage that was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer is today a significant part of the religious heritage of millions of Ontarians of culturally diverse backgrounds;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to continue its long-standing practice of using the Lord’s Prayer as part of its daily proceedings.”

I agree with that petition and I’ve signed it.

PUBLIC WASHROOMS

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It was prepared by Ed Green, who is a constituent of mine and who has been advocating hard for this cause, so I’m happy to present it on his behalf.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Toronto and greater Toronto area has the highest rate of Crohn’s and ulcerative colitis in Canada;

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“Whereas this disease requires patients’ fast access to public washrooms;

“Whereas there is a lack of public washrooms on the current TTC subway system and lack of access for these patients;

“Whereas the Ontario building code only requires the TTC to build public washrooms at the end-of-line stations;

“Whereas the York subway line is about to be built with provincial dollars;

“We, the undersigned, therefore request the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to amend the Ontario building code to provide public washrooms at every station on the York subway line.”

I agree with this petition, and I affix my signature to it, and I give it to page Alexander here with me today.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas over 50,000 people visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year; and

“Whereas over 20,000 students from across Ontario visit the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre each year, receiving curriculum-based environmental education not available in schools; and

“Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre receives no stable funding from any level of government;

“We, the undersigned, petition the province of Ontario to establish a reasonable and stable long-term funding formula so that the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre can continue to operate and exist into the future.”

I’m pleased to sign my name to this petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Mike Colle: “Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

“Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

“Whereas ‘day surgery’ procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to ‘day surgery’ procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed.”

I'll attach my name to this petition in support of the people of western Mississauga.

GYPSY MOTHS

Mr. Tim Hudak: I have a condensed version of my gypsy moth petition that summarizes:

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

"That Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources immediately fund a gypsy moth spraying program to assist landowners and municipalities attempting to control further gypsy moth infestation."

And under the signatures of Carol Oliver and Chris Wilson of Glanbrook, I affix my signature in support.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 17, 2008, on the amendment to the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I'm splitting my time with my colleague the member for Mississauga South.

It's a privilege and honour to stand up and speak in support of the speech from the throne, which was announced on November 29, 2007. This document is important because it outlines the vision of the government, and it's important to talk about the vision in these circumstances we're facing today. As you know, in North America, in Canada and the United States, we are facing some kind of switch and shift in our economic strategy and our structure of business, companies, and factories. I believe that the economy is shifting toward a more technological economy and more high-tech, instead of a traditional economy. That's why I think this throne speech spoke eloquently and in detail about our vision for the next four years and how our government is going to tackle these issues, because they are very important.

We cannot ignore the present life anymore and just pretend we are doing okay. That's why we have to invest in our future. To invest in our future, we have to invest in our first bases, which are our kids, our children, our students. It's very important to start from the beginning, so that's why our government acknowledges that the future of the province cannot be achieved without investment in our youth, in our children and in our skilled people for the future. That's why in this document there is about \$3.8 billion to be invested in the education system to equip our students and children with the tools they need in order to be able to compete in the future.

As you know, our population is not so huge and so big—it's almost 13 million people. So in order to compete in the global economy, with so many huge

populations in countries like China and India, we have to equip our people with the tools, science and knowledge to be able to maintain the jobs we have in the province of Ontario, to be able to create new jobs. We'll be able to take those jobs in the global market and earn some money and also maintain our economic status.

That's why our Premier and our government took that direction to invest in the schooling system and to invest in colleges and universities, because as you know, this is the time for innovation and research. If we don't compete on the research and innovation level, we will be left behind. Any community, country, province or population that doesn't invest in research and innovation will be left behind in this day and age. That's why we pay a lot of attention to these areas, because we believe strongly that we are able to compete and we're able to achieve our goal and our vision, which will create an economy and create a community able to compete in a global market, with the confidence and ability to score the highest score we can achieve in our lifetime.

We talk about education and highly skilled people. That's why I think we are able to attract many companies to open in the province of Ontario, like Toyota in Woodstock. Two weeks ago, a huge company came from British Columbia. They're called The Original Cakerie and they came to London, Ontario, to open. This company is going to hire more than 400 people. I think that's a good achievement. Also, another company came, from Korea; they're called Hanwha. They're going to invest more than \$171 million in our area, in London.

Why are all those companies coming to Ontario? Not because we're good-looking people—that's not enough for them—but because they believe they can make money. They believe we have the skilled people to provide to their company and factories, and we have the economy. We have the government that can support them and create a safe environment for them. Also, we have the colleges and universities, good health care and a good education system. That's why people are coming to the province of Ontario. This is also a good indication, a vote of confidence in our government and a vote of confidence in our economy.

Investment in education systems alone cannot do it. We also have to recognize, to support and invest in the vulnerable people who live among us, because we cannot walk alone. We have to maximize our capacity. We have to engage all the people among us, whether they're disabled, whether they're people who came just yesterday from different countries to be a Canadian, or whether they're people who for some reason are on the poverty line. So our duty as a government and as a society is to support every person who decides to be an Ontarian to get their maximum capacity, to utilize his or her capacity in order to maintain the beautiful life we're living in the province of Ontario.

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That's why we invested in a poverty initiative. We appointed Minister Deb Matthews to lead a task force, alongside many different ministers and many different members of this House, in order to do research and

studies to see the way and the mechanism that we could achieve our goal, which is to reduce poverty in the province of Ontario.

Yesterday was a good initiative on this track. We invested more than \$100 million in social housing across the province of Ontario. We doubled the support for poor kids who do not have food in their home and go to school on an empty stomach. I believe, we believe and everybody across the whole globe believes they cannot study and they cannot learn when they are hungry. That's why we doubled that investment by \$135 million for an extra three years. I think this is a good initiative toward correcting our track record in the province of Ontario.

We look at giving the poor people among us support, a lift, because we believe strongly that if all of us are working, whether it's people who came yesterday or people who have been living here for years, poor or rich people, people with no education or people with higher education—when we work collectively as a community, we are able to achieve our goal, to achieve our vision.

That's why I am speaking strongly in support of this throne speech, because this throne speech outlines our vision. We had a track record. We governed for four years before, and we proved to the people of Ontario that we were able to deliver. When we promised, we delivered. The people saw our innovations in the education system, our innovations in health care and our innovations in infrastructure. It's great to say things, but it's very important to act. This government is not just saying; it's also acting.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak. I'm going to leave it to my colleague to continue.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I am honoured to address the Legislature and to deliver my maiden speech.

I am proud to be the 12th elected member of provincial Parliament to represent the good people of Mississauga South. Our community has a rich history. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Mississauga First Nations, who settled in the Credit River area 100 years ago. In 1805, at a meeting in Port Credit, the crown purchased lands along Lake Ontario from the Mississagas, which became known as the Toronto townships. The town of Mississauga was formed by provincial decree in 1968. As a student at Sherway public school, I remember that historic ceremony, which included descendants of the First Peoples. Mississauga South's vibrant waterfront neighbourhood is now cherished for its heritage homes and historical sites, including the original gateway to Toronto, known as the Middle Road bridge, which still stands over Etobicoke Creek today.

Since 1867, 11 members have preceded me in this assembly, such as, most recently, Tim Peterson. As well, the Honourable Margaret Marland served Mississauga South proudly for 18 years, and the Honourable T.L. Kennedy lived in south Mississauga and represented Peel region for 38 years. Their contributions are greatly appreciated.

Mississauga South is my home. It's where my wife, Zenny, and I raise our family. It's where I grew up and

attended local schools. More than 700,000 of us—people from all parts of the world and from every faith—now call Mississauga home, and that number is growing. We are a shining example of the diversity that makes our province, and indeed our country, strong and unique. We are also a community of hope.

My family's story reflects this diversity and hope. In 1953, my father arrived at pier 21 from Portugal. He fled a fascist regime in postwar Europe, because he wanted his family to be free. He came here seeking a better life, and never looked back. He taught my brother and me to be proud of our Portuguese heritage and to stand tall for Canada. I am fortunate that my parents chose Ontario. I am grateful that Ontario accepted them.

My father's deep respect for democracy and his commitment to the community formed the basis of my political development. His love for our province and our country is exemplified by his expression, "There is room for everyone."

That statement formed my belief in a government that nurtures values of hope, prosperity and fairness. We want to continue to be a welcoming society. We want to continue to help those who are less able while building upon our strong economic foundation. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to now acknowledge my father, Mr. Antonio Sousa.

I support the speech from the throne. It is based on the premise of a balanced fiscal approach to build a stronger Ontario. I share this vision. My constituents know that my vision also includes a commitment to five priorities: protecting the environment, addressing gridlock, growing our economy, investing in publicly funded education and safeguarding universal health care.

With more homes and businesses coming to our community, there will be an even greater demand for peak electricity, but we must continue to balance the need for power generation with environmental responsibility that includes conservation and increasing renewable resources. That is why I fully support the efforts of our local ratepayers and community associations in calling for full environmental assessments. But we must go further. Coming from a community that celebrated the demolition of the Lakeview coal plant, I'm especially pleased with this government's continued commitment to close all of the province's coal plants by 2014.

While more power will be needed in Mississauga in the years to come, I believe that our lakefronts and riverbeds must be protected. Our waterfront is a jewel of Mississauga South. It is a source of enjoyment and pride, it is where many businesses thrive and it attracts tourism. Many community leaders have presented a bold vision for the future of Mississauga's lakefront and they have now secured support from the community, this member and city council. Let's not miss this opportunity. We must work to revitalize the villages along the water's edge. The environmental and economic benefits will be enjoyed by everyone in the GTA.

Our government is also committed to improving air quality. The Clarkson airshed study indicates higher levels of ambient air pollution in my community. As part of our government's new infrastructure plan, a light rail

system will be built along two major corridors in the south, and an additional GO line along the Lakeshore will result in quicker and better service. This will help reduce pollution as well as ease gridlock. It will also increase economic prosperity. I am certain that by working together, we can leave a legacy of clean air, green spaces and a vibrant waterfront for our children and future generations. We're fortunate to already have a protected wetland in Mississauga South known as the Rattray marsh, but we have an opportunity to do even more.

Just as acting today to protect the environment is an investment in our future, so too is our investment in education. Coming from a family of teachers, I am often reminded of the challenges facing our education system. While there remains more to do, I commend what our government has done and continues to do to enable more teachers and students to succeed.

I'm a father of three amazing children and, like any parent, I want the best for them. They remain at the heart of my commitment to maintaining and improving our education system in Ontario. It is for my eldest daughter, Cristine, a first-year student at the University of Ottawa, that we work towards ensuring better and more affordable post-secondary education. It is for my son, Justin, that we seek to facilitate mentoring programs and promote greater graduation rates in high schools. It is for my little girl, Jessica, in elementary school, that we strive to improve early education so that all children have a chance to succeed. I proudly speak of my children, and I absolutely speak in favour of this government's belief that every child in Ontario deserves an opportunity to realize their maximum potential.

