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(Hansard)**

Thursday 27 March 2008

Jeudi 27 mars 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 27 March 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 27 mars 2008

The House met at 1000.

Prayers.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

DAY NURSERIES AMENDMENT ACT
(NOT FOR PROFIT
CORPORATIONS), 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES GARDERIES
(PERSONNES MORALES
À BUT NON LUCRATIF)

Ms. Horwath moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 26, An Act to amend the Day Nurseries Act to limit the approval of corporations to not for profit corporations / *Projet de loi 26, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les garderies afin de limiter l'agrément de personnes morales aux personnes morales à but non lucratif.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Ms. Horwath, you have up to 10 minutes.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I wanted to start out by saying that I truly believe that all members of this House would agree that children are our future. In fact, I'm sure that every single one of you has either used that phrase before or certainly has nodded in agreement when you've heard that used by someone else. I put to you that as members of this place, we actually have an obligation to Ontario's youngest children, an obligation that says we must do everything in our power to ensure that they are given every chance, every support, every tool that we as a society can provide to ensure that the mantle they take on, that mantle of our future, is something that they can handle with every bit of success that they, as individuals and as groups of people, are capable of achieving.

How do we do that? I would put to you that we do that by ensuring that the programs and services that we provide are of the highest quality, of the greatest calibre, ensuring that our system of early learning and care is befitting of a province like Ontario; ensuring that we have a child care system that delivers a universal, accessible, affordable, developmentally appropriate environment for our children in their most important and formative years.

Members in this place may be surprised to learn that there is not a system like that currently here in Ontario.

In fact, there is no system per se of child care in Ontario. Ontario continues to have a patchwork of services scattered across the province that has little consistency, accessibility and availability in fees, in educational programming and in staffing quality. Sadly, there is no current policy, no current proactive approach in Ontario, to ensure that we get to where we need to be to equip our children with the tools that we can provide to ensure their success. I hope that by the end of this debate, members will see fit to support this bill; to allow it to continue to the committee stage in order for a fulsome consultation and discussion to take place.

I also want to make sure that members are very clear about what this bill does and doesn't do. It does amend the Day Nurseries Act to restrict future child care licences to the not-for-profit sector. I emphasize the word "future." It does not in any way threaten the existing for-profit child care providers across the province who are currently operating licensed child care centres. It does not require families to participate in child care. It does not insinuate a removal of resources from other kinds of care. It is a very short, very simple, very specific bill that does one thing and one thing only: It amends the Day Nurseries Act to provide that future licensing of child care centres is restricted to the not-for-profit sector only. That's it, period; that's the bill.

So why, you might ask, is this important? Very simply, it's important because it's a fundamental time for child care in Ontario right now. It's an historic time for child care in Ontario. The reality is that the bill, in large part, deals with the issue of quality and a sub-issue of timing.

There is an article that was published about a year ago, when the Early Years Study 2 came out, and it speaks to why quality child care is so important. I thought it was important to share that with members. The article was in the Record, and it says:

"A growing body of worldwide research shows clearly that investing in early child programs before age three produces dramatic long-term results, not only for better child learning, but also for lower crime and fewer physical and mental health problems later.

"And the cost savings are enormous, with one study estimating that society saves more than \$17 for every dollar invested in early childhood programs"—17 to 1: that's the value of investing in quality early childhood development programs.

The article goes on to talk about specific studies that were done in particular communities, but I fear I'm going

to run out of time, so I'll leave those studies for people to look up on the Internet and review.

The reality is, every study that has ever taken place in the last 30 years shows very, very clearly not only the importance of quality, but the fact that the higher-quality early learning in education comes from delivery in the not-for-profit sector. That's not something that I'm making up; that's something that is borne out by study after study after study. In fact, approximately 15% higher quality has been measured in some of the studies in the not-for-profit sector. I ask you to consider, members: Do Ontario's children deserve to have 15% less quality? I certainly don't think so, and I hope that you don't think so.

What is the "quality" argument about? The quality argument is all about the fact that, like many, many labour-intensive types of services, like schools—my friend Rosario Marchese is here; he is our critic for education—like in the education sector, like in the health care sector, it's hands-on, one-on-one work with people that makes the difference. That's where the quality comes from. It comes from the staffing levels. The reality is that, not unlike public education and not unlike health care, the same rings true for child care: You have to have high-quality staff; you have to have staff who are paid well; you have to have staff who are committed to their careers in child care and in early learning. In order to achieve that commitment and those staffing levels that are consistent and long-term, you need to have funding that is not withered away into the pocket of a private operator.

Unfortunately, there are very few places where you can cut corners in places like child care centres. One of the places where corners get cut in the for-profit sector is, quite frankly, in wages. If you can't provide wages and professional development opportunities for your staff, your staff are soon going to be leaving your child care centre and moving on to another centre that is more appropriately supporting their needs. So the bottom line is that the quality argument has a heck of a lot to do with the extent to which staffing is remunerated at an appropriate level and supported appropriately. Having said that, I think people would recognize that staff turnover is something that also would disrupt the children and destabilize the centre. Of course, system-wide, that is something that we experience already and that we know happens in other jurisdictions as well.

People might wonder why this is important right now. I'm telling you that the importance of this bill coming forward right now is because we are now in a situation here in Ontario where there are significant threats to our existing system, significant threats to what is currently the majority of our providers here in Ontario, which is the not-for-profit sector. The threat comes specifically from an organization that has set up shop here in Canada, that is searching around to gobble up some of the existing centres here in Ontario. It's a multinational corporation based in Australia, and one of my colleagues later will give you some of the specific information about what's happened in Australia.

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They went from a system of having a far greater majority of not-for-profit centres, but they decided not to come up with any real public policy around not-for-profit expansion. Lo and behold, a couple of years later, a vast majority of providers in Australia are now in the for-profit sector. And what's happened? There is no access to child care in many parts of that country. Fees for parents have gone through the roof. There's been a significant reduction in quality. There have been situations where the for-profit conglomerates—this particular one actually operates over 2,300 centres on four different continents. They are an organization whose main priority, like any for-profit corporation, like any publicly-traded for-profit corporation—and, God bless, maybe that's the way the world works; that's fine. But not in child care, because the priority in child care should be the care of the children, the learning of the children, the development of the children.

The priority—just by definition—in the for-profit sector, particularly this model that is now threatening Ontario, is shareholder return on investment. That's what corporations do. That's their job; that's their mission. That's what they're created to do. It's the nature of their business. We don't think that early learning and care has anything to do with the making of profits and the growing of shareholder value. We think it's about the growing of children. I think it's about the growing of public value and of a society where our kids are given the tools that they need to succeed. In fact, all of the studies indicate very clearly that that's what necessary to be able to have a successful model.

We need only to look at Quebec; we see what Quebec is doing in terms of child care. We know that other provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, have already gotten rid of any expansion in the for-profit sector. We need to do that as well in Ontario. Some of our Ontario cities—Toronto, Ottawa and Sudbury, recently—have already said no to expansion into the for-profit sector. They're staying in the not-for-profit sector. The preponderance of evidence is significant.

This province needs to take a proactive stand. We need to make sure that the expansion of child care in this province is only in the for-profit sector. I urge members to please allow this bill to go into committee where we can have a more fulsome debate. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you for giving me the chance to speak on Bill 26, An Act to amend the Day Nurseries Act to limit the approval of corporations to not for profit corporations. I read this bill many different times. I was listening to the member who introduced this bill a few minutes ago when she was talking about the whole intent of this bill. I have no doubt in my mind that she has good intentions and wants to protect the children in the province of Ontario.

But as a matter of fact, I wonder if the member went back to the rules, regulations and laws in this province.

She probably didn't know that we as a province, as the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, don't make deals with corporations, with child care corporations or others. So the whole thing happens through social organizations and also municipalities across the province of Ontario.

As you know, we fought very hard to sign an agreement with the federal government to create a national daycare, and the province of Ontario especially would have benefited from that agreement to a great deal. Sadly, this agreement was cancelled after the government changed in 2007. That agreement was intended to support almost 25,000 child care spots across the province of Ontario.

Despite the cancellation of this agreement, the province of Ontario and the Minister of Children and Youth Services went ahead and approved 22,000 spots across Ontario. Therefore, I don't see that if this bill would pass or not pass, it would make any difference, because we already don't interfere with any deals going on between municipalities and child care spots or organizations across the province. Our statistics show that the ratio between private and not-for-profit is almost 87 for non-profit versus about 13 for for-profit across the province. This number has been consistent for the last 10 years. So I don't see why the member opposite is making a big issue about it. In the meantime, we have tough regulations and good standards to make sure that the quality of child care in the province, and also the delivery of child care organizations in Ontario, has to be able to provide the province the [inaudible] for the children on a regular basis—update about their activities on a daily basis.

I want to tell you something very important. Almost a month ago, I had the chance to visit one of the child care spots in my riding of London—Fanshawe, called Simply Kids. It is a great small child care centre. The kids come from different backgrounds to this centre. This child care is, amazingly, very good. If anyone in this assembly gets the chance, go and visit that place. It's run by an individual. It's a small one, not a huge one. It's organic in the community—based in the community—and it works for the community.