I wish to recognize my big brother, Julio Sousa, principal of St. Michael Catholic School. He believes that we need to continue making this a priority.

Along with schools, hospitals are among the most important institutions in any community. We are fortunate to have Trillium Health Centre and Credit Valley Hospital.

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We're also investing to better serve and provide for our seniors. Unfortunately, not all of us are as resilient as our youthful mayor, Her Worship Hazel McCallion. At 87 years young, she is Ontario's longest-standing public servant.

I am proud to represent Mississauga South and I am grateful to those who have entrusted me with this responsibility. To truly be successful, one needs the support of others. In that regard, I have been touched by the dedicated efforts of so many, most especially my family. Their energy and encouragement have made this journey one of the most enjoyable experiences in my life. Please join me in recognizing my wife, Zenaida, and my two youngest children, Justin and Jessica. I appreciate their support and understanding, especially when I'm too often away from home.

Mr. Speaker, I have told my constituents, through you, how fortunate I feel to be here. Through you, I now say to them: I will do my very best.

I applaud this government for its vision for Ontario, one that is fiscally responsible, socially and environmentally conscious. I am proud of this throne speech and I will vote to support it.

I conclude with my father's phrase: "There is room for everyone." This also means that there's room for everyone's ideas, ideas that may be very different than mine. I look forward to hearing from all members, on both sides of the aisle, as we strive to do the best we can for the people of Ontario.

Finally, I extend my best wishes to my fellow MPPs, the class of 2007. I look forward to working with all my colleagues to get the job done for all of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: First of all, my congratulations to the member for Mississauga South on his maiden speech.

I would like to add some comments to the speech from the member for London-Fanshawe, who was talking a fair amount about the economy in his speech. I would suggest that the McGuinty government's economic policy of picking winners and losers with their policy of subsidization is not working. You just need to look at comments like those from Don Drummond, the chief economist of TD, who points out, "It's not so far"—Ontario—"from being an equalization province." That's what's happening in this province. We have the slowest private sector job growth in Canada. We have the least competitive tax structure in Canada. And this government keeps creating more and more red tape.

As a small business critic, this is a letter I recently got from a constituent talking about a small shop. I'd like to quote a bit from it as an example of the new red tape being created by this government. I'll just summarize it: "Again, another of our wonderful governmental agencies has managed to complicate manners for the little guy.

"I am presently trying to complete our registration for 2008 (we have been registered for 10-plus years now) and am being asked what chemical properties Safety Clean leaves for us to clean out pump-bearing housings in our shop." As I understand, he's using this product and now has to register as a waste generator. It's a new rule, and even the ministry is recognizing that it's taking too long and has postponed it.

I can't go into all of the details in the 15 seconds I have left. This is the kind of red tape that's really crippling all business in Ontario, particularly small business. We need to reduce red tape, have more competitive corporate taxes, eliminate the capital tax and develop a skilled labour policy in this province.

Mr. Michael Prue: It's an honour to stand and give a couple of minutes' talk about my fellow colleagues from the Liberal Party and what they had to say today.

First of all, to the member for Mississauga South: It was a very nice little inaugural speech. I want to use the word "inaugural" though, and I suggest it's probably more appropriate than the word that was used. But notwithstanding that, the speech touched on all the high points, and I want to commend him and his family for the

support you have given him. This is often a very difficult job. It's a job that takes you away from your family. It's a job that can be quite combative here on occasion. I look forward to hearing more substantial speeches from you in the future because I think in what you had to say today you certainly did try to capture the essence of how we need to work here together.

To my colleague from London–Fanshawe: I listened intently to what you had to say. I only wish that your optimism were well founded in fact. Unfortunately, although there are some good things happening in London, the city you represent is going through very tough times. London has the dubious distinction on this date of being the municipality in Ontario with the fifth-worst unemployment record, a record that continues to go up. Factories continue to leave and, notwithstanding that some new ones have come in, there are far more manufacturers leaving and far more manufacturing jobs leaving than are currently coming in.

You also had good words to say about poverty initiatives—would that were so. We are waiting for the budget next week. But the expectations, I think, will be much higher than the delivery on that date.

Last but not least, you talked about the \$100 million for social housing. It pales in comparison to what is actually needed. The city of Toronto alone estimates they need \$300 million this year to effect the necessary repairs. When you're only giving—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I am most pleased as well to congratulate my two fellow caucus members, the member for London–Fanshawe and my new colleague the member for Mississauga South.

I think we cannot forget that these were two of the most closely watched races in October 2007. It stands in testament to the abilities of the member for London–Fanshawe that he was re-elected as part of the McGuinty team. Clearly, the people in that area were looking at the record of our government's first four years. They felt that our platform, as reflected in this throne speech, was one that they wanted to support wholeheartedly—and an even more interesting situation in Mississauga South, where again it was the McGuinty record that clearly resulted in the reaffirmation of a Liberal member of provincial Parliament elected to represent that riding.

I am very much in support of this throne speech, and both my colleagues have pointed out what a well-balanced, fiscally responsible plan this is. We are also obviously here to listen to our two opposition parties, as the wise owl so clearly asks us to do.

What have I heard over the debate on this particular throne speech from the opposition parties? From the third party I have heard that they value social services, essential public services. They also acknowledge that economic times are tough. However, how do you reconcile the type of reckless spending that they are promoting with these tough economic times?

I support my colleagues and the throne speech.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to rise and congratulate the member for Mississauga South on his recent election and entree into the Ontario Legislature, and welcome here today his family and friends, who should be very proud of his accomplishment, no doubt, because we all know that the family takes up an increased burden with the demands of the legislative schedule when we're here in Toronto or at events in our own ridings. So they should be congratulated for their support as well on the member's new endeavour here in the Ontario Legislature.

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I enjoyed spending time with the member on the recent finance committee hearings. As he knows—he mentioned it today in his member's statement—the official opposition, including the member for Wellington–Halton Hills and the member for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant and I, penned a dissenting report to point out concerns that we have about the provincial economy and the harmful economic policies of the Dalton McGuinty government that have chased hundreds of thousands of jobs from Ontario and scared off a lot of potential investment. My view on this is considerably different from that of the member from London–Fanshawe, who spoke a bit earlier. Let me give you a couple of examples; I'll get into it more later on.

Since Dalton McGuinty came to office, only 112,000 private sector jobs have been created. Over four years, the net creation of private sector jobs is barely over 100,000. Across the eight years of PC government, the predecessor government to Dalton McGuinty, private sector jobs expanded by an average of 109,000 per year—per year, Mr. Speaker. So the grand total of Dalton McGuinty, after four or five years in office, is 112,000. The previous accumulation by the PC government was over 109,000 per year—over a million net new jobs created in the province of Ontario. Certainly we hope we will see in the upcoming budget from the finance minister a change in direction to actually make Ontario a friendly jurisdiction for business investment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the government members has two minutes to reply. I return to the member from Mississauga South.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you very much to the members from London–Fanshawe, Parry Sound–Muskoka, Beaches–East York, Oak Ridges–Markham and Niagara West–Glanbrook for their comments.

It is indeed a privilege for me to stand here before you as a colleague, with many of you who have been here longer than I, and I appreciate the insight and the wealth of knowledge that you bring. I also look forward to working closely with all of you to try to do what's best—what I believe is best—for all Ontarians. I know that most of us share those same concerns. Ideologies may be different, but in the end, people's intentions are good. I will work hard to do just that, so we can represent well the people of Ontario and, especially for me, my constituents of Mississauga South.

There are some differences, and we have spoken about them often in this House. But my support for the throne

speech, as well as our positioning for what we believe will be the best way to establish economic stimulus going forward—especially in times as we see them now, it is important for us to be positive and to ensure that we do work together for the benefit of all. With that said, I appreciate this time and thank you all for listening to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: You know, given that this government has allowed us only eight days in the last 10 months to debate government direction, I am grateful for the opportunity to comment today and to comment on the throne speech, albeit I'm commenting three months after the throne speech was given. This is what happens when a government strays from the parliamentary calendar.

As you know, in the past 10 months—even in the last three—the job and economic indicators have not gotten any better. In fact, we continue to see the downward spiral, and again we hear evidence that Ontario, once the economic engine of Canada, has become one of the slowest-growing provinces across the Dominion of Canada. Ontario's growth in 2007 was the slowest in Canada. That's the first time that has happened since the 1991 recession, and it does beg the question, are the McGuinty government harmful policies now driving Ontario to have-not status? Are the McGuinty government harmful policies now creating in the province of Ontario a status of being one of the so-called equalization provinces?

I have a quote from Don Drummond, with the TD Bank Financial Group. He states that Ontario's economic performance does bring it closer to federal government handout status: "It's not so far from being an equalization province." Another quote, from Douglas Porter, deputy chief economist with BMO, Bank of Montreal: "While the arcane equalization calculation may still peg Ontario officially as a have province, the reality is far less friendly for the provincial economy. Ontario is becoming relatively poorer each year."

Now, to be clear, Canada itself is going through a period of global economic uncertainty. The combination of the stronger dollar, a slowing US economy, higher energy prices and increased competition from emerging markets—obviously China, for one—has posed significant challenges for our national economy. However, when you look at the impact on the economy in the province of Ontario, particularly the manufacturing sector, we see what seems to be an ever-increasingly serious situation.

While other provinces have adapted to these challenges through forward-looking economic policies, the present Ontario government has pursued what we consider an outdated agenda: an agenda of higher taxes, an agenda of bigger government, increased red tape, and higher energy prices by reducing supply, of all things. Put simply, we now have evidence that Ontario is becoming the economic laggard of Confederation.

We know, and history has shown, that a competitive tax environment is one of the key factors that will attract

the scale of business investment that we need and will also attract the quality of business investment that we need. Despite that fact, the present government continues to rake in unprecedented revenue from taxes. Tax revenues very clearly have skyrocketed by \$17.3 billion. That's since fiscal year 2003-04. That's a 35% increase in tax revenue. In fact, probably one of the very first bills this government brought in was legislation to implement the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario. Clearly, this government does not understand that its fiscal and tax policies, for example, have hurt capital investment in industry. When you hurt capital investment in industry, that has a direct linkage with job creation—or, more appropriately, job loss—and has a direct correlation with productivity.

Taxes have a dramatic impact on where businesses choose to locate. Capital tax—and our finance critic, Tim Hudak, has mentioned this—is a prime example. In periods of economic slowdown, when businesses are losing money, they have to search for other ways to cut costs. When you have a very high capital tax compared to other jurisdictions with which you are trying to compete, you're in a situation where you have to cut in those areas. That gives you the flexibility, unfortunately, to make reductions in purchases of plant and equipment, machinery and equipment. In economic downturns, capital tax leads to greater job losses. That's essentially the bottom line. We've seen this scenario play out across the province of Ontario in the last several years. As a result, these kinds of misguided economic policies are driving Ontario toward a have-not status. It's now increasingly possible, as I said, for Ontario to become an equalization province.