The amazing thing about this child care is that the families of the kids have the ability to watch their kids on a regular basis from their home. Every class has a camera, and the parents can watch their kids—whether they're playing, studying, learning or interacting with the person who's looking after them—from their home. It's amazing. Also, the camera is connected only to their room. The family cannot have access to all the rooms; only to the specific room where their child is. This camera is also connected with the playground. The family can monitor their kids while they're playing outside, and can see how the people who are providing services deal with them on a regular basis. I think that's amazing.

This is a for-profit. If you are profit or non-profit, it doesn't mean: Are you going to deliver a good service?

The most important thing is that we have rules and regulations in place to protect the quality of the delivery of child care services in the province. That is the most important thing.

When we were fighting hard to maintain the agreement with the federal government, the member who stood up a few minutes ago and introduced Bill 26 didn't support us. It was a huge fight with the federal government to maintain that agreement which would provide 25,000 extra child care spots across the province. That's why I don't agree with her, in terms that passing or not passing this bill can change the whole image. The most important thing is to have rules and regulations to protect the quality of child care spots and spaces in the province and to work hard to create some kind of agreement with the federal government, with the municipalities, in order to create a good working relationship to make sure that all the spots are safe and deliver in a good fashion, in a good way, in the interests of the kids of the province.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to join the debate on the issue of child care in Ontario. This is an issue of great importance to many of my constituents. We hold the responsibility, as legislators, to devise policies that suit the needs of Ontarians, meet their priorities and benefit their children.

As I regard the child care issue, I see a few clear principles that we need to follow as we make decisions. The first of these is the principle of parental choice. Moms and dads deserve to have every possible choice that suits their child care needs. They do not need or want a single, rigid system designed for everyone. Some families prefer a tax credit, with one parent staying at home or with child care being provided by a close friend or relative. Others want to make use of child care facilities, either publicly funded and run or privately funded and run. Many families do not need or want any state involvement in how they raise their children, and their views should be respected as well.

The second principle is for the government to recognize that it is up to families to raise their children. The state must respect the wishes of parents and not close off any child care options. Parents do know best, and they certainly know better than the state what is best for their children. Children learn best when they have a strong role model to follow, and that's the one at home. The bill before the House today does not meet either of these principles. It simply rules out one child care option for families. It makes no changes in the provision for standards. It makes no comment about the size of child care facilities or their quality.

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The member's question yesterday referred to the "risk that these new for-profit daycare corporations pose to the movement for universal accessible, affordable and regulated child care." To me, this is the wrong way to look at the issue. The role of this House is not to please a movement or a lobby group; our role is to do what is best for families and children. It was the PC government in 1998 that provided the first child care tax credit in

Ontario's history. While in office, we doubled the total funding to children's social services, spending record amounts on child care. Most importantly, we stood for a balanced child care system.

The last PC government also recognized that early childhood development was a vital investment. We launched 103 early years centres across Ontario. They offer core universal programs such as parenting classes, early literacy programs and workshops on child development. These centres let local communities decide on how best to meet their own needs. As our party knows that parents are the best ones to raise their own children, we also know that many parents want assistance with skills and expertise. The early years centres offer this assistance. A balanced approach is the best for child care.

Parents need to find out which options suit them and then have those offered to them. Let moms and dads choose what is best for their own children. We must not take any option off the table.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to start off by giving you a couple of comparisons with what is going on in Australia and what is going on right here at home in Sudbury. Over the past 17 years, the face of child care in Australia has changed dramatically. In the early 1990s, about 15% of the centre-based services were owned by small commercial operators. The rest were operated by non-profit societies. Today, about 70% are for-profit commercial operations, with approximately 25% of all centre-based child care provided by the largest child care corporation in the world. Conversely, in Canada in 2004, the last year for which these figures are available, 79% of the centre-based services were non-profit. The rest are commercial, most commonly small businesses run by independent owner-operators. Since 1990, parent fees have risen 123%—more than doubled—while household income has only increased by 62%. The most dramatic escalation occurred since the first Australia child care corporation listed publicly in 2001, with others following in 2002. In 2006, the cost of child care rose faster than almost any other monitored good or service, outstripped only by vegetables and gasoline. In fact, the child care price index has surged 65% in the past four years. Why do you think these people are getting involved? For profit.

Government spending doubled between 1991 and 1998, from \$525 million to \$1.135 billion per year, and it has almost doubled again since then. In May 2006, the federal budget set out nearly \$10 billion for child care over the next four years, and almost all of it is earmarked for child care benefits and a 30% tax rebate for out-of-pocket expenses for operators, both of which were initiated in response to the soaring costs of child care. Bloomberg reported that about 40% of the largest Australian corporation revenue comes from government subsidies. Others report the percentage to be even higher. According to the latest annual report from ABC, its worldwide profits are now \$143.1 million for 2006-07. The same corporation spent over \$700 million last year buying centres in the US, Australia, New Zealand and the

UK, and will continue to acquire and develop child care centres this year.

Now that we've had the horror story from Australia, I would like to go locally. The city of Sudbury has strong and positive relationships with five private owner-operators of licensed child care in the greater Sudbury area that have been developed over many years. However, this type of child care is a difficult fit for the child care system that the city envisions for the future. The potential conflict, where the city provides direct operating fund grants to private, for-profit operators, makes it more difficult to move toward the vision of child care as a publicly funded system of early education accessible to all families.

As with the public system of education in Ontario, where private schools may be licensed but do not receive public funding, the vision of public systems for early education would not exclude private, for-profit child care from opening their doors. However, public funding in the form of operating grants and fee subsidies would not be provided to for-profit, commercial child care centres.

This bill, in my opinion, is long overdue. I commend the member for Hamilton Centre for bringing this forward. Bigger is not better. We've witnessed that, even in cities. Let's take greater London, England. They have now gone back to the borough system of 100,000 people, including all their services, child care and other things. Bigger was not better.

Offshore control: Here we go again. Not only are we eroding our base industries; we're now eroding our education system. We're putting the control of our kids' future in the hands of overseas owners that are there for profit, not there for quality, not there for decent wages for local people who are employed in these daycare centres.

Talking about neighbourhood involvement, a lot of the people who work in these facilities are local moms, trained in our area, who have a stake in our community. They want to provide even better care than they do. But if they're under the direction of a foreign company, with their rules and their out-the-door/in-the-door policies to make more money, I'm not quite sure the quality is there.

Bad wages: Are you going to keep quality people employed, or is it going to become like another Wal-Mart? Are we going to be working for minimum wages—bad daycare, untrained and unlicensed people running these daycares? I think that may happen as it goes down the road.

So I have some great concerns. If the government doesn't support this bill, I think we're going to make a big mistake, and down the road we're going to regret not supporting this bill at this time.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I am pleased to be able to stand here today to speak to the bill. As a mother and a grandmother, and not just as an MPP, I've had to struggle with child care in a rural area over the years. When I look at this and hear someone say, "Well, we don't want to support the for-profits," for me, in my communities—and I'm sure for all rural and northern communities—the

issue is what's best for the child. It's about what is quality child care, what is affordable to the family and, more importantly, what is accessible. When we, as parents, need to have child care, we look for those things. We don't look to see whether they're for-profit or not-for-profit. It might be nice to support one or the other, but that's not necessarily the first question in our minds.

In rural communities, it's an extreme struggle to find child care on a seasonal basis. When you're a farmer and you need to get out and help with the cropping and the work on the farm, you want something safe for your children. You don't want to take them on the tractor with you; you don't want to take them into the barn with you. You want something safe for your children. You need to find something close by, and someone who is willing to work with you on a seasonal basis and in off-hours.

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I'm really not concerned about big box in rural and northern Ontario. We are not big enough for a big box. We are not the kinds of communities that they are looking at, but we do need the child care, and we do not always attract the not-for-profits. We have a number of people in our communities who use this as an opportunity to employ themselves. They use that as an opportunity to employ their neighbours and they also provide a service that's very important, that's very local; it's very culturally sensitive, in many cases. These are the kinds of things that we need for our children. These are the things we look for as parents.

I live in a community that is about 45 minutes outside the city of London. Many of my constituents work in the city of London, but they don't want to take their children there for child care, which is where we would find most of the larger child care facilities. We would not find very many—we do have not-for-profits, but they are not large operations. Most of them are for-profit in my communities.

As a mother who doesn't want to take her child a great distance for child care—we want to be able to have our children close to home. That way, if something happens and the child care calls and says that you need to come pick up the child because they're sick or something has happened, we often call grandparents, aunts and uncles, a neighbour, a good friend to go and pick the child up. That is because we want them close to home. If we have to do that and we have to ask someone to come from the home area into a large centre, because that's the only place that actually ends up being able—under this type of an amendment, would that be the only way we would have child care?

That is totally unfair to my constituents. I feel very strongly about this. As I look around my community and I know the struggle that we still have in rural communities to get accessible child care, I think we're tying the hands here, and we're making it more difficult to find that child care that we need in our rural communities. So I'm very opposed to this. I want to see us move forward with quality, affordability and accessibility. Those are the keys. It's not about who is operating, because I don't

think as parents most people really ask that question—unless they have a lot of options, but most rural communities don't. I find it's important that we make all avenues open and leave them open for parents.

Mr. Peter Shurman: We live in a day and age where two incomes are no longer considered a luxury but a necessity in order for many families to make ends meet.

Each and every day, parents, especially those of children not yet old enough for school, are forced to make serious decisions about appropriate care for their children so they can go to work to earn the money needed to ensure a roof over their family's heads and food on the dinner table. Some are blessed with friends or loved ones who can watch their kids during the workday, but many are not. Often a parent is forced to stay home due to a child's illness, thus missing a much-needed day's pay.

We've seen time and again how this government ignores the plight of ordinary Ontarians. They remain in the state of wilful ignorance about the state of this province's economy despite repeated warnings from respected economists. Yet as the McGuinity government keeps its collective head buried in the sand, the problems facing the parents of Ontario's children become more dire with each passing day. Rather than fostering an environment in Ontario that provides parents with a broad spectrum of choices for the care of their children, this government is steadfast in its belief that parents do not know what is best for their own children. When can we expect a modicum of individual respect and dignity?

Indeed, I believe that no one knows how to take care of a child better than a loving parent. Each of us here wants what is best for our children and our grandchildren; many of us were inspired to become MPPs so we could make Ontario a little better for them. The people we represent are no different from any of us in this chamber. No parent wants to be told by a faceless government how to raise her or his children. No two families are alike. Each family exists with its own set of circumstances. Indeed, you cannot legislate a cookie-cutter approach to such an important issue as child care.

It is our role as politicians to enable parents to make the best possible decisions for their families and to support the choices that each individual family makes. What works for a family in my riding of Thornhill may not work for a family in Thunder Bay. We must respect this fact.

What we need in this province is a range of policies that respects the diversity of families and assists them in their quest to determine the best care for their children. What we don't need are policies, such as the one proposed today, that will unreasonably limit the choices available to responsible and caring parents. Parents aren't ignorant. Give them the right to choose.

There are those in this chamber who think we should imitate the Quebec daycare model. Let me share with you some thoughts from a report of the L'Institut économique de Montréal on the subject of Quebec's model. The report cites "two-year waiting lists, lack of parental choice and a proliferation of daycare strikes as the main

shortcomings in the Quebec system since its 1997 reform under a Parti Québécois administration. 'Access to a subsidized space depends neither on the parents' financial circumstances, nor on the needs of children who may require special help.... The only factor that now plays a role is the rank of a child on a waiting list, i.e., bureaucratic convenience.'" Do we really want this for Ontario's children?

There's more in an editorial by the National Post's Norma Kozhaya. She writes: "One of the few extensive studies on the quality of Quebec child care facilities reported, in 2005, that 61% had an overall quality rated as minimal (with scores of three to 4.9 out of seven) while 12% were rated as inadequate and 27% as good. Government subsidy and regulation, clearly, does not ensure high quality."

Some parents believe an institutional setting will assist their children with early learning and socialization skills. Others believe a child can best be looked after by a venerable member of the family. Still others believe it is best for one of the parents to remain home during those formative years. The decisions made are based on each family's individual circumstances. Shift work, commute times and child care costs are all factors that impact parental decisions on child care. The best thing we can do as politicians is to broaden the range of safe child care options available to parents, not to presume that we know what's best for their children.

The federal government provided a one-time sum of almost \$300 million to Ontario for child care. Whatever happened to that? Let me point to the federal universal care benefit program. It is a new program that issues a \$100 monthly payment to families for each child under the age of six to cover the cost of child care. That way, families can decide what type of child care is best. That is choice. That is what I'm talking about: giving parents the ability to decide what is best for their child.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm very happy to be here to support my colleague from Hamilton Centre and to support her bill, which we believe is a very good bill.

As I listen to the Tories and the Liberals—more the Tories—what they have to say is very predictable. The point about choice—very predictable. They are allergic to anything public; it's embedded in their genes. It has been embedded in their genes since time immemorial, and it will never go away.

What is surprising is the Liberals. They continue to amaze me and surprise me each and every day. Two members for whom I have some respect, or a lot of respect, depending on the issue, just stood up to talk about the idea of choice—couched in different language, but it's the same thing; it's all about choice.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Oh, come on.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Again, it's predictable, Jimmy, what you have to say. When the Tories were in power for eight long years, they spent not one cent in child care services, public or otherwise—not one cent. So am I surprised when two Tories stand up and say, "We like choice"? I'm not surprised.

When the Liberals stand up, am I surprised? No. They have \$300 million given to them by the federal government to spend on public child care services. Did they spend one cent of federal money on public, not-for-profit child care? Not one cent. Money that was given to them by the federal government to spend for that purpose, they kept in their own pocket to do whatever else they wanted to do. They have no commitment to public, not-for-profit child care.

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We have a public elementary and secondary school system in this country. Ninety-five per cent of our children are in a public system. This, it appears, the Liberals support; that, they support. But when it comes to child care they make the case that, "Well, in some cases we don't have public in our area. What are you going to do?" And in another case another individual says, "Well, I've been to some of these for-profit and they're not so bad," and they need choice. Please. How can you argue that a public system, elementary and secondary, is good and then argue that for child care, "Well, it's not so bad; you just have to make sure that you regulate it, and if people want to make money on children, that's okay"?

How could you make that leap and feel good to be Liberals? This is the problem with Liberals. You claim you have a heart on so many issues, and when you're put to the test, you fail each and every time. And God bless you. People seem to like it, they seem to like you, so you must be doing something right. I understand it. To take two contradictory positions is always a beautiful Liberal thing, and you win each and every time. The good people of Ontario, who don't know any better, who should know better, who ought to know better—who know or ought to know that you're not investing one single cent in child care—keep voting for you, so you must be doing something right. God bless you, all Liberals, on this side and the other side.

We have a public universal health care system that is gradually being eroded by the feds, who have an allergy to public institutions, and by Liberals under the Chrétien-Martin government who eroded the funding of public services, including child care, for many, many years, since 1993 when Jean Chrétien was elected. We have a universal public health care system that is gradually, incrementally being eroded, both by Conservative governments provincially and federally and by provincial Liberal governments here. You still pretend you have a commitment to universal health care as you gradually eat away at those public institutions.

Liberals say, "We want a universal health care system. Oh, no, we want a universal public elementary and secondary system, including the post-secondary," but when it comes to children, those things that we value the most, we say, "It doesn't matter that it's a public institution or a for-profit institution making money on the care of children." That's the commitment Liberals make in this place each and every time.

Why can't they learn from Quebec, which leads on so many issues, notwithstanding any comments made by my

friend from Thornhill? It has one of the best programs offered in Canada, and it has been offered by Quebec for a long time. Why can't we follow Quebec? Their child care is provided on a low-cost basis because it's subsidized by the government. It says to working men and women, "We value the fact that you have to work, that your children are an investment for us all, and that you cannot afford to pay the rates of \$7,000 to \$15,000 for each child for that care. We want to help as a government because we believe it's an obligation of government." But not here, not the Liberals—and let's forget about the Tories.

Please. Can't you look it up, do a little reading and say, "Why can Quebec do it, and we, who have been rich for so long in this province, with so much money, declare ourselves to be incompetent and unable to do the job?" Why do you do that? All it takes is just a little effort, a little will, a little left-leaning Liberal heart, for those of you who still have some of it left, to pull into that heart and say that Quebec does a good job. Some 64% of Quebec children have access to a licensed early learning and child care program—64%. You should look at those numbers and say, "Man, how do they do it? They have been poorer than we have for a long, long time. How do they do it?" But they have, and they've been leading.

We don't have to look to Europe, as well we should, in terms of the programs they provide in Europe at an early age, not for-profit but subsidized by governments. We could and should look at Europe, but we don't have to. We could just stay here. Travel a little bit to Quebec. It's not so far. You can access it by e-mail; you don't even have to travel there, for God's sake. It's in Canada. Parents here pay anything from \$7,000 to \$15,000 a year for one child—a lot of money. Most parents can't afford it.

Most parents who cannot afford it are waiting in line, and those who don't have access to that kind of support subsidy by government are going to unlicensed, unregulated child care. We don't know what those kids are getting in those unlicensed child care services. We don't know. I can't imagine the kind of care they're getting, and the government says that it's okay. It's part of the choice that parents have. We have a profound difference with Tories and Liberals on this particular issue.

We urge people who are watching, we urge people working in the public child care system to lobby their Liberal members on an ongoing basis and make this a campaign. Some Liberals will be torn. Some Liberals will feel guilty about this. You need to meet with them face to face and ask them for their position. It's got to be part of a campaign; otherwise it won't work.

We have said in this bill that we are grandparenting the services provided by the for-profit child care groups. We are grandparenting that; we don't want any other monopolies coming from another country to provide child care for profit for our children. We simply reject that as an option.

Those who are watching in this Legislature and on television: Make it a campaign. Go after your friendly

Liberals. There are some; not too many, but there are some. Go after them and make them feel guilty so that when they go to their Tuesday caucus meetings they are forced to debate this issue in a serious way and not allow themselves to be part of the same argument about choice. We reject it.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I'm glad to have an opportunity to say a few words on this debate.

First of all, I find it incredibly ironic that the NDP, especially at the federal level—Jack Layton—who got together a few years ago with their Conservative friends to bring down not just the federal Liberal government but also to bring down the most comprehensive child care plan ever proposed in this country—that child care plan went down the drain the moment the NDP and Jack Layton decided they would rather pursue their own personal agenda of taking down the Liberal government at the time, and take down the child care plan with it; let it go right down the drain and have that no longer exist.