As opposition, we cannot sit by and watch as this government's misguided policies sell our economy down the drain. As such, during the pre-budget sessions in the finance committee, as you will know, Speaker, we have an opportunity to put forward motions to address some of these competitive issues, motions including an immediate elimination of the capital tax, lowering the corporate income tax rate and phasing out the health tax. However, these motions regrettably were voted down by the Liberal-dominated standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

As we now know, Ontario has lost 183,500 high-paying manufacturing jobs since 2005. In 2007 alone, Ontario lost 64,000 manufacturing jobs. That's a 6.5% drop in manufacturing employment since 2007. According to Statistics Canada, compared to other provinces—and this is important—Ontario has suffered the greatest loss of manufacturing jobs in Canada since January 2005. That's not only in real terms but also as a percentage measure of manufacturing employment. It does get worse. According to the TD Bank, Ontario could experience a further job loss of 250,000 over the next half-decade.

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I should note as well that the single biggest weakness in Ontario's manufacturing, certainly in comparison to

the United States, is this underinvestment in plant and equipment, this underinvestment in machinery and equipment. Capital investment in Ontario's manufacturing sector has decreased since 2003 and has decreased the most in Canada, again in both real and percentage terms. Again, why? Our position, and we tried to make this clear during the pre-budget hearings, is that corporate income taxes are too high in the province of Ontario and capital taxes are too high in the province of Ontario. Given this information, we in the opposition made recommendations to the Minister of Finance, one of them being to lower the corporate income tax rate for all businesses in Ontario, to help foster investment. Part of the rationale is that all the other provinces in Canada are moving forward with cutting business taxes, not only corporate income taxes but also capital taxes, to stimulate job creation.

Here in Ontario, our businesses, our industries, have one of the highest marginal tax rates, and we feel that this is perhaps one of the more important measures, given some of the economic data and information that we received as we travelled around the province of Ontario on the finance committee. We visited the Soo, Guelph, Timmins.

Given this government's track record, the forecast for the present year is not sunny. We heard from Scotiabank in our finance committee. Economic growth forecasts for the current year have ranked Ontario dead last. In 2007, Ontario's growth rate was the slowest anywhere in Canada, and according to nearly all the bank estimates, Ontario hasn't sunk this low since the recession in 1991. We did hear testimony. There were obviously questions relating to the US economy. Some in the United States are using the R word, flirting with a sub-prime mortgage lending recession, as we know, and potentially—there was an announcement yesterday of a recent bank collapse, Bear Stearns. This is the fifth-largest investment bank in the United States, and essentially they're now out of business. What does this bode not only for Canada, but more particularly for the future of our economy in the province of Ontario?

Locally, in my riding, people are concerned. We have some localized economic troubles. I'm referring particularly to our farm economy, whether it be hogs, beef and, in particular, tobacco. The devastation to the economy of Haldimand county—we're now going into a third year of Six Nations-generated blockades and occupations. This afternoon I made mention of the Haudenosaunee Development Institute blockade at 6 o'clock this morning which brought a \$10.5-million hotel project to its knees in the city of Brantford.

One other factor with respect to—whether it's business corporate taxes or whether it's the capital taxes that business has to pay on plants and machinery, it's not only business and work, and industrial and economic activity involving goods and services. Primarily, we're talking about jobs, and for the first time in 30 years, Ontario's unemployment rate is now exceeding the national average. Again, all five major banking institutions predict

that the unemployment rate will continue to rise not only this year but throughout 2009. This is why we in opposition felt it was important to put forward another motion in the finance committee to eliminate the job-killing capital tax, and to eliminate this tax immediately.

Just by way of explanation, many economic studies consistently show that capital taxes are probably the most inefficient form of taxation. It's a direct tax. It's paid year after year on money that companies have invested in capital. It's a tax that must be paid whether that company is making money or not. Few jurisdictions use this tax. Most of our competitors do not have a significant capital tax, if any at all. So with respect to this tax alone, the capital tax, Ontario is at a competitive disadvantage. Economists complain that capital taxes are punitive to investment in a context where increasing our productivity remains probably the most significant challenge that our economy is facing.

So, as I have tried to explain, the capital tax discourages investment, flies in the face of any measures that we should be bringing in right now to attempt to encourage investment, and certainly to encourage capital investment. Yet we have a government today, and reflected in that Liberal majority on the finance committee, that voted down our motion to immediately eliminate the capital tax.

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: It is curious, and I know our finance critic echoes my sentiments by saying, "Shame." I think that pretty well summarizes it.

It's curious that this government refuses to acknowledge the signs of economic downturn. Ontario's economic growth, first of all, is below the national average. Our manufacturing sector is bleeding jobs and we're losing a record number of people to other provinces. Again, this is another dismal measure of Ontario's economic progress, or lack thereof. All major economic indicators have Ontario lagging the rest of the country, and this is right across the board.

This province does need initiatives on a number of fronts:

(1) This province needs the elimination of the capital tax. That's for all business, and that would be implemented immediately.

(2) We need a reduction of the corporate income tax rate; bring it down, at minimum, to a competitive level and provide some tax relief for small business.

(3) We need a government that will put this province back on the right track by setting and committing to real targets to reduce the regulatory burden on all businesses. Again, I'm talking about the plethora of rules, regulations, red tape and forms to fill out, the kinds of things that really do not make being in business a lot of fun.

(4) Provide some tax relief for hard-working Ontario families.

(5) Begin serious consultations with Ottawa on the subject of tax reform.

(6) We must address the energy crisis, including a responsible plan with respect to coal power, and make

use of existing technology. Do not compromise our future energy supply.

(7) The province of Ontario needs to develop a strategy to address what is clearly a looming labour shortage.

While the government members of the finance committee did introduce a motion recognizing the growing unemployment problem, the motion really did not go far enough. As I've said, for the first time in 30 years Ontario's unemployment rate is exceeding the national average. It's a bit of a dismal statistic, and it would serve the Premier well as he goes to Ottawa and asks for fairness for Ontario workers, to ask in the context of that statistic.

1630

As I have made mention, 183,500 manufacturing jobs have been lost since the beginning of 2005. If we look at our problems from a national perspective, given the growing tough times with respect to the Ontario economy, people are on the move. They're leaving this province. They are heading elsewhere in Canada. The reason they are leaving: lack of employment. The reason they are going to other provinces: They can pick up work. Ontario has reported a net loss of over 30,000 people to other provinces. This is just in the past year. Since the third quarter of 2003, Ontario has lost people to the other provinces, amounting to a net decline of well over 64,000 people in the last three and a half years.

While this government is quick to point to a federal perspective regarding Ontario's economic woes, we must be cognizant that it is provincial policies—I'm talking about provincial policies, not federal policies—that have contributed to Ontario's plight by degrading the investment climate.

We have seen headlines in the media regarding provincial policies scaring off US investment. I think of the fairly recent McGuinty-Flaherty debates. Clearly, in these already tight times, we certainly do not want any kind of situation where Ontario's Premier is scaring off US investment, because again, that does translate into job losses and impacts not only Ontario; it impacts the whole country. I guess one measure, and we can measure this in the future, is more people drawing unemployment.

Speaker, as you will know, while we were on the pre-budget tour we found the government was fond of speaking in generalities, essentially, about the next generation of jobs. They talk about making strategic investments—pretty vague stuff. I'm just not sure what they are planning on doing or who would receive the money in the future. But one way to sustain jobs in the short run, I guess, from their line of reasoning, is to use tax dollars. We saw this with the former NDP administration and now with the provincial Liberals.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos: It's a delight to be able to comment on the address made by the member from Haldimand-Norfolk. I know folks watching listen to him, as I have for the last 20 minutes, and look at his rather

controlled style, but I want to assure you that inside he is bubbling over with passion.

I'm very familiar with his riding. He has surely been blessed with being able to represent one of the finest pieces of Ontario. I mean, you're traveling west on Highway 3, you hit Highway 6; just south of Highway 3 on the east side is Nigh's meat shop. They've got a good smoker, good sausage. Travel down south to Port Dover, which I believe is a part of this member's riding. He's blessed to have that in his riding. Erie Beach Hotel—platters of perch, fresh Lake Erie perch. Eat until you can't eat any more. And if you want, you can travel up north on Highway 6 and come pretty close to where the Speaker hangs his hat. Keep going and you end up on Manitoulin Island; Elliott Lake; one of the great historic highways of Ontario from the lake shore, from the ports—Port Dover, in this instance—all the way up into northern Ontario to mining country.

My colleague the member for Beaches-East York, Mr. Prue, has been patiently doing House duty with me this afternoon, even though he is not going to be able to speak to the throne speech today. He will be addressing the comments by the member from Haldimand-Norfolk in a few more minutes. And in a few more minutes, I'll have my chance to speak to the throne speech for a modest 20 minutes. That's all the rules allow us. I'm looking forward to it, because I know there's a great deal of latitude provided when a member of this assembly addresses the throne speech. I intend to utilize that leeway. I look forward to the opportunity. I ask folks to be patient. In a few more minutes I'll have the floor again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It is always a pleasure to follow the honourable member from Welland. It is my pleasure again to stand and speak in support of the throne speech. One of the fundamental reasons I support this throne speech is because it's investing in our biggest asset in this province; that is, our people. Yesterday's announcement on affordable housing is an indication of the kind of thing this government, the McGuinty Liberal government, wants to achieve in this province.

In my riding of Ottawa Centre, affordable housing is a big issue. We need to ensure that we invest in repairing our existing infrastructure—the buildings, the apartments—so that people, the working families, the low-income families living in these buildings, are living in a safe community, in a safe and healthy environment. That's why I'm very proud that the government is investing \$100 million across the province. That means the city of Ottawa alone will be receiving \$8.2 million towards repairing the infrastructure, the affordable housing stock that exists in the city of Ottawa. In fact, tomorrow I will be visiting some community housing in my riding, along with Ottawa Community Housing and local city councillors, to see firsthand where the investment will be made and how lives will be improved in the community.

Similarly, the government's intention to move forward with the dental care program for low-income families by

investing \$132 million over three years is again an important indication that we are investing in our people, in Ontarians, to ensure that they do live in a healthy community. We know that poor dental care can be a stigma for people who are not able to get jobs, who are not able to participate fully in the community. By investing that type of money, people in my community, in my riding of Ottawa Centre, will definitely benefit from the kind of investment this government is making through this throne speech.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to commend my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk on his outstanding comments with respect to the throne speech and, as he mentioned, on the value of the dissenting report that he helped to craft as a member of the finance committee, along with the member from Wellington–Halton Hills and me as the finance critic. In fact, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk brought forward a number of very sensible motions that would help out his constituents and taxpayers across Ontario. Surprisingly and very unfortunately, those motions I think were entirely voted down.

I will give you some examples of what Mr. Barrett had brought forward. We certainly heard in that committee about the great pain the forest industry has had, not only in northern Ontario but across the province. Mr. Barrett had brought forward a motion to help invest in the forest industry and turn around what has always been an industry of great economic benefit to small and large communities across the province. Now we've seen 5,500 high-paying forestry jobs go. Sadly, the Liberal majority in the committee was whipped into voting down that motion.

Mr. Barrett also brought forward motions with respect to contraband tobacco and seeing better enforcement in that respect—also voted down.

And suitable for his riding, but also of importance in other ridings to seniors and working families concerned with their energy bills and to businesses, particularly the manufacturing sector, Mr. Barrett, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk, brought forward an important motion about clean coal technology to make sure that all technologies are investigated, including carbon sequestration, to ensure that we could continue to benefit from all power sources made more green. This is the way I understand that other provinces, states and countries are looking at this type of innovation, as my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke notes, but unfortunately, again, the whipped members of the committee voted it down.

I congratulate him on his efforts and hope we'll see action on these files.

Mr. Michael Prue: In response to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, I listened intently to what he had to say for some 20 minutes, and time will only permit me to comment on three of the things he raised.

The first was that since this throne speech was given last fall, a great many things have happened, and the economy has not performed perhaps to the liking of the government or perhaps even to the liking of the people of

Ontario. The member astutely and correctly notes that the subprime fiasco in the United States is having its toll on the economy of that country and that that country is our chief trading partner.

He went on to talk about the second thing, which was the collapse of Bear Stearns in the last couple of days, and how many people lost not millions but billions of dollars in equity with the collapse of that institution and that the United States government, for the first time in many, many years, has been forced to step in with a \$30-billion guarantee in order to guarantee the assets, no longer part of the Bear Stearns portfolio.

1640

These are things that we need to bear in mind when we are looking at the upcoming budget. We are debating the last economic statement and the last throne speech where the government was headed, but I want to spend my last few seconds talking about the pre-budget tour, which he also touched on.

We were on that pre-budget tour. That pre-budget tour, I have to tell you, was one of the saddest times I have ever had as a parliamentarian from this Legislature. We heard—

Mr. Tim Hudak: Not because of the company.

Mr. Michael Prue: Not because of the company but because 175 individuals and groups came forward to make, in person, deputations before the committee and another 100 sent in written submissions of what they wanted the committee to talk to the finance minister and the Legislature about in terms of improving the budget and, I guess, the throne speech, and not one of their recommendations—not one of the 275—saw the light of day inside this institution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): You have two minutes to reply, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I thank the MPP from Welland for his comments. I'm looking forward to him having his chance, as he says, to comment. I plead guilty. It was a fairly controlled presentation—economic facts and figures. That may be why they refer to it as the dismal science. I'm looking forward, in contrast, to a presentation that may well be out of control. So I'll look forward to that—

Mr. Peter Kormos: One should hope so.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I should hope so—to maintain your reputation.

As the member for Beaches–East York knows, some of this is pretty dry stuff. He made mention of listening to me for the last 20 minutes while we've been listening to each other for two weeks on the finance committee. What do they say about economists? What is the expression? I guess, "An economist is essentially an accountant without the charisma." Some of us here have degrees in this stuff. We're trying to get away from it.

Thank you to the member from Ottawa Centre. He talked about human resources and the importance of people. I'd remind him that in our province of Ontario we lost 30,000 people to other provinces in the last year

looking for jobs, and we've lost 183,500 manufacturing jobs. Of course, our finance critic, Tim Hudak, knows a bit about the north and the forest industry. He knows about the red tape, the Ontario government regulations that are helping to bring this industry to its knees, and he knows that the forest industry needs that electricity from Atikokan and Thunder Bay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos: It seems like it's been so long since those short 10 days in December 2007.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Only eight.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Maybe it was nine. Maybe it was only eight. It just seems so long, and I'm so pleased to be back. Over those few months, I've grown a little greyer and I've gotten a little fatter. I was listening to the Minister of Health Promotion today in her ministerial statement, a very fit, slim person standing up and talking about nutrition and exercise and fitness. I looked over especially at some of my male colleagues here, pointing out and acknowledging our commonality notwithstanding our political differences, and I said to her, "Yes, Minister, that's easy for you to say," but I suspect there are more than a few of us who would be well advised to heed her advice.

Look, down where I come from, in places like Wainfleet, Port Colborne, Welland and Thorold and St. Catharines and, yes, places like Pelham, which is represented by my neighbour here, the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook now—it's a shame that those people got shifted over, but I'm pleased that they're well represented in the Legislature. I do miss them.

Down where I come from, where the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook comes from and the member for St. Catharines and the member for Niagara Falls—that was industrial Ontario. That was the wealth creation in this province, in this country. It was where people worked hard making things—the manufacturing industry—adding value, creating wealth.

You see, you don't create wealth in a casino. Oh, those jobs have become more and more important. We know it; you bet your boots we know it. But you don't create wealth in a casino. You stir the pot and separate people from their wealth.

You don't create wealth—dare I say it?—in most support types of service industries. You're a supplement to the economy, but you're not adding value in the manufacturing process.

We are at great risk. Our future, our economic future, is at incredible risk if we don't move promptly, quickly, immediately, to restore and rebuild our industrial manufacturing base, that wealth-creating part of our economy.

Down in Welland the largest single employer now is a call centre, Canadian Tire Acceptance. I know many of the folks that work there. I know Mr. Hudak knows many of them too. They work hard. They do work hard; make no mistake about it. It's not heavy lifting—you're not out there with a pick and a shovel; you're not tearing out the brick of a furnace—but you're working in a stressful

environment. You're working in an environment where repetitive strain injury appears, especially as workers mature and reach their late 30s, 40s and move into their 50s, and in an industry where most of the workers, for instance, don't have WSIB coverage; they simply don't. And not only is Canadian Tire Acceptance the largest single employer, indeed the call centre industry has become a prominent player in the job market across Niagara, as it has in other parts of Canada.

So imagine my surprise—I've got to put some context in this. I was late coming to the computer world. I was a little late coming to the computer world; in fact, I still use a fountain pen. I feel very comfortable using a fountain pen, and I still feel far more comfortable with a real book, with a binding on it, than I do with a computer screen. But it's been years now that I've used computers here at Queen's Park, at work, and in my office in Welland and at my home. My younger brother, an IT, computer kind of person working here in Toronto, has been hectoring me for as many years about this Luddite tendency, because until this past week I've had but dial-up. I suppose that was fine in the early days of those computers, which not that long ago were pretty slow in and of themselves, but even the most bottom-line entry level computers now are pretty fast machines.

I succumbed to the chiding. I said, "Mark, you're right. It's time to move to high-speed Internet access." I had a dilemma, because I looked up the providers. My television cable is provided by Rogers here in Toronto. I don't know if you've ever had any experience with Rogers Cable, but let me tell you, there are no good stories. There are no good stories. It's incredible—you folks know exactly what I'm talking about—how in the middle of Law and Order, right where the confession is going to happen, the box collapses, and you've got to reset it. It doesn't happen during some rinky-dink—it doesn't happen at four in the morning. It happens right when the confession is coming in Law and Order, right when Mariska Hargitay from Law and Order—you remember her—has got the accused in the little interrogation room and he's ready to spill, and all of a sudden, a grey screen.

1650

If you phone Rogers, you're on the phone for a good 10, 15 minutes, if you're lucky—and that's on a good day. If you get a person at the Rogers call centre, you're lucky if they keep you on the line. If they do keep you on the line, they'll tell you, "It's so easy to reset your machine yourself." You just crawl down behind the television set and unplug the box—you know what I'm talking about—and then you go through this series of procedures. I say, "Look, I didn't screw up the machine; you did. I'm paying rent. You fix it." And then, of course, they hang up on you.

I was in London at the Conservative mini-convention a couple of weekends ago. I met a whole lot of good folks I have regard for. The only thing that really troubled me was when the leader of the Conservative Party, Mr. Tory, was addressing his people in the

question and answer, and talked about how the party needs a leader with the type of business experience he has and how he would run Ontario the same way he ran Rogers cable. I'm not one to give free advice to Mr. Tory, but for God's sake, John, stop using that analogy. You're not serving yourself well. Rogers has got to be the most customer-unfriendly operation you could ever encounter.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Bell.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, I'm getting there, my friend. Mr. Hudak mentions Bell. Bell and Michael Sabia have a little bit coming over the next 12 minutes too, let me tell you.

So Rogers was not on my short list to get high-speed Internet. I said, "No. You guys have made enough money picking enough people's pockets with crummy cable service that I'm not going to sign up. No, no, no." And this is where we come to call centres—jobs, Canadian jobs.

What's more Canadian than Bell Canada? They use the little singing, dancing beavers in the ad because it's Bell Canada. I get the drift. I'm not so obtuse that it doesn't connect. So I call Bell Canada.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Did you get the beaver?

Mr. Peter Kormos: Oh, I got the shaft. This was three weeks ago. I called Bell Canada. I'm on hold for 15 minutes, and then the line disconnects. I got the Muzak. I call back. Again, 15 more minutes, and I get Muzak.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You're a patient man.

Mr. Peter Kormos: No, I'm under pressure. Now I want high-speed Internet. Now I want it; I've got to have it; I'm adamant that I'm going to have high-speed Internet; I'm not going to be stuck in the last century.

Mr. John Yakabuski: How's your blood pressure?

Mr. Peter Kormos: The member from up there in Renfrew asks. He knows what my blood pressure was like.

Finally—honestly, I'm on the phone for two and a half hours talking, and finally I get connected to a service rep, and where am I talking to—Bell Canada—where am I talking to? New Delhi. That's not Delhi, down in Mr. Barrett's riding, down there on highway 3—I know Delhi. This is New Delhi, India.

And look, please, I have no qualms; of course people in other parts of the world have to have jobs and deserve work and decent jobs and good-paying jobs too. But it just blew my mind and rotted my socks that I'm ordering Bell Canada high-speed Internet and I'm talking to a service rep in New Delhi. I waited until the next week for delivery of my modem, and when I didn't get the modem, I called Bell back again—this time, a call centre in the Oshawa area—and was informed that I had never been hooked up to Bell high-speed Internet, which is why I didn't have my modem. So we went through the whole process again.

There is more to the story: another credit card transaction, more waiting. I get the Bell modem, hook it up, and by God if it doesn't work. But you have to put filters on the lines to your phones. Bell provides the filters for

the cable hook-ups, but for wall phones, you have to go to their website and order special wall phone filters; otherwise, you have to disconnect your wall phone. So the wall-phone in my kitchen is on my kitchen floor now. It can't operate because I can't use the high-speed Internet if the wall phone doesn't have a filter. And, be damned, when I went to the website there was no place to find the wall filter. It wasn't where the guide book said it was. I finally phoned Bell and they assured me it's in the mail.

Michael Sabia, as a matter of fact, is from St. Catharines—high-priced, well-paid, CEO of Bell Canada. You're too young, but I remember back in the 1960s Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book*. Do you remember that? It was a fantastic marketing ploy because the big title was *Steal This Book*—

Mr. Michael Prue: And most were stolen.