Instead, what did the Conservatives bring forward? They brought forward a small allowance that is given monthly to parents, who've told me that that is not enough to provide them with any help whatsoever. The NDP knew this was going to happen when they collaborated with the Conservatives to bring down the Liberal government. If anyone, the NDP should be complaining with their federal sisters and brothers in Ottawa as to why they brought down that child care plan.

Also, I have to address the issue of Quebec. Again, as anyone in this Chamber now knows, Ontario provides a lot of money to the federal government. We are a province that provides and subsidizes the rest of Canada. We're not complaining, saying we don't want to subsidize or help other parts that may need help; that's fine. But we subsidize Quebec a lot, and Quebec is using Ontario dollars. If they use Ontario dollars, they're going to be able to create and put forward the kind of programming and funding, whether it be in child care or other areas, that we in Ontario can't do, and this is what the Premier continues to bring up.

We're not saying that we're not going to contribute at all, but billions of dollars through equalization flow out of Ontario and go to other parts of Canada, and I'm sure some of them land in Quebec and they end up getting the programs they want. Perhaps it's time that the NDP start pointing their guns and their arguments towards the federal government and telling them that they shouldn't be hurting us so much. This is something that has come up many times.

1050

But getting to the core of the issue, the Liberals have done here in Ontario a lot towards child care. My colleagues and myself have said that we've expanded the availability of child care for the creation of more than 22,000 new licensed child care spaces in the last three years. That's a remarkable achievement, when you think about it, considering all the other areas that we've focused on in Ontario. We invested \$142.5 million in 2007 to sustain more than 7,000 new licensed child care

spaces across Ontario. So we are involved in helping with child care.

We've launched a website to help parents find the information they need to make an informed decision about licensed child care. Our government is also raising the bar on quality by establishing a regulatory college of early childhood educators, the first of its kind in Canada. Childhood educators are going to have a college to strengthen the quality of early learning. We've gone on to appoint Dr. Charles Pascal to advise in implementing full-day learning. When implemented, the full-day learning program will free up thousands of child care spaces. And there are other accomplishments which, unfortunately, time doesn't permit me to list, but the bottom line is that we have invested \$142.5 million to 2007.

In closing, I'd like to say that in the riding of Scarborough Southwest—we've allowed a lot of new immigrants, a lot of new Canadians, to come to this province. They have come to me and they've said that they have needs and they have requirements. A lot of them take public transit and have to leave their kids at child care facilities. We have responded. We are funding the ones that presently exist. We are doing our very best to make them as good as possible. Again, a lot of people in my riding have young children that require daycare, but they're not complaining about the fact that there isn't daycare available. They want to make sure that the quality is good, and that quality is improving under the Liberal government.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I am pleased to rise this morning and join my colleagues in the thoughtful and antagonistic, at times, debate on the bill presented by the member from Hamilton East: Bill 26, Day Nurseries Amendment Act (Not for Profit Corporations), 2007. It certainly allows me to bring up later on some issues we have in the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. For the moment, for starters, I will be joining my other two colleagues who spoke previously from the party about the PC caucus and our fundamental beliefs in Ontario children and young people, and that parents are the best suited in their families to decide on their choice—I'll use that word again—in their child care decisions and their needs.

We agree, certainly, that affordable daycare and child care is important to all the health and well-being and the development of Ontario's children. I know the member from Scarborough Southwest has just mentioned that he doesn't have any problems in his riding with access to daycare, but that's certainly not the situation in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I've spoken several times in the Legislature about the Best Start child care spaces that the former Minister of Children and Youth Services decided to remove, after promising that they would come to the riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. For reasons we are still investigating, both the municipality and myself—questions about that—we hope that the new minister will look at this with fresh eyes. We've certainly asked for that, both verbally and in written letters to her.

But I think it's important to bring up the fact that the former Minister of Children and Youth Services—that ministry received a scathing report last year about the expenses and what went on in that ministry, brought forward—I mean, \$59,000 in luxury vehicles was spent; trips to the Caribbean, Argentina; other misspent monies that should have gone to hard-working Ontario families in respect to child care, and didn't. When the former minister decided to give 15,000 Best Start spaces in the province, my service provider for Kawartha-Victoria, which provides services in both Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes, received zero. We feel it was unjustified that we received zero Best Start spaces from the former minister. I've asked the Auditor General to investigate. I know the municipality of Kawartha Lakes, which would also be the service provider for Haliburton in this matter, has asked the Ombudsman to look into this, and, as I say, I've asked the minister to look into this issue with fresh eyes.

It's important to bring that up because we have challenges not only geographically but with a lot of low-income families in our riding, and the service providers, the municipalities, want to provide the best services possible. They're certainly at a disadvantage when they weren't allocated the initial Best Start spaces, a disadvantage that would be \$5 million over four years.

I know the member for Peterborough is looking at me kind of strangely, but certainly it's been brought to his attention many times.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes.

Mr. Jim Wilson: The best program in North America.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It is the best child program. Certainly there was federal money, as has been mentioned, that was given to the province. The accountability for where that money was spent—and the good work done by the previous Conservative government, no question, on early childhood education. This brings us to a bigger picture, and I know the member for Leeds-Grenville and the member for Niagara West-Glanbrook spoke yesterday in the budget debate about how the commitment to Ontario actually means taking responsibility for governing seriously. You keep pointing fingers at different governments, be they federal or municipal; everybody is at fault but yourselves. Again, I've said several times that the federal government gave you a lot of money. We're asking how you disbursed it in respect to the child care spaces.

I've brought my example forward several times in this Legislature, and I bring it forward again today because we don't want to let that go. That's still a lot of money to us in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, and we're at a disadvantage in providing services that we desperately need in that riding. All the other service providers in the rest of the province received funding. It's doesn't make sense, but we're still asking questions and I hope to get some responses and some answers from this government.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Don't hold your breath.

Ms. Laurie Scott: No, I won't hold my breath, because that is a long, long time and we've been fighting this for a long, long time.

Bill 26 has brought the opportunity to discuss the lack of this government's initiative in respect to child care spaces, and I welcome the debate this morning. We have some fundamental disagreements on the best way for child care to be delivered with private-public providers, but we welcome the initiative brought forward by the member for Hamilton Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Ms. Horwath, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have to say, I'm pretty shocked by the lack of information that some of the members in this House have and on which they are basing their decisions.

I want to start by addressing the claim that the member for Scarborough Southwest makes about government investment. This government has invested very little of Ontario dollars in child care in this province, and that's a fact. They promised quite some time ago over \$300 million of investment that would be brought into this child care sector, and it has not shown up. That's the reality. Any dollars that are being invested at all are coming from federal agreements, and those are running out soon. So I've got to hope the government is going to start taking some real action in Ontario in committing to child care.

1100

I also have to say that I don't think people were listening when I indicated in my initial remarks that we are not saying, and this bill does not say, "Let's get rid of the existing for-profit providers." In fact, I have long acknowledged, and so have many others in this sector, that it's because of lack of government investment, because of ignoring the needs of families and children in the province, that some of these for-profit providers have come to pass. The reality is that if we were investing what we should be investing in child care, then there would be no need, because the fulsome and bountiful public provision of child care would exist like it does in the province of Quebec.

But mark my words: Things are different in Ontario today than they were even two years ago. The reality is that the big bad wolf of the multinational corporation is breathing down the neck of the small providers here in Ontario, and the reality is that we do not want to see big-box child care. So it's not good enough for the government to close its eyes and pretend that everything is just the same. It's not the same. We're not talking about small, mom-and-pop operators like one of the members was talking about earlier. Absolutely not. We are talking about big corporations, corporate child care. That is not acceptable in the province of Ontario. It's not acceptable to me or to most parents. We have to pass this bill and get on with good child care in Ontario.

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI FAVORISANT
UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE

Mrs. Savoline moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act / Projet de loi 42, Loi modifiant la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée.

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

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise and recognize in the House a constituent in Burlington who has brought this issue to my attention, that we have a loophole in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. Mr. Ted Kindos is the owner and operator of Gator Ted's Tap and Grill, and others have joined him from Burlington.

I am proposing to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to include that "no person shall smoke tobacco or any controlled substance or hold lighted tobacco or any burning controlled substance in any enclosed public place or enclosed workplace," and also add, "or within 10 feet of that place."

The issue came to my attention some months ago when Mr. Kindos told me that he was being challenged by a patron who was smoking marijuana for medicinal purposes. My amendment does not cast judgment on those who smoke marijuana for relief of whatever ailment causes them to smoke it, and I want to make that perfectly clear. I am not trying to infringe on anybody's rights to take their own medication. However, what happens here is that the rights of the broader public then are infringed on if marijuana is allowed to be smoked in places where we have prohibited smoking tobacco.

When researching this issue, I really felt that there was a loophole in our legislation, one that folks could take opportunity with. I felt it was important to bring this forward and to close that loophole. I want to ensure that this follows on the intent of the original act, which was to create a safer environment. It really was to be a safety measure for the broader public against tobacco smoke, which we know is detrimental to people's health. What the original act did was, it banned smoking in enclosed public places and all enclosed workplaces; this happened a couple of years ago. Time has gone by and we're learning where, perhaps, the wrinkles are in the act. This gives us a way to close those gaps. The places included restaurants, bars, schools, private clubs, sports arenas, work vehicles, offices and entertainment venues, including casinos, bingo halls, and bowling and billiard establishments. What this act proposes to do is to include the prohibition of smoking controlled substances in all those places as well. If it stands as a safety measure for people's health in the original act, then it should be extended in this amendment to smoking controlled substances in public places as well.