Mr. Peter Kormos: And Michael Prue would know that most were stolen. He may even have a copy.

Abbie Hoffman, of course, was the renegade hero to so many of us in that little counterculture movement in the 1960s, back when I not only had hair with colour but with length and substance.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I've seen the pictures.

Mr. Peter Kormos: That's right.

If you were really hard-core, there was *The Anarchist Cookbook*. What it had was ways of sabotaging Bell, and it was primitive stuff. It was like plugging the coin slots in a pay phone.

The problem is, I'm looking for an updated digital version of *Steal This Book*. I dearly would love to find a way to sabotage Bell to pay them back for the pain that they've inflicted on so many others. The problem is that in a digital world you can't plug the coin slots with *Krazy Glue*. There is no way of reversing the flow.

So all I can say to you is this: I've got high-speed Internet—oh, by the way, the e-mail doesn't work because Bell *Sympatico* doesn't support Microsoft *Entourage*. We're not talking about some obscure e-mail software that some kid is manufacturing on a bootleg disc; we're talking about Microsoft *Entourage*, which, I trust people will agree, is a pretty good e-mail application for a home user. Bell *Sympatico* won't support it. So I've got high-speed Internet and my wall phone is on the floor, so that means I can't receive voice mail and things like that, and I've got no e-mail access; I've got to use the mail part of Apple. And although I love Apple and it's wonderful, the mail software is really less than desirable.

Here's my colleague from St. Catharines, who is well aware of my concern about the gouging of the public of Ontario by the cable television industry and by Bell Canada. Again, talk about an ineffective, toothless, meaningless CRTC. When are they going to get the courage to rein these operators in and protect consumer interests? And when are we as consumers going to start insisting that if we're going to have companies that identify as Canadian, like Bell Canada, we darn well expect that their employees are going to be based here in

the country and that those jobs are going to stay in this country?

You recall that I took some heat from some of the Liberal backbenchers when I was criticizing the Premier's junket to India—remember that, Mr. Hudak?—

Mr. Tim Hudak: I remember that.

Mr. Peter Kormos: —and wondering what in the Lord's name the junket was going to market to India that was manufactured in Ontario, because I don't know. But I don't think there is a big market for those Ford Crown Vics that CAW workers make at Ford down in St. Thomas. Do you know the ones I'm talking about? I just don't think there's a big market for those in India, or in most of Asia, for that matter. I don't even think there's a big market, although there should be, for the Impala or the Accent that comes out of the great GM plant in Oshawa.

So when I'm talking to a call centre in New Delhi about getting my Bell Sympatico hooked up, I'm wondering if that call centre was one of the things that the Premier on his trade junket established in India while he was touring the land with his backbenchers.

As usual, I find time fleeting. I've just got to warn folks. These companies, these anonymous corporations, that hide behind call centres are the most abusive, anti-consumer, non-consumer-friendly entities that have ever existed. Consumers have been, in a Pavlovian manner, trained and reprogrammed to put up with them instead of telling them, "No, we're not going to take this anymore."

1700

It is just incredibly outrageous, when you look at the huge fees that the CRTC permits cable television like Rogers and telephone operators like Bell, and the gouging, the nickel-and-diming—very much like the bank industry's ATM fees and other service fees. It's amazing that that same CRTC that allows these huge fees by gougers and scoundrels like Rogers and Bell Sympatico doesn't, at the same time, provide some modest level of consumer protection.

New Democrats have proposed a job creation program, a job protection plan. We're talking very specifically about tax credits, corporate tax credits, for manufacturing industries investing in upgrading their manufacturing machinery; talking about enhancing those tax credits when the machinery is green or designed to produce green products; talking about a Buy Ontario policy.

I come from down in Niagara, where we grow a lot of peaches and pears and apples and, of course, our great vineyards. We've got a company down there called CanGro, American-owned now, that's announced it's going to shut down. You know what's going to happen? It means that 1,000 acres of peach production and 600 acres of pear production will become obsolete. There will be no market for those farmers on their acreage. There's none. They might as well plough her under. Funding for new crops? What new crops? Who's going to protect the next crop?

CanGro, then, proposes to use its American plants to process and can everything from Chinese to South American fruit and vegetable products, and they get away with marketing it as a product of Canada.

I was in the factory—great workers, great management, great company; it has been there for decades. My grandmother worked there. A whole lot of immigrant people worked in that factory. Back in the old days, it was very manual labour, with hard-working, dedicated personnel, and their jobs are going to disappear. Not only are their jobs going to disappear, hundreds of those jobs, but also the fruit farmers who produced, in this instance, peach and pear, are going to disappear. All the greenbelts in the world won't protect that land anymore, will they, Mr. Hudak?

Mr. Tim Hudak: No.

Mr. Peter Kormos: You can have all the greenbelt legislation you want, but if you aren't giving the farmers an opportunity to grow product on their land, to grow produce at a modest profit level, then forget about any sort of legislative or regulatory production. We lose that valuable, scarce farmland.

New Democrats will focus on this issue, along with issues of seniors and long-term care, along with issues around poverty, on a daily basis over the course of the next four years. We will do everything we can within our power to hold this government's proverbial feet to the blazing fire because the people of Ontario deserve no less and because we, in this NDP caucus, are committed to nothing else than to standing up, speaking up and speaking out, for seniors, workers and the poorest in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Brownell: It's a pleasure to have a little time this afternoon to speak in the throne speech debate.

Certainly, what we have as a result of the throne speech is an ambitious plan that follows the plan that we had previously, in previous throne speeches, where we tackled issues in health care, in education, in our rural communities. Coming from a very large rural riding, I know that we had much in those throne speeches on infrastructure and assistance to farmers etc.

We intend to, with this throne speech, build strong public services that families across this province have been wanting, and certainly wanting a government to deliver. During the past four years we delivered, and now we're into this new throne speech, with many, many opportunities to look at issues such as poverty, and that's just one that I'd like to comment on this afternoon.

In my own riding, the city of Cornwall has an individual, Mehroon Kassam, who has been tasked with a local poverty reduction strategy. That will certainly help us and certainly pay dividends as we work.

It's great to see that the Honourable Deb Matthews, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, has been tasked with the opportunity to look at poverty and the opportunities for us to tackle the situation of, especially, children living in poverty.

There are many, many other aspects; for example, the greening of Ontario, going to the next generation of green technologies. I look at Liquiforce, a new company in my riding, which is set up to look at municipal in-ground infrastructure, and that will be new technology.

These are the things that I'm quite anxious to see and look forward to working with the government on.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to commend the member from Welland for his insightful and erudite comments on the budget and the economy, as we see it as well. He raised many issues that I have an interest in as well, and many of my colleagues on this side of the House spoke to those today.

I also come from the manufacturing sector, where we've been affected by layoffs, downsizings. We also feel that the government needs to do more to create the economic climate in this province to see that those jobs that are here remain here and we can also attract new investment, as we need in the Welland and St. Catharines area as well as Niagara, Glanbrook and Sarnia-Lambton, obviously, and the rest of the province.

He said that he'd been accused of being a Luddite in the past, and I said I'd watched him for many years before I entered this august assembly and I never found him to be a Luddite or a troglodyte—there's another word; I thought I'd throw that in.

Anyway, he said that he was worried about Rogers Cable, when he was having trouble dealing with them and he said he had trouble finding his modem. Well, I suggest that maybe he lost that modem but he hasn't lost his mojo.

In wrapping up, I'd like to say that we'd like to see on this side of the House, on the Progressive Conservative side, that balance in the private sector as well and see that those taxes, business taxes and taxes to individuals, be reduced so that people will consider reinvesting in Ontario so that Ontario can still remain the province of opportunity, not become a have-not province, as is being cited in some newspaper writings. We intend to work, as well, to hold the government to account in the coming days.

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to give two minutes' comment to my colleague from Welland. I listened intently to his speech. I wish all members had done so, because as I heard some of the questions and comments, particularly from one speaker—he never once referred during his two minutes to anything that my colleague from Welland had to say.

What I found most impressive is how he spent about 15 minutes talking about his own personal travails, his own difficulty with these multinational corporations and the frustration I think that every single consumer in this province has felt, not once, not twice, but sometimes hundreds of times in trying to deal—"I'll put you on hold, sir." You'll be on hold, and then the computer comes on and tells you there will be an approximately 15-minute to 35-minute wait. Sometimes it's long distance and you have to pay for it. Sometimes you have other things to do in your life, and you try to put your

phone on speakerphone. You wait and you wait and you wait and then, inevitably, at least one quarter of the time, exactly what happened to him—somebody hangs up. So it's a really good thing to hear that these experiences are universally shared. Perhaps the government should be looking at bringing back some kind of consumer protection. I don't remember seeing anything like that in the throne speech.

In his final couple of minutes, he touched all the high points. He touched the high points of job creation, job protection. He talked about the plight of our farming community, particularly in southwestern Ontario, where many of the fields are no longer productive or many of the families have gone out of business. He talked about the protection of the poor. He talked about the pensioners and the people who need the support and who will get the support of the NDP caucus. I commend him for his speech and listened intently. As always, it combined both humour and human interest. He brought it all poignantly to the end, and I commend him for what he had to say.

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Mr. Bill Mauro: It's my pleasure to rise today and add my two minutes in support of our government's throne speech. In fact, it's a very easy thing for all of us on this side of the House to do. This throne speech, like others before it over the course of the last four years; like our budget speeches, like our major policy decisions that we've made on this side of the House over the last four and a half years—all of us, I think, find it very easy. I think most people in the province understand that the priorities that we lay out in our throne speeches, the priorities that we lay out in our budget documents and our major policy decisions within individual ministries greatly reflect the needs, the will and demands of the people of Ontario. We have been doing that for four years. The throne speech that we brought in before Christmas is a continued reflection of our ability as a government, as a Liberal government, to understand what it is that people in the province of Ontario are looking for and what they want.

When we came to government for the first time, fully four and a half years ago, in October 2003, we had a bit of a mess, as has been acknowledged. We remember three major deficits that existed in the province. There was a fiscal deficit of \$5.6 billion. We remember in the run-up to that election how it was trotted out on every occasion that the budget was balanced, even though they were selling for \$3 billion highways that were valued at \$8 billion. When we were told that the budget was balanced, we ended up finding a \$5.6-billion deficit, a fiscal mess that we inherited. I'm very proud of the fact that we've now balanced that budget and have created the fiscal capacity in this province to do some of the things that are our priorities. We also found a services deficit and made major strides in addressing the services deficit. We heard today how there are 9,000 more teachers working in this province than there were four and a half years ago today. And of course the big one, infrastructure as well, another big one: major investments have been made in infrastructure.

For my part, it's very simple for me to stand here today and support this throne speech and continue to reflect the priorities of the people of the province of Ontario. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The member for Welland has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, of course it's easy for government members to support the throne speech. They are in the government caucus and if they didn't support it, they would be thrown out of the caucus. Then they wouldn't have their jobs as ministers or parliamentary assistants or committee chairs, all that sort of stuff. Heck, we expect government backbenchers to support the throne speech; that's what they are paid to do.

What I say to you is that the denial of the depth of the crisis out there puts us in a very, very serious prospect of very, very serious consequences. This isn't a little passing transition. This isn't hula hoop factories becoming obsolete. This is an all-out gutting of industrial manufacturing in Ontario. Look, will Ontarians continue to survive because of their nature, their tenacity, their strength and sense of community? Of course, they will survive. But I tell you, Speaker, and you know this darn well: When a community that has enjoyed high-wage salaries and incomes, all of a sudden, because of the closure of factory after factory, becomes a mid-to-low-wage income community, that community changes dramatically. People's lives change dramatically. When you're making \$10, \$12, \$15, \$16 an hour, you're not buying new homes, new cars, new furniture, you're not sending your kids to college and university. And you're not saving for retirement, because when you're making \$10, \$12, \$16 an hour, you probably don't have a pension plan either.

The Ontario that is being designed and engineered by the McGuinty Liberals is not the Ontario that your parents and mine struggled so hard to build, be it as young immigrants or as the children or grandchildren of immigrants. And, by God, it's our job to stop the government now and get it back on track.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is a pleasure to respond to the speech from the throne for the 39th Parliament. I'd like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Scarborough Southwest. I'd like to talk about some of the real drivers of economic growth, some of the things that really propel development in Ontario and what a difference investing in those things that matter to Ontarians makes to our province and to my city of Mississauga.

More people come to Ontario from within Canada or from other parts of the world than to any other province or territory within our great nation. Ontario is now, and has historically been, the first place that businesses choose to set up, to invest, to create jobs, to build homes and communities and to grow as business entities.

For a business to be able to grow, it needs good people. Ontario has a workforce second to none anywhere in the world. A business needs access to capital.

Ontario is home to all the leading financial institutions in Canada. Further, through such programs as the next generation of jobs fund, Ontario has joined hands with cutting-edge businesses to grow the knowledge, the jobs and the commercially viable enterprises to continue to be the destination of choice for leading-edge companies, like Satyam of India, which chose Ontario to develop its state-of-the-art information systems in health care management. Satyam chose Ontario and Mississauga because it knew that from Ontario and Mississauga it could invest in the future at Mohawk College in Hamilton.

Companies come to Ontario because of the competitive advantage they gain from our publicly funded health care system. As a rule of thumb, for those familiar with the US system, you look at what you would pay in your health care premium here and then add a zero to it. That's roughly where your US health care costs, after tax, start. In the United States, as some of my friends have told me, they have got features in their health care system that we commonly associate with our car insurance, things like deductibles, limits. We don't have those in our health care system. Canadian workers don't lament the state of their employment and grumble that they can't afford to leave their job because they'd never be able to get health care anywhere else.

Those MPPs whom Ontarians sent to govern them—outstanding individuals like Charles Sousa of Mississauga South who gave his inaugural speech today—share that value, that belief that if you're an Ontarian, you're one of us and we'll all work together to take care of you.

In Mississauga, we grow by about 20,000 people each and every year. Only 23 years ago, we opened what was then a brand new hospital, Credit Valley Hospital, in the middle of a cornfield. Today it's surrounded by homes. Today it's boxed in completely by rapid development in the city of Mississauga. We didn't build Credit Valley Hospital in 1985 with a tax cut. We didn't build the attached regional cancer care centre with a tax cut. We could never have installed three more linear accelerators to keep up with patient demand—all three of those expensive linear accelerators installed ahead of schedule—if we had cut taxes and given away the store.

Today, we stand ready to break ground on phase 2 at Credit Valley Hospital, a decision made on the watch of this government, a decision that our local members lobbied for, worked hard for, a decision that this government made three years ago and we break ground this spring. Phase 2 will add about 140 new beds at Credit Valley Hospital. It's going to enlarge the maternity suite which last year gave birth to nearly 5,500 new Ontarians in a facility designed for only 2,700. Phase 2 will greatly expand our ability to provide complex continuing care to our aging population, and seniors are the fastest-growing demographic in the city of Mississauga. The Credit Valley Hospital Foundation has already raised some \$52 million to meet our community portion of the hospital extension that we so desperately need. Ontario could not meet its 75% share of that new extension with a tax cut.

Our leading-edge companies need that facility. Their people need to know that their employees can receive quality care in Mississauga when and where they need it.

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Ontario is renewing our core of health care professionals as well. We're building a new medical school at the University of Toronto at Mississauga, right in Mississauga. That means that the kids who tell me in grade 5 that they want to be doctors, in schools like Hazel McCallion school or Plum Tree Park in Lisgar, can all study medicine right in Mississauga. It means that at the family medicine teaching unit recently built, attached to the Credit Valley Hospital, those same kids who grow up in Streetsville or Meadowvale or Lisgar or Churchill Meadows can learn to be doctors in Mississauga, can do their internship and their residency in Mississauga. The odds are overwhelming that these very students will replace the retiring baby boom physicians in the years to come and will settle in Mississauga.

We're not building the medical school, not paying the training of those students, and not providing them the hands-on internship and residency with a tax cut. We're investing in them. We're investing in our best people. We're investing in the facilities and the institutions that our people, our companies and our province need in the long term.

We need to open another facility in western Mississauga; we need to open an ambulatory surgery centre. Our physicians at Credit Valley gave up their change room years ago to build yet another operating room in the old facility, the existing facility, and for years our doctors, before surgery, had to go down the hall to wash their hands to get ready. Now we've raised the funding for Credit Valley and Credit Valley has fixed that. But about 75% to 80% of the surgery that our physicians perform at Credit Valley Hospital doesn't need to be done in a hospital. It doesn't need to be done in such a facility because most people don't need the pre-op or the post-op care. They don't need access to the intensive care unit. They don't need to stay overnight at a hospital. In most cases, three out of four or four out of five people walk in, have their surgery and walk out. Your typical procedure takes between 15 and 20 minutes.

We can free up our hospital operating rooms for complex emergency or serious surgery that does need pre-op or post-op care and does need access to the intensive care unit if we take the between 75% and 80% of our procedures and do them in a dedicated ambulatory surgery centre near Credit Valley. We can reduce wait times. We can help the doctors be more flexible in how they use their blocks of operating room time. We can do more procedures. But we can't build an ambulatory surgery centre with a tax cut. We can build it with an investment in our community. We can build a facility that is going to take our doctors and allow them to set up their offices and find something that you can't find in Mississauga, which is 1,000 square feet of office space. We can build a facility that's going to enable a doctor to be located near the facility that he or she uses to perform

procedures on behalf of patients. That type of facility is what our people want, that is what our people need, and that is what our government has been building for the future.

Just recently, last year, in response to an initiative that we began after we were first elected in 2003, we said at that time that we could move people better in western Mississauga if we added another GO train station. On September 4, 2007, the Lisgar GO train station opened and began to accept passengers and to take them downtown; 900 cars can park at Lisgar and not be on the roads to and from downtown. I must say, having worked very closely with GO Transit and with our community on that project, I still get a thrill when I take the train home, and as I pass Meadowvale and I'm getting ready to get off the train at my stop, the engineer says, "Lisgar. Next stop, Lisgar." To all the folks at Lisgar, we did it. We worked together. It's a real achievement for our community, and it is for me emblematic of the values that my colleagues in this government stand for and why we are so proud of the throne speech that our government has laid out. That's why I urge all of our members to support this throne speech and enable this government to get on with building the future for Ontario and all Ontarians.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I'm privileged to have this opportunity to say a few words on the throne speech that was recently delivered to start this session and what our government plans to do in its next four years.

It's from this very building and from this very chamber that decisions are made and legislation is passed that affects all Ontarians.

One need only look at the past and some of the decisions made in the past. There was the Hogs Hollow disaster that occurred years ago which resulted in the deaths of many young men who were working underground, where unfortunately a fire broke out. There were no rules in place at the time regarding how employees should be treated. As a result of that tragedy, this very place here, this Legislature, enacted the Employment Standards Act, which put into place rules regarding how employees should be treated and what kinds of safety standards should be in place for them. That legislation continues to exist to this very day.

Other legislation has also come into place over the years from this building. There's been all sorts of human rights legislation. We brought in the human rights act itself and amended it several times to protect those who needed protection, so there was less discrimination based on people's background, ethnicity, whether male or female, and some other grounds, and we continue to do things like that.

So, again, from this Legislature we bring forward a picture, as stated in the speech itself, which is the very essence of the throne speech, a picture of what we plan to do.

Over the years, we have focused on education and health care as being two of the cornerstones of our policies here since taking office in 2003, and we continue

to say in our throne speech that we'll build more on those two cornerstones of education and health care, and also on the cornerstone of the environment—you cannot have a good Ontario without having a clean Ontario—and on the area of energy, so important nowadays in so many ways.

We've made decisions regarding the ever-increasing demand for energy and how we plan to provide energy to people in this province as the demand goes up every summer of every year. As more people continue to use air-conditioning and other electronic devices and place more of a toll on the energy sector here in this province, we are trying to address that in the best possible way.

We also do that in other areas. We've laid that out clearly in our agenda for the next four years.

In the past four years, we've seen results as we continue to build upon what we started in 2003. In health care, we've seen results in all parts of Ontario. I can say that in my own riding of Scarborough Southwest we have the third-largest health care facility, Providence Healthcare, which was begun years ago by the Sisters of St. Joseph as a health care centre to help some of the seniors and some of the elderly who were unable to get help through hospitals or other facilities. Now it's become a massive complex that contains a hospital, a seniors' residence, as well as a nursing home, all in one. In the first four years of our mandate, the government was able to build on that, as it's helped so many other facilities and hospitals and health care centres throughout all of Ontario.

We've done the same with our education facilities. We've seen the improvements, starting in the early stages by capping class sizes in the early years and trying to build it into other years so that children are able to get a proper education, proper time with their teacher or their educator to get the best possible education.

We are doing this for a reason: because we want to have the healthiest possible people in Ontario and the most educated people in Ontario. We want to make sure that the 12 million or so people in our province are the best that they can possibly be.

We don't have large reserves of oil under the ground that we can tap and use and sell, as they are doing elsewhere. We don't have large amounts of gold or other precious metals under the ground which we can pull out and sell and make money from. We have as our best resource our people, the actual human beings who are living here, who come here from all parts of the world and, as many speakers have spoken about earlier, have made Ontario their home, whether they be the immigrants who arrived 100 years ago from parts of Europe or the ones who are arriving today from Asia, places like Bangladesh. My own riding has the second-largest Bangladeshi community in all of Ontario. In the last election I had the opportunity to meet hundreds of Bangladeshis who are integrating and are happy to be in the province of Ontario.