It's really regrettable that we even have to legislate what I call a logical or a common-sense issue. Talking about this today, it may seem like, well, why wouldn't it include that? Well, it doesn't, and only legislation can change that. So I would like to say that what I'm bringing forward is about the principle. It's the principle of respecting the rights of folks who do not want to be subjected to second-hand smoke of any kind. What message do we send our Ontario residents or our children if we allow a loophole to stand?

What I think we're doing by moving forward with this amendment is to protect workers and the public from exposure to second-hand smoke. It will help ensure, I think, that the young people understand that we are not tolerant of this in our society in Ontario and perhaps pick up this deadly addiction.

Tobacco, as many of you know, is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Ontario. It kills 16,000 people every year. Tobacco-related diseases cause the Ontario economy almost \$2 billion yearly in health care. This results in \$2.6 billion in productivity losses and about 500,000 hospital days each year. We know that we need some relief in our health establishments, our hospitals. I think this goes yet one more step in protecting our public and keeping it as safe as we can.

It also, I believe, advocates for the right of business owners to protect and advocate, first of all, on behalf of their patrons, the majority of their patrons, and also on behalf of their business. What happens when patrons stop coming to a business is that the business loses money and eventually goes out of business. I think this act would go a long way to preventing that kind of thing from happening. The restaurant industry, as we all know, is a very competitive place, and even though there's a certain loyalty attached to attending one particular establishment, I think that in order to protect one's health, one's children's health, people will stop attending that establishment in order not to breathe that second-hand smoke. So we owe it to businesses that cater to patrons—the food service industry—to protect them against anybody who feels that this is an opportunity to actually go around the law. There are establishments, I think, that are at risk because this is happening, because police will not confront anybody who has a certificate to smoke marijuana for legal purposes. So when you can't count on the police to help you because of a certificate, then I think we have to legislate this into our Ontario laws. People have rights, and I respect those rights, but I think it goes without saying that with rights come responsibilities. Unfortunately, some people have to be legislated into those responsibilities.

Our businesses create jobs in our community. They provide good-quality jobs, they contribute to the economy in that way, but they also give back to the community. They give back in many ways. They give back through volunteerism. They have the right of this protection in Bill 42 to help them continue to be good corporate citizens, to be good constituents in our ridings and to provide an environment where they can run their businesses

without the risk of being challenged and without the risk of losing patrons because somebody is smoking, either trying to smoke in the establishment or right at the doorway of the establishment. I think this bill actually closes that loophole and provides us with the opportunity to make things right and continue with the intent that the bill set out to do back in May 2006, when we all agreed that smoking was bad for our health, that we were providing safety to residents in Ontario by creating the legislation in the first place and that this just follows on that legislation.

1110

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to commend the member for bringing forth this bill. We support this bill. However, here are a few concerns about enforcement and a rationale for this amendment.

Enforcement: Local public health units are responsible for ensuring compliance with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. In 2006, when the restriction on smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces was introduced, the government provided funding for enforcement, a commitment of \$5.5 million. The new provision brought forth by the member in restricting smoking within 10 feet of a public place or workplace will require a greater level of enforcement resources and will create an additional resource burden on the local public health units. Although we are supportive of the bill, once again, we want to make sure it is enforceable in a way that does not stress the local public health units.

Effects of second-hand smoking: We all know the health impacts of second-hand smoke on our communities. According to the Canadian Cancer Society, cigarettes produce about 12 minutes of smoke, yet the smoker may inhale only 30 seconds of smoke from that cigarette. The rest of the smoke lingers in the air for non-smokers and smokers to breathe. Second-hand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Many of these chemicals are known to cause cancer. Chemicals found in second-hand smoke include carbon monoxide, found in your car's exhaust; ammonia, found in window cleaners; cadmium, found in batteries; and arsenic, found in rat poison. Each year, more than 1,000 non-smoking Canadians die from second-hand smoke. This bill takes additional steps to ensure that fewer people are subjected to the dangers of second-hand smoke.

Second-hand smoke versus other pollutants: While this bill will lower the impacts of second-hand smoke on Ontarians and is important, we need to keep in mind that in many communities across Ontario the health impacts of second-hand smoke are far, far outweighed by widespread industrial pollution. I'll give you an example. If one of my fellow colleagues in the steel industry is standing beside his gate 10 feet away from where this new law would take provision, then you look directly behind him and you see large stacks putting out tonnes and tonnes of pollutants into the local air. The Ontario Medical Association estimates that in 2005, air pollution

caused 5,800 premature deaths, almost 17,000 hospital admissions and almost 60,000 Ontarians to visit hospitals and emergency rooms. The OMA report estimates that the cost of air pollution to the economy of Ontario is a staggering \$16 billion per year. These health impacts are rising at an extraordinary rate. So while we support this bill, it is important to highlight these concerns. If you're standing outside of your workplace in Hamilton, even in a smoke-free environment and at a 10-foot perimeter, you are not breathing clean air. The air around you is probably 15 times worse than the cigarette alone.

What are we going to do about cleanup? Okay, the guy was dropping butts in the doorway of the establishment—not good; not good for children and not good for anybody to breathe that in. But now he's going to stick that butt 12 feet, 14 feet away on the ground—more cleanup. Has anything been taken into consideration about cleaning up the butts, cleaning up the cigarettes surrounding the establishment, not just 10 feet in front of the door, where they used to stick ashtrays so people could smoke outside, even if they were employees? What are you doing around the establishment? What are you doing about the streets, where these people are now going to throw these cigarettes? Can they not breathe, 11 feet away from the establishment, the same cigarette butt or whatever is thrown on the ground or whatever they are smoking? Cannot there be residue from the marijuana, or who knows what else—opium? Who knows what people are taking? Is this going far enough? Is this really going to eliminate it?

I can't emphasize enough that I'm not sure if the member has taken into consideration the enforcement of this. As far as I can see, having been in Hamilton for many years, I haven't seen too many people get fined with smoking violations. The odd one was blatant: inside a bar or a restaurant. They were actually doing it and trying to push the issue. They got fined. So I'm not really sure how this is going to be enforced.

I hope the member, in discussions, if this bill goes further in committee, will take into consideration some of these other concerns and try to alleviate some of the tension of people who feel they're being unjustly dealt with because of the big stacks that are pouring out tonnes and tonnes of pollution, which I tried to address with the environmental minister the other day.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today, and certainly a pleasure to announce that I'll be supporting this bill. I think it is a wonderful bill; I think it's well thought out. It's nice to be able to work with the member from Burlington. She and I have a long history working together on Halton regional council. Sometimes the adversarial nature of this place puts you at odds with each other, so it's certainly nice to be working in a cooperative way again on this.

I think there's a certain logic to this bill that's appealing, that I think would make most members of this House support the bill. The test I often use as to whether something makes sense or not is to talk to kids about it. When you look at any major behavioural change that

we've been able to make in our society over the past 10, 15, 20 years—when you think about things like recycling, when you think about drinking and driving, when you think about a host of changes, like smoking, perhaps—when we told adults it was unsafe to smoke, adults continued to smoke. It was when we got kids to talk to their parents and say, "I'd like you to stop smoking," that parents started to pay some attention. When we asked adults to start to recycle tin cans and pop cans, it wasn't the adults who really did the work, who did any of the heavy lifting on that; it was the kids who did it. It was the kids who would not allow you to throw a pop can in your own garbage. Drinking and driving: We told people they shouldn't drink and drive, and adults continued to drink and drive. We told the kids, "Don't ever get in a car with someone who's been drinking. If your parents have been drinking, hide the car keys." That's when we started to see action on drinking and driving. So if you asked a child, if you asked a young person today, if you asked some of the pages in the House today, "Does this make sense? Should you have to walk through a cloud of marijuana smoke to get into a restaurant?" I think the answer from everybody would be no; somebody simply doesn't have the right to do that to other people.

The dangers of second-hand smoke are very, very clear. I think the same logic applies here in this bill, that the dangers of marijuana second-hand smoke are no less dangerous. In fact, some of the research I've seen has said that marijuana second-hand smoke could perhaps be even more dangerous.

I think of all the progress we've been able to make on the issue of second-hand smoke and smoking cessation—and we have made terrific progress, as a government. We committed to reduce smoking in Ontario by 20% by the end of 2007. It was in 2003 that we set that target. But we were able to decrease smoking by over 30% between 2003 and 2006.

We have a new proposed law coming out that would ban smoking in cars with children. That makes sense to everybody around this House, I would hope. We know that smoking kills 13,000 Ontarians each and every year. It costs our health care system \$1.7 billion every year.

So unlike attempts by previous parties to do something about smoking among young people and adults, the past four or five years have seen actual progress on this issue. It's something that we do want to keep moving forward with. We've seen, when the NDP were in power, that smoking went up among young people. Between 1991 and 1995, smoking rose from 21% to 31%. How could that go up?

Mr. Paul Miller: That's our fault?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is. I don't know how you did that, but you managed to do that.

Our plan is working. In a 2007 survey by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 72% of students between grade 7 and grade 12 are reporting that they have never smoked a cigarette in their life. That's a 15% increase since 2003. So we're starting to see some real progress. To have a loophole inserted, or to have some-

one try to take advantage of a loophole, seems to me to just run contrary to the progress that's been made to date. So as I said, I'll be supporting the bill.

There certainly is a federal element to this as well, and I would urge the member for Burlington, if she hasn't already done so, to contact the federal member from Burlington too. Certainly this is a controlled substance; certainly there's a role for the federal government in this issue. I would hope today, when the vote is taken, that all members in this house would support the member from Burlington. But I don't think we need to let the federal government off the hook on this. They have a role to play here; I don't know if all members agree with that. Certainly, I think that if you look—

Mr. Jeff Leal: I do.

1120

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The member from Peterborough agrees, and that's good enough for me.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He agrees with everything. Wait till I get up. He'll agree with me.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I can't wait to hear that one.

I know the establishment in question; I know the proprietor of the establishment in question; I played soccer against him for a number of years. He's very, very involved in the community, he's a person who takes his corporate and social responsibility very seriously, and he's somebody who deserves to be supported. As I said, I will be supporting it, and I would urge all members to support it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate on this bill brought forward by my colleague from Burlington, Bill 42, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. I must say that Ms. Savoline did offer me a treat for speaking today, but that is pure chocolate. I assure you, there is nothing in there but pure milk chocolate. I do appreciate any bribes in the way of candy that you can offer, Ms. Savoline.

Speaker, you have to ask yourself: Why do we need to bring in a bill that should, for most thinking people, be automatic? Over the years, incrementally, we have changed the rules with regard to smoking in this province. I can't say exactly when it was, but maybe in the late 1980s, we first banned smoking in businesses and public places such as clothing stores, or in my case, a hardware store, so that you couldn't be smoking in those buildings. It may have been later than that. Incrementally, we've gone to a situation where a couple of years ago, we banned smoking completely in bars, restaurants, and everything else except for when they built a nice, fancy room down at the casino—the government did, so that they could smoke there.

We've had these incremental changes to the law so that we could send the message that we as a society and we as people in government believe that smoking is inherently bad for you, and we can't simply allow it to take place wherever somebody chooses to conduct themselves in that activity.

Then, of course, we had medical exemptions to smoke marijuana, a controlled substance. Those were granted by the federal government through Health Canada if someone could put forward a case that their health was being benefited by the ability to smoke marijuana.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Grandma's glaucoma.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Grandma's glaucoma.

But that's not what this debate is about. This debate is about whether or not someone who has that exemption has the right to smoke somewhere else.

What I fundamentally believe is that while you may have the exemption from a law, it doesn't put you above the law. In the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, we don't permit smoking in bars, restaurants or establishments such as that. So just because someone has the privilege of having a medical exemption to smoke a controlled substance such as marijuana, that, in my mind—and, I believe, in the mind of every reasonable person in this province, with the exception of that person who is bringing this before the court—certainly, Mr. Kindos, the people who work in his establishment and the customers in his establishment would believe that it should go without saying that that does not give someone the right to smoke marijuana in a place where the rest of the population cannot partake in the smoking of tobacco.

We live in a society—or at least we used to—where the law applies to everyone. In this government, quite frankly, they have different views about how the law is applied. I want to talk about the situation we have in Caledonia, for example, and the situation with the Haudenosaunee Development Institute and how this government views acts of extortion with regard to the law.

I know that if I went over to Welland, into my friend Mr. Kormos's riding, and started going door to door demanding money, I would soon find myself on the wrong end of the law, but in this government they permit that because they don't want to enforce the law.

Let's talk about illegal tobacco. Michael Perley of the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco now believes that fully one third of the cigarettes consumed in this province are illegal, contraband cigarettes. The revenue for the government from the sale of tobacco is plummeting. They like to say that as a result of their strong position against smoking they've actually reduced smoking, but no, they haven't. What they've reduced is the enforcement of the law, because they don't want to have anything to do with illegal cigarette smuggling coming through First Nation reserves in this province. They don't want to touch it—not with a 10-foot pole.

My question is, will they actually agree to enforce the law should Ms. Savoline's bill be passed? This is an opportunity—another one; they've squandered opportunities—to say, "We're going to ensure that this law applies to everyone in this province of Ontario. If you can't smoke cigarettes there, you're not going to be smoking a controlled substance."

I support this law in the strongest way possible. I congratulate Ms. Savoline for bringing it forward, and I'm looking for the vote a little later on today.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to take a few minutes on this bill because I know my colleague the member from Hamilton Centre wants to speak to it.

Just from a personal perspective, I want to talk a little bit about the importance of this type of legislation toward curbing people's habits when it comes to smoking. I used to be a pack-and-a-half-a-day smoker, probably some 80 pounds ago, but I've lost about half of that, so that's pretty good. Basically, like most people who smoked at that time, I was very hostile towards any type of legislation that would restrict my ability to smoke.

I remember back in the 1980s when legislation was first introduced limiting our ability to smoke on airplanes and a few other places. Like most smokers I was up in orbit about it—"Who are they to tell me I can't smoke in this particular place?"—not realizing a couple of really important things. Never mind that it's bad for your health, but I never realized as a smoker to what extent it really annoys people who don't smoke. Now, being a non-smoker for some 15 or 18 years, since I quit, it just amazes me that I never recognized as a smoker of the day that if somebody walks into a room and smokes, just how obnoxious that smell can be and to the degree that it's bothersome, to the point that you don't want to be in the same room. You want to get out of the restaurant and stuff.

As a former smoker, I understand the arguments of those people who smoke, because certainly I hear that from my constituents as I travel around the riding every time this type of legislation comes forward. But I'd just remind people that legislation like this in the end helps to take away the triggers that allow you to smoke. Why did I quit eventually? Because it became so unhandy, so difficult to find places to smoke. I finally came to the conclusion, "It's more of a pain to try to find a place to smoke, so I'm just going to quit." It was like, "You can't smoke on the airplane." God, I used to have two or three on that one, because I was a bit of a white-knuckle flier at the time. I used to not be able to smoke in my office here at Queen's Park. I used to be up in the ministry office at the time, so I'd have to go outside in the snow, the rain and the rest of it. You couldn't smoke in public buildings that were owned by the government. I just came to the conclusion, "Heck, I don't need this hassle anymore. Maybe I should try quitting," and eventually it is what led me to quit smoking.

I know that a lot of smokers out there get annoyed when this type of legislation comes forward, but from my perspective, I just want to say that if you can get this old dog to learn a new trick and quit smoking some 17, 18 years ago—

Mr. John Yakabuski: How old are you?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, a young dog at the time—I would just say that anything is possible.

I encourage members to vote for this law. I think, however, that the bill will have to go to committee if it

does pass here at second reading, because I think we need to give people an opportunity to come forward and point out whatever difficulties they have with the bill. I look at parts of this bill that quite rightfully are probably more under the Criminal Code than they are under provincial jurisdiction, but nonetheless we will support this bill.

1130

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Indeed it is a pleasure to join the debate this morning on Bill 42, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. I would certainly like to commend the honourable member from Burlington for her initiative in this regard. Clearly, she has an issue in her community and she is working hard on behalf of her constituents to bring that issue forward.

In fact, many of the issues brought forward this morning are issues with which I could certainly concur. For me as a former physician, the whole initiative behind what led to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act in 2006 started when I was in medical school. I'm going way back to the 1960s—because it was the US Surgeon General in 1963, Dr. Everett Koop, who actually brought forward the epidemiological evidence that showed that many forms of lung cancer were directly related to tobacco smoke.

As many members have stated, it has been a very long war against tobacco. Those of us who worked in the municipal sector remember those first few municipal bylaws. I know the honourable member for Burlington, in her capacity as regional chair of Halton, will have had to deal with that, as we did in York region. In my community—I have four municipalities in my riding—the type of public debate and, as the member for Timmins–James Bay said, the difficulty of getting those bylaws through one by one, as we did in York region, and eventually—through a lengthy process requiring a triple majority—to in fact have a regional bylaw for the whole of York region that we passed in the year 2000.

Since that time, we needed to level the playing field across the province. So when this government was elected in 2003, one of our commitments at that time in the platform leading up to that election was to bring forward a Smoke-Free Ontario Act, which we see before us. Of course, our government very recently proposed an amendment. Members have alluded to the danger for children in cars where adults are smoking. I'm certainly hoping, given the kind of debate we've heard today, that there will be all-party consent to that particular amendment. In fact, hearing all the concern related to tobacco smoke, hopefully the opposition parties will also be supporting our budget, because of course in our budget we are proposing to establish a permanent retail sales tax exemption on nicotine replacement therapy.

Having said that, as we know, certainly there are issues with the proposal around enforcement. I thank my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for remembering public health units and their role in enforcing the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, which I believe they are doing exceptionally well. It certainly could be a challenge, and some of these issues need to be fleshed out.

My colleague also talks in general about pollutants. Certainly we know, as the science is telling us more and more, the harm that so many substances, potentially chemical toxins, can do to our health. We in this Legislature, of course, are all committed to ensuring that we do guard public safety, as the honourable member from Burlington has suggested.