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We are trying our best to get these people, and all people who are in this province, to work and to do their

best here and get opportunities in Ontario; not to give them fish or food but to teach them how to fish or how to have food, or how to have a proper skill based on being properly educated to do that. That's what we're doing. We're not giving handouts; we're trying to teach them so that they can hand out to their families what is best for their families and what is best for them. So we're working hard.

I'm a product of an immigrant family. My family came here and had an opportunity, was given that opportunity. My father and mother are now retired. Both of them worked hard, raising a family and trying to get their children an education, trying to get their children careers and jobs, while at the same time providing food and necessities for them at home.

We do that here. It starts here in this very building, by providing necessities like proper hospitals and proper education facilities so that new immigrants that arrive, as well as those who have been here for a couple of centuries—100 years or 150 years; some of you have been here a long time—and their children have an opportunity. Ontario ranks very highly in a lot of these areas. That's why Toyota came here a few years ago and why other industries continue to come here.

We can't control the economy. We don't hide or run away from that. The fact is, yes, south of the border there are changes happening that are affecting us, but we are staying the course. It's clear, through what the Premier has said and what the government has said here, that we'll continue to stay the course and continue to focus on education and health care, and not pack that up and suddenly focus on something else, and not change things around and start focusing on changing our tax system and making changes just because perhaps other provinces are doing it. We are going to stay the course and we're going to get through the economic changes. I truly believe that we're doing the right thing and I applaud the government for continuing to stay the course and do the right thing.

There's a famous song—perhaps not that famous—that was written years ago by John Lennon. The title of the song is, "Nobody Told Me" there'd be days like these. It's probably the last song he wrote. It's true in so many ways. When I think about the lyrics of that song—he basically says, as the title says, "Nobody Told Me" there'd be days like these. No one told us there would be a recession—not even a recession; a period of slower growth or less-than-expected growth—occurring in early 2008. But that could turn around, and by June or July we could see a period of great growth.

Do we then change our policies again? I don't think so. I think the throne speech lays out clearly what we plan to do in the next four years. We stay that course and we do what we're supposed to do: We bring out legislation that best helps those who can help themselves. We are clear in that position. We made it clear in 2003 and we've stayed in that position here, five years later, in 2008. I'm happy to be part of that.

In the days to come and in the years to come, we will show that this course—this throne speech and the

legislation that we've put forward and will continue to put forward—is the right path to go. I think we will continue to build and grow on the cornerstones that we set out in 2003 and continue to see that education, health care, a clean environment and focusing on energy and delivering those services to the people of Ontario is the best way to make Ontario prosperous, to have it grow and to make the people of Ontario have the best possible opportunities for all. Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to add some comments to the speech of the member for Mississauga–Streetsville and the member for Scarborough Southwest.

The member for Mississauga was talking about the new programs they have to create more doctors, particularly in the Mississauga area. That's a good thing. The past government of Ernie Eves created the northern Ontario medical school, with campuses in Sudbury and Thunder Bay, and that is certainly necessary in rural and northern Ontario. But what I would point out is that at this point we still have large areas of Ontario where we have shortages of doctors, and not just doctors; we have shortages of nurses, physiotherapists and other health professionals. In fact, last week I was at Lakeland Long Term Care in Parry Sound for a meeting to receive hundreds of cards, which I delivered today to the health minister, trying to get this government to keep their promise of funding for long-term-care homes. There, they pointed out that they received \$10,000 to advertise to hire a registered nurse. They put out full-page ads and radio ads and got two applications and one interview, and the person didn't show up for the interview. So there's obviously a real shortage out there of health professionals despite the fact that this McGuinty government has been in power some five years now.

But I come back to the point, where does this member think the money for long-term care in the health care system comes from? It comes from taxing individuals and private businesses. The dissenting report put out by the members of the PC Party, *Once the Economic Engine of Canada, Now the Caboose*: I would highly recommend he read it because it points out that Ontario has the highest marginal tax rate in Canada.

There are lots of other good statistics that I don't have time to go through in the last 13 seconds I have here.

Ontario: 37% marginal tax rate compared to 6.6% for New Brunswick or 11% for Newfoundland. That's scaring away business from this province.

Mr. Peter Kormos: We're going to wrap up pretty soon here. I understand that the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook will be speaking to the throne speech in about five minutes' time. That's Tim Hudak, of course, and he's the finance critic for his party. He's on the front benches. He's now a veteran of this Legislature.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I guess I am.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, he is. He has demonstrated himself to be a tough, effective examiner during the

course of question period and he has displayed outstanding leadership skills. During the course of his five years I've watched him mature from a young neophyte member to an experienced member of this assembly and a leading member of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario. So I'm looking forward to his comments on the throne speech because I suspect—look, I inevitably will not agree with a great deal of what he has to say. You'll understand it reflects the conservative values of a whole number of Ontarians who elect conservative members. These people, of course, have a right to be represented as well. I just tell folks that in but a few minutes' time Tim Hudak, the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, will be on his feet in this chamber.

I want to thank my colleague Michael Prue, the member for Beaches–East York, for doing his House duty here this afternoon. He isn't going to get a chance to speak to the throne speech this afternoon but he has been diligent, as usual, in terms of being here and sitting in the NDP benches. He is, in his own right, a leader amongst New Democrats here in Toronto and across this province.

Mr. Dave Levac: Let me start by picking up on the member from Welland. I do look forward to hearing the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, but I'll probably be able to give his speech in 10 seconds: "I agree with Jim Flaherty." That's all he's going to say. He's going to attack, and that's what the opposition is supposed to do. The NDP are supposed to do that too. So we've got a spectrum of people who are going to stand up and say things like, "You need to tax less. Cut all the taxes." Well, do you know what? We did that experiment, and for eight years, what do we get? A \$5.6-billion deficit. We've got all kinds of services removed.

What we talk about in the throne speech, and what the two honourable members from Mississauga–Streetsville and Scarborough Southwest just talked about: We see the glass as half full, not half empty. As a matter of fact, if we keep going the way we're going, we're going to have a glass that's three-quarters full, and we still have more work to do. That's exactly what we're trying to set the table to do.

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But listen carefully to what's going to happen. They're going to stand up and they're going to talk about what's wrong with Ontario. Jim Flaherty is wrong. He's telling people not to come to my riding and set up business. He's telling people from those two members' places, "Don't come up and set up business. We don't like what you're doing. Oh, Ontario, you must heel. You must do what we say to do."

What we're going to have to end up being is—the person who's going to stand up next is going to say all that Jim Flaherty is saying. So I'm asking you to set the table clearly. Listen carefully to what he is going to talk about. He's going to talk about the ideals that put us into an eight-year spiral down, in terms of hospital closures and nurses being fired. We want to revisit that again? Heavens, no. The NDP are going to stand up and say we're not spending money fast enough. We're not taxing fast enough.

So guess what we've done? The two members have made it quite clear what's happening in their riding. They're talking about a balance. That's what people are looking for: the intelligent balance between what taxes can do and generate for us and the services we are going to offer. Thank you to the members next door.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the government members has two minutes to reply. I recognize the member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It was a very entertaining round of comments. To my good friend and colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, I point out that for the past four years, Ontario has certified—not trained, but certified—more foreign-trained doctors than domestically trained ones. He talks about other provinces having tax rates that are in fact lower than Ontario's, and that's true. But the fact of the matter is that many of those provinces are cutting their taxes with Ontario's money, with our equalization payments. Those equalization payments for Ontario are growing faster than our economy is. This is a challenge for Ontario. We remain proud Canadians. We remain proud to build this country, but we do suggest that because another province has been able to lower its tax rates with Ontario's money, we are comparing apples and oranges.

To my colleague from Welland who talks about his feelings for his colleague from Niagara West–Glanbrook, I concur with him. Our feelings for one another as members, regardless of which side of the aisle that we sit on, are quite independent of our duties within our parties, whether it be in government or in opposition. The people who are here are all committed Ontarians. All have a vision of Ontario as a better place. I respect them and respect the motto of the Ontario Legislative Assembly, which, translated from Latin into English, means "Listen to the other side."

Finally, to my colleague from Brant, he points out very accurately that the ghost of the former member for Whitby–Ajax is with us still. One can only speculate whether or not the former member wants to return and why, but as the member pointed out, we've seen that play. We've been down that road, we know how it turns out, and we're glad we're not there now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I am pleased to rise and offer comment on the throne speech. I thank my colleagues from Welland, Brantford and Mississauga in advance, for advance questions and comments before I even had a chance to speak, which is nice. You don't see that very often. It usually happens after the remarks, not beforehand, but I'll try not to disappoint, particularly the member for Brantford, who has already done his review of my speech before I even began.

This is supposed to be about the throne speech and a view from Niagara West–Glanbrook. You may recall that the throne speech took place in early December 2007. You might think it odd, as you're watching at home, why today in mid-March, March 18, we're still thinking about

the throne speech. Well, the reality is that this Legislature sat for a grand total of 10 days, a grand total of 10 days since the election of October 10, 2007.

In fact, the Legislature, I think, last actually sat in June 2007. It was recessed. The election campaign happened; the election was October 10. Then, with great alacrity, with amazing speed and determination, Dalton McGuinty made a decision not to call the Legislature into session for a couple months after the election because he was so full of vinegar to get to work with his exciting agenda from the last campaign. So we'll recall we sat for a grand total of 10 days, and that's why I'm speaking on the throne speech now on March 18, 2008.

I want to say too, and my colleague from Brantford will recall, I don't think there is a single government bill that was actually debated and passed in the last legislative session, which I found to be rather disappointing as well. You would think that in the session immediately after the election campaign the government would begin to implement some kind of agenda, some sort of vision for the province—by way of example, to take on one of the biggest issues of the day: the flight of 180,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs from the province of Ontario. But no, no such bill was brought forward; no such program was brought through the Ontario Legislature.

In fact, I think the only bill we really debated, although not passed, was one to ban certain kinds of snack foods in cafeterias, if you'll recall. I know my colleague the former principal, and in many ways still principal, from Brant applauds the legislation. I would say, though, that there may be some general support in the chamber for getting rid of Hostess Twinkies from cafeterias or chips and what have you. I just cannot believe that that is the most compelling, clear and present issue, even in education today. I'll give you some examples.

We have had, sadly, many cases of extreme violence happening in our schools in Ontario. The media were seized not too long ago by the Falconer report about what had happened in the Toronto school board. I'll read you a quote from an article of September 3, 2007: "One week before Jordan Manners was killed at C.W. Jefferys, a student at an east-end Toronto high school was severely beaten by as many as 50 students as 200 others watched." The article goes on to say, "Almost all the city's high schools have had their share of assaults on teachers or students, not to mention bullying and intimidation."

Obviously it's a major issue here in the city of Toronto and a major issue in other parts of Ontario. But instead of acting on this significant issue of concern to students, teachers and parents, we decided to concentrate on banning certain types of snack foods from the cafeterias. I think it's showing the vacuousness of the government's legislative agenda, or lack thereof, in the last session.