I see clearly the need for further discussion and debate on this very important issue. I would like to thank the member from Burlington for bringing this issue forward.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to join in the debate this morning and support my colleague the member from Burlington on her private member's Bill 42, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. Certainly, the member from Burlington has been an outstanding addition to our caucus and has represented her constituents extremely well. Today's private member's bill is an example of that. She had a constituent, Ted Kindos, the owner of Gator Ted's, who brought a problem he was having to his member of provincial Parliament; in this case, Joyce Savoline, the member for Burlington. There was a problem in legislation that was affecting his business. I see there are many members in the gallery from the Burlington area in support of this, and we are pleased to have you here with us today. Certainly it is our responsibility, as legislators, to fix problems that exist that are affecting our constituents, and in this instance, all the people of Ontario.

The government's website says, on Bill 42, the Smoke-Free Ontario Amendment Act, "The Smoke-Free Ontario Act is designed to protect the health of all Ontarians by prohibiting smoking in all enclosed workplaces and enclosed public places in Ontario...." This should be consistent across the board, and the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke made the point that there should be one law, whether it affects a controlled substance or second-hand smoke from cigarettes.

Under the previous Minister of Health Promotion, we had on the website "equal protection under the law to all Ontarians for second-hand smoke and prevent youth from starting." The amendment brought forward today by my colleague from Burlington speaks to this quote, allowing no exceptions for any controlled substance.

I was also the critic for health promotion, and I'm certainly a strong advocate of healthy lifestyles, including reducing cancer-causing exposure to second-hand smoke. I know that the Canadian Cancer Society did a survey a few years ago, and my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock had the highest lung cancer deaths related to smoking in Ontario, which certainly highlights the need for education and prevention. It also speaks to access to primary health care, specifically in my riding, with the underserved designation we have and the lack of doctors and health care professionals.

In my other life, before I entered the Legislature, I was a nurse, and I understand the medical value of controlled substances like marijuana. As long as it's used in public places and does not affect Ontarians in other ways, there

is certainly a proper place to use medicinal marijuana, and that should be followed.

It's our responsibility to protect Ontarians, and the member from Burlington has done an excellent job of bringing this forward. She has gotten support from all parties in the Legislature so far. At the end of this session—closer to 12 p.m., for people in the gallery and at home—we'll be having a vote. Hopefully we can move this legislation forward and get that loophole closed.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I thank the member from Burlington for bringing forward this legislation.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in support of the member for Burlington's bill. I have to say that I look at it from some of my own experience at the municipality. When I was a municipal councillor in Hamilton, my area of representation included our downtown, and I can tell you that there was no end of frustration, usually from many of the owners of large office towers, who were concerned that as people were not be able to smoke in their workplaces anymore, it forced people out of the office towers and onto the street. Particularly in inclement weather, but really at all times, people would converge and congregate around the entranceways of these buildings. That caused some concern and some problems for the people who owned those buildings and were leasing out the space to various types of businesses within.

The issue became a couple of different things. One was that of people coming out at various times of the day—morning break, lunch break, afternoon break, whenever, or even just a sneaking-out break, when they weren't supposed to be doing that—and dropping their cigarette butts on the ground and jamming them out with their heel or their foot. By the end of the day, you would have quite an unsightly mess of cigarette butts on the very doorsteps of these buildings. It became pretty unsightly, and it was something that was difficult to try to resolve.

1140

I recall that we did successfully implement—and, just downtown the other day, noticed yet again—a beefing-up of public ashtrays in our downtown area. That helped, but it didn't really solve the problem 100%. It certainly helped those people who were inclined to actually put their cigarette butt in the right place, but the bottom line is, the problem still remained.

So I think that this bill will help to move people away from that very small space, congregating in front of, often, the only entranceway to some of these large office towers. The other thing is, if you were actually going to go into this office tower or that office tower and it happened to be a time when there were a number of people congregating smoking, people would have to run the gauntlet to try to get through the group of people who were smoking in order to access the building. Again, this became problematic.

So whether it's the litter issue or whether it's the issue of having to run a gauntlet to get through groups of smokers at a front entranceway, I think this bill will help address that concern that I know a number of owners of businesses in the community that I come from have articulated over the years.

I also have to say that it certainly has been my experience that when these congregations of smokers are taking place in front of these buildings and you happen to be inside and the door opens, what happens but a big waft of smoky air gets sucked right into the building and you're hit; you have some kind of cloud of noxious smoke hitting you. It goes back to the issue of second-hand smoke. It goes back to the issue of the extent to which we have to try to do whatever we can to reduce the exposure of people to second-hand smoke. I think this member's bill does very much that.

I know there are other parts of the bill as well that speak to the kinds of substances that are currently not caught, if you will, in the legislation, the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. Again, I think as the member mentioned in her opening remarks, it seems kind of—I'm not sure of the term she used, but it doesn't really make sense. It seems like almost an administrative error that somehow—so tobacco is legal. We're now saying that we cannot smoke tobacco in public places or places of employment or various places listed in the act, but lo and behold, illegal substances were not covered off. I know my colleague from Timmins—James Bay raised the issue very briefly as to whether or not that is something that is a matter for this kind of legislation—for the Smoke-Free Ontario Act amendment—or whether that issue should be dealt with in other areas like the Criminal Code or some other place.

The reality is that it seems to me that the smoking of, particularly, medicinal marijuana, where people are actually able to smoke that substance because they have a doctor's prescription—it really shouldn't be something that is done. Because, in the same way as regular tobacco, the wacky tabacky—is that what you call it?—also has the kinds of toxins in it that are harmful to the health of other people.

The reality is that this bill is one that makes sense. It's one that not only will help in terms of some of the outstanding issues that I know exist in commercial areas, in our downtowns across the province, but also I think it covers off a piece—a kind of no-brainer in terms of the restriction of smoking of any kind of substance in a location that is currently identified in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to make remarks and I want to congratulate the member on bringing this forward. I think it's a positive piece of legislation and something that can be very well supported. It really does speak to the health of Ontarians—something that we all think is important.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I am pleased to join the debate on Bill 42, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, brought by the member from Burlington. I think I'm

going to support this bill because it speaks about something important to us as a government. We have fought very hard to work on this issue for many different years. I know when we got elected in 2003, we brought this issue forward and we debated it big-time in this place. I remember that the investment to control smoking habits and invest in this area was almost \$10 million when I got elected in 2003. Right now, we have almost \$60 million invested in this issue because it means a lot to us and we want to help the people who smoke in the province of Ontario. For that reason, we created a special ministry called the Ministry of Health Promotion in order to promote healthy habits and healthy living.

I listened to many different speakers who spoke before me—what great experts in this field, especially one of them, who was a nurse in her past life. She knows a lot about the impact of smoking on people and the cause of smoking. We also had with us our colleague, my friend, the member from Oak Ridges—Markham. She's a doctor and she was also the medical officer for York region. She knows a lot about the impact of smoking, and of second-hand smoke too, like when you inhale smoke, the damage may be more and greater than when you smoke directly. I acknowledge that myself, Mr. Speaker. I hate it when I go to visit a friend and they smoke; it's awful and it bothers me. I ask them nicely if they can quit smoking until I leave, or I leave.

Mr. Peter Kormos: In your house?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: In their homes, not my house. In their homes.

For some reason, when we introduced this law in the province of Ontario in 2006, it was very difficult for many people, especially the people who smoked and who used to go to the coffee shop. They got used to it. They went to drink coffee and smoke, or they went to the bar to drink beer or whatever, and then they smoked. It was a part of the habit created through the history of humankind. Also, it was promoted through the media. When you watched a movie, you saw a good-looking woman smoking and you saw like a Marlboro man, a big, huge, macho man, on every billboard across the globe, actually smoking and riding his horse. It was some kind of promotional material across the globe that created a kind of stimulation to sway people to smoke. And I guess it was working. It was part of the fashion of humankind across the globe.

Then, when this issue became very dangerous for humankind, people started thinking about it, because the cost, at least in Ontario—almost 13,000 people die from smoking and it costs our public health care almost \$2 billion; it's very costly. That's why all the activists, all the government colleagues, members of provincial Parliament, and the many different activists in our communities came together and enforced the law and it became a law in Ontario. You cannot smoke in public places and you cannot smoke in the car—hopefully, it's going to be a law soon—while you have children in your car.

I think it is a very good initiative to be taking, and I thank the member from Burlington for bringing this very

important issue. It's dear to our hearts and to many people in the province of Ontario, especially the people who work in health care, because it's important to us to make sure we live in good conditions and healthy conditions.

I was also listening to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek when he was talking about a very important issue, about the unit to implement the law and enforce it, the health unit in every city, basically. We have to make sure that the budget is there in order to enforce the law, because most of the time it's very difficult to implement issues like this one here, when you know people smoke, especially when they are driving alone, or they are smoking when people are not monitoring them.

It was also brought to this House and to the attention of the people of Ontario that smoking is not just hazardous to the people who smoke; it also pollutes the environment. The environment is very important too. It's our responsibility as citizens and as a government to bring laws and rules to protect not just our health, but also the environment around us, because indirectly, the environment will affect us. I listened to the member from Hamilton Centre, as a previous politician at the municipal level. She was talking about putting ashtrays in many different spots in the city instead of throwing cigarette butts out on the street, because we don't want to pollute our streets. We have a good environment, good streets, good gardens. It's very disgusting when you see people smoking and throwing them on the ground and twisting them under their feet. It just doesn't look good and it also pollutes—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Chewing gum is no better.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I agree with you. In some countries, they ban chewing gum because it sticks everywhere and anywhere, especially when they go to meetings. It's bad.

Anyway, I'm glad to join this debate, and I support—

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

1150

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I'm absolutely thrilled to support the motion that has been put forward—Bill 42, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act—by the member from Burlington.

The member from Burlington, as you know, was elected in a by-election. I can tell you that ever since she was elected to our Legislature, we have been the beneficiaries of her working extremely hard on behalf of her constituents in the Burlington community. I think this particular piece of legislation again demonstrates the fact that she is very responsive to the concerns of her constituents. In this case it's Mr. Kindos, the owner and the operator of Gator Ted's Tap and Grill. I'd like to join others to welcome Ted here and those others who have come from Burlington.

I think we all agree that this is just plain common sense. I think people wonder why it wasn't done before this. I applaud the member for stepping forward and

introducing Bill 42 today, which simply means that the prohibition is going to be extended against smoking these substances anywhere within an enclosed public space or workplace or other places such as schools. I think we all know that this is something that obviously is going to be supported today.

It really is all about respecting the rights of people. I think we are quite aware of the harmful effects of smoke, and that was why the original legislation had been introduced. Recently we've talked about introducing legislation which I've been very supportive of. I did introduce a resolution to make sure that we don't force children under the age of 16 who are in cars to be subject to tobacco smoke. I very much support our moving forward, because we know that tobacco smoke has a very detrimental impact on children. When I was Minister of Health, I was pleased to introduce measures at that time which recognized the health issues that were associated with smoking.

I think the amendment today to the original act simply builds upon, obviously, our concern for the health and the safety of people in the province of Ontario. Again, I want to applaud the member. As I say, she has been an outstanding MPP since she arrived here. She did a phenomenal job as the regional chair before that time. I can tell you: Time and time again she brings the concerns of her constituents to either our caucus table or to this Legislature, and I applaud her for this move today.

Mr. Jim Wilson: As a former Minister of Health, I too want to join with my colleagues from all sides of the House in congratulating the member from Burlington, Joyce Savoline, for bringing forward this measure. As my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said, though, it's astounding that we would have to bring forward legislation and that common sense seems to have gone out the door, at least with some people in Ontario, that they would actually smoke a joint right in the doorway of a public restaurant, Gator Ted's.

I've been to Gator Ted's. I don't remember it very well, but I know I was there at one time with the former member from Burlington. The only reason I don't remember it is—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Reefer madness.

Mr. Jim Wilson: There was a lot of smoke going through the door; I remember that.

Anyway, as the member from Kitchener–Waterloo has just said so eloquently, we're very proud of Ms. Savoline, our colleague, who was regional chair for many years. A lot of people probably don't know, but Joyce not only practises good health, but she has done so all her life. She used to train with the National Ballet of Canada. I congratulate her today with bringing this initiative forward.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to add some words of support to the debate that has been taking place this morning on Bill 42 and to congratulate and commend my colleague the member for Burlington for bringing this bill forward, An Act to amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. As members know, this bill is intended to prohibit

smoking any controlled substance within 10 feet of a public place. I certainly agree that this is a measure that's needed. We shouldn't really have to debate this too long. I would hope that the government will allow it to pass into law.

I want to congratulate and commend the member for Burlington for the good work she does on behalf of all her constituents. It's an honour to work with her, along with the member for Halton and the member for Oakville, representing the region of Halton. I'm pleased to have that opportunity. I really look forward to the government getting its support behind this bill so as to ensure that it passes into law.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Savoline, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I want to thank my colleagues and friends from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Oakville, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Timmins–James Bay, Oak Ridges–Markham, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, Hamilton Centre, London–Fanshawe, Kitchener–Waterloo and Wellington–Halton Hills.

I'm overwhelmed by the comments that are being made today in support of this bill. I have noted the comments that have been made, and I will take them under advisement as this, hopefully today, moves on to committee.

I think some of our residents feel there is a futility when they come to government and ask for something to be fixed. It's refreshing today that an establishment that caters to a sports crowd is here asking us to strengthen and enforce a no-smoking act. I think that speaks a lot to how far we've gone in the awareness of how bad smoking is for our health.

We have an opportunity here to legislate something that all of us have said is just logic and common sense, but that's the responsibility we take on as legislators in this House. I think we have to do this in the most defensible way, that simply creating a rule that is something we want rather than something that respects the rights with defensibility in a challenge—they're two different things. We have an obligation to create an act that has defensibility in the case of a challenge.

This is about the impact on people's personal safety—

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

Interjection: Your time is up.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Is my time up? Okay.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): As a matter of fact, the time provided for private members' public business has expired.

DAY NURSERIES AMENDMENT ACT
(NOT FOR PROFIT
CORPORATIONS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES GARDERIES
(PERSONNES MORALES
À BUT NON LUCRATIF)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will deal first with ballot item number 7, standing in the name of Ms. Horwath. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will call in the members and have a division.

SMOKE-FREE ONTARIO
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI FAVORISANT
UN ONTARIO SANS FUMÉE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 42, standing in the name of Mrs. Savoline. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. It's carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, we will have—I'm sorry. This bill is referred to the standing committee—

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to refer this bill to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Savoline has asked that this bill be referred to the standing committee on finance. Is it agreed? Agreed.

Now we'll call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1159 to 1204.

DAY NURSERIES AMENDMENT ACT
(NOT FOR PROFIT
CORPORATIONS), 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES GARDERIES
(PERSONNES MORALES
À BUT NON LUCRATIF)

Ms. Horwath moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 26, An Act to amend the Day Nurseries Act to limit the approval of corporations to not for profit corporations / *Projet de loi 26, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les garderies afin de limiter l'agrément de personnes morales aux personnes morales à but non lucratif.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Horwath has moved second reading of Bill 26. All those in favour, please stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Gélinas, France	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Horwath, Andrea	Miller, Paul	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): All those opposed, please stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Hoy, Pat	Rinaldi, Lou
Albanese, Laura	Jaczek, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Arthurs, Wayne	Jeffrey, Linda	Savoline, Joyce
Balkissoon, Bas	Jones, Sylvia	Scott, Laurie
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Shurman, Peter
Brown, Michael A.	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Brownell, Jim	Miller, Norm	Sorbara, Greg
Chudleigh, Ted	Moridi, Reza	Sousa, Charles
Colle, Mike	Munro, Julia	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Oraziotti, David	Wilson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dickson, Joe	Pendergast, Leeanna	Yakabuski, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Qadri, Shafiq	Zimmer, David
Hardeman, Ernie	Ramal, Khalil	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 11; the nays are 41.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negated.

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

The House recessed from 1207 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise in the House today. I want to comment on the 400th anniversary of the coming of Samuel de Champlain, a French explorer and one of the founders of our country.

I want to bring it forward to this House because the 400th anniversary will be taking place in the year 2015. I have with me a deputation of people from my riding whom you will introduce a little later on who are here today helping me promote this special event, but what I am really wanting to say today is that, as Samuel de Champlain went across Canada, so has the celebration of his explorations. In fact, this year in the province of Quebec, in a partnership between the province of Quebec and the federal government, tens of millions of dollars are being spent on the promotion of the 400th anniversary of this event. You may have heard some of the

radio and TV ads. We're already promoting this special event in the province of Quebec.

What I would like to see happen in this House, in a non-partisan manner, is for everyone to get together and look at what we can do as parliamentarians, working with our federal parliamentarians, to promote this very special event when it takes place in the year 2015.

I know it's seven years away from this summer, but the reality is that time flies quickly and there's a lot of planning to do. I would like to see the Ontario government work with the federal government to receive tens of millions of dollars to promote this special event. I thank every member of this House and wish them well as they try to work with me to promote the 400th anniversary of the coming of Samuel de Champlain to Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'm just going to take this opportunity—I have some further introductions that I will make later, but I know the member has guests who are here promoting the 400th anniversary of Champlain's coming to Ontario in 2015. We would just like to welcome Yvon Gagné, Anne Gagné, Matthew Desrochers, John Desrochers, Bob Nash, Terry Quealey—I apologize; the member's writing isn't clear—André Claire and David Dupuis.

Also, I'd just like to let the members know that, on members' behalf, I wrote to every mayor in the province of Ontario because on July 3, Quebec City is going to be ringing their bells. I have written to every mayor in Ontario asking that they consider ringing their bells in recognition of that celebration.

I apologize for the introduction, but I thank the member for bringing this most important event forward.

BRAMPTON SMALL BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CENTRE

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I rise today in the House to recognize the Brampton Small Business Enterprise Centre, which recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

For the past decade, the enterprise centre has been a haven for aspiring business owners looking for planning resources and support services to implement their business vision. A joint project between the city of Brampton and the province of Ontario, the centre also partnered with HRDC, the Brampton Board of Trade, the Royal Bank, Microsoft and Bell.

Last year, in collaboration with the province of Ontario and the federal government, Brampton joined the BizPaL online network. It was one of the first municipalities in Canada and Ontario to do so. This reflects the centre's strong commitment to offering to local businesses and entrepreneurs innovative tools and resources to help them create and grow successful and thriving businesses.

The centre continues to offer personal, one-on-one assistance. Aspiring and new business owners appreciate the opportunity to speak with a live person, to learn in traditional classroom settings and to meet in person for

confidential consultations