This session, as we come back after a long recess that did not see us sit through the end of December, January and February, the government similarly has prioritized banning smoking in automobiles. I don't know many people who actually do still smoke in automobiles with

children in them. But this is what the government has highlighted as one of their main priorities for the upcoming session, never mind the fact that 70,000 talented Ontario workers have gone to other provinces—and not just Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia, but even out east—to make their living and raise their families. Never mind that fact; never mind the fact that the total combined manufacturing job losses in all the other provinces combined are less than the manufacturing job losses in Ontario. One of the government's priorities, instead of addressing that crisis in our economy, is to bring forward a piece of legislation to ban smoking in cars, which I think is probably only done by a very small part of the population. I'm not sure a piece of legislation is going to stop it anyway. I wanted to point out that not a single government bill has passed, and their focus has been on banning junk food and smoking in automobiles, to see if the legislation actually has some enforcement mechanisms in it. We have not actually seen that yet. I don't think it's been introduced into the Ontario Legislature.

I would suggest that, in response to the speech from the throne in that initiative, if Dalton McGuinty truly wanted to do something about reducing smoking, he would take some strong initiatives to fight illegal cigarettes in the province of Ontario. It has gone from urban legend to common commentary of individuals selling cigarettes out of the trunks of their cars near local high schools. I think a significant portion of smokers in my riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook drive to the Six Nations reserve to purchase tobacco, which I don't believe is supposed to be happening, to take it out of the reserve to the non-native population.

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A study by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit found that 37% of Ontario smokers avoided paying tobacco taxes by purchasing illegal cigarettes. The Ontario Convenience Stores Association estimates that the province is losing almost \$600 million per year from lost tobacco and sales taxes. So a major exodus of funding that could come in to support valuable programs like health care and education is going into the black market, fuelling organized crime. I've not seen a single initiative from the McGuinty government to butt out illegal cigarettes. In fact, it seems like they are afraid to take this issue on.

If they truly want to do something about combating smoking—as opposed to the initiative they're taking, which grabs some headlines but ultimately I don't think will make that much of a difference, because I don't think people smoke that much in their cars with kids anyway; if they do, they shouldn't—a real way to take a bite out of illegal cigarettes is enforcement mechanisms in some of those areas that I mentioned. There's no doubt that the illegal cigarettes, because they are so cheaply priced, are encouraging more smoking and encouraging more young people to take up the cigarette habit. So maybe we'll see some action on that. Maybe now that we've met for the 12th day since the October 10 election, we'll see some initiatives from the government to truly fight smoking through cutting off the black market.

You may recall as well that we were scheduled to come back into session on February 25. As I said, the House recessed back in December and we sat for a total of 10 days, and then the McGuinty government announced, "Well, we're not going to sit for a while yet." I guess they didn't have any legislation prepared to implement whatever agenda was supposed to be contained in the throne speech, so the recess was pushed back until yesterday. By the way, happy St. Patrick's Day to you, Mr. Speaker, one day late.

You would have thought that we would have taken some time since December to address some of these pressing issues. As I said, Ontario is last or second-to-last in growth and job creation in all of Canada. We've seen developments since the throne speech where greenbelt farmers with thousands of acres of grape and tender fruit land now no longer have a market to sell in because of closure of processors. As my colleague from Welland had mentioned, CanGro, an operator in Niagara which was the only processing-canning factory this side of the Rockies in Canada, has sadly announced that they're closing their doors, throwing hundreds out of work and having significant detrimental impacts on growers in our area who depended on that canning factory for their peaches and pears.

Dalton McGuinty likes to boast about the greenbelt, but basically all we've seen him do is draw a series of lines on the map and then simply walk away from any obligation, which I believe he has, because of his legislation to support the farmers who actually try to make a living in the greenbelt. The Minister of Agriculture hopefully will be paying very close attention and will be acting to support our tender fruit Growers who no longer have a market.

I had hoped to see—maybe we still will see, now that we're in the second day of this new session—some activity by the government in this respect. But since the sad news was announced months ago, we have not had much of a reaction from the Dalton McGuinty government.

There was a piece of legislation introduced today by the finance minister. He did a press conference, you may recall, last week, where he announced that additional surpluses beyond a certain level would go to municipalities for infrastructure needs. I suspect one of the reasons why he did that press conference was because there will be very little for municipalities in the upcoming budget. That's probably why he did that announcement beforehand. There was no legislation given out at the press conference, by the way, just the minister's example of the \$800-million figure. Well, we saw today, as my colleague from Beaches—East York, the critic, noted quite well in his comments, where the bill substance didn't actually meet at all with what the minister said was going to be an initiative, and I thank my colleague for giving me some notes. This is the compendium of the so-called Investing in Ontario Act, 2008.

We expected a bill that would say that, if there were some surpluses beyond a certain level, they would go to

municipal infrastructure. Here's what the bill actually says: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council"—as we know, cabinet—"would be authorized to prescribe by regulation the recipients to whom payments may be made, the purposes for which payments may be made, the method of and basis for calculating the payments, the activities in which the Minister of Finance may engage in furtherance of the purposes of this act...." When you actually go inside the bill, they define a recipient as any group that is a not-for-profit that is eligible for funding under this act. The bill doesn't say anywhere in it, "municipalities."

By way of example—not to bring up a sore issue with my colleagues across the floor—the much-vaunted Ontario cricket association, the world's most famous cricket association, the recipient of a \$1-million grant under their last end-of-year Liberal slush fund, would be eligible for funding under this program.

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't know if my colleague from Essex realizes this, but the bill the minister introduced today would enable the Ontario cricket association to receive yet another slush fund grant.

Interjection: Good.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I hear my colleague across the way saying, "Good." I think that the taxpayers would strongly disagree with the notion that slush funds should be used to finance groups like the cricket association because of Liberal connections, as opposed to being based on merit.

The finance minister said one thing at his press conference and we found it was entirely different when he came here before the Legislature. As my colleague from Beaches–East York has also pointed out, the compendium notes that, "Should the surplus exceed an amount set in the regulations, then the regulations would identify municipalities as recipients for 2007-08 and provide for payments to municipalities for capital investments." Again, that's not in the bill; that's the intention of the minister. But notice that they specifically say, "for the 2007-08 fiscal year," meaning that all bets are off for any future fiscal years. It could be to finance cricket associations and the like, of which we saw in the spring of last year, that caused, finally, a cabinet minister to lose his position.

I do want to note that while some municipal leaders may have had their hopes up—and you know why they had their hopes up? Because this government has shown no commitment to a transparent process for funding municipal capital infrastructure. It seems to be that grants are steeped in a lot of political decisions. The announcement may have sounded good to some municipalities, but now when they actually see the bill, they'll see that any group or partnership of individuals could qualify for that funding. Mind you, let's be clear: That's not debated here in the Ontario Legislature; there's no bill to do so. It is cabinet, behind closed doors, that would make all of these decisions sometime in the summer. I'm sure, just coincidentally, those decisions will be

made in the summer of 2011, just before the next election, to dole out more of the political slush funds.

The other thing I should point out is that if this is the funding mechanism that the McGuinty government views as appropriate for municipal capital investment, it is very lacking. Basically it means that after the end-of-year spending sprees take place, which I think were about \$3.6 billion in the last two fiscal years—after they do all the shovelling of the dough out the door to beat the March 31 deadline to spend that money, only after those slush funds do the municipalities get any kind of consideration—that is, if the finance minister is good for the words he said in his press conference. It certainly is not a predictable, not a transparent and not a fair funding mechanism for capital projects for municipalities.

A much better way, as my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has suggested, is the gas tax funding, which would be predictable to municipalities, which all would benefit from, not simply those with transit but those like Pelham, Grimsby and Lincoln in my riding of Niagara West–Glanbrook, which also would like to use those funds to invest in roads and bridges.

Let me also point out, while I'm on the topic of Pelham—and my colleague beside me, Mr. Kormos, worked very hard to advance the issues of Pelham over the last number of years and was rewarded for it by a strong show of support from Pelham voters in the previous election. Now Pelham is in my riding. I've enjoyed working with him on a number of issues, including getting that berm stopped and now removed in Fenwick. It took both of us and some local residents to bring some of that berm juice here to the door of the Premier's office.

Mr. Peter Kormos: We moved a berm and a minister.

Mr. Tim Hudak: A berm and a minister were both moved, the member points out.

Speaking about funding for municipalities, Pelham found out through the press yesterday that they would no longer be receiving any Ontario municipal partnership fund monies. The government had said that they'd be providing stable funding to municipalities. That certainly is not the case with Pelham. Granted, Pelham's grant was sharply reduced. They used to receive the CRF, the community reinvestment fund, under the PC government. They scrapped that to bring in their own OMPF, the Ontario municipal partnership fund. That slashed the amount of money that Pelham, Lincoln and Grimsby received. Pelham was reduced to only \$26,000, but at least they had some funding coming from the province. They found out by way of press release that that funding now has been eliminated altogether. No word from the minister's office; no explanation; simply, when the grants went off, they were off the list.

I'll say to my colleagues the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Finance that I hope they will clear that up immediately. If the government is promising—I know that suggesting that the McGuinty government follow through on promises may be a bit of a stretch. I want to give them the benefit of the doubt, and I

would strongly suggest that, at the very least, they restore Pelham's funding dollar for dollar. I think it should be higher. I think Pelham's rurality should be recognized by this funding formula; it currently fails to do so. At the very least, make sure they get the same amount of money they received in previous fiscal years.

We did our best, I think, as colleagues here in the opposition, to try to hold the government to account in the last session, as short as it was. We are now back in session, hopefully for a bit longer than the much-abbreviated first session of the Legislature of Dalton McGuinty's second mandate.

I, as the member for Niagara West–Glanbrook, will bring issues forward, as I have on fighting the gypsy moth infestation and trying to get a health card clinic into the Mount Hope area. We brought forward some issues, with some success, about getting drivers' licences offices restored in Smithville and Grimsby; I'm pleased that has moved ahead.

Certainly, those communities impacted by the greenbelt legislation and then Dalton McGuinty's walking away from his responsibilities—much like an absentee landlord. Dalton McGuinty, when it comes to the greenbelt, is an absentee landlord. He drew the lines on a map and then walked away from any obligation. When

you see CanGro close its doors; when you see Cadbury Schweppes, which had produced grape juice, close their doors; when you see a sweet cherry processing line in Vineland shut down and no longer use local cherries—sadly, that has left several thousand acres of tender fruit land without a market to go to. The federal government, to their credit, recently came through. Credit goes to Dean Allison and Rick Dykstra and Rob Nicholson for working on this—about \$26 million to assist in a transition program. Sadly, the province of Ontario is not matching that funding. Other provinces have matched that funding and brought forward their 40% share.

Mr. Robert Bailey: AWOL.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Ontario is AWOL, as my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton says—an absent-without-leave landlord.

I do hope that in the session ahead of us we will see some action on these files, as well as the finance issues we discussed earlier today, to make our province again attractive for jobs and investment.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being past 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1803.

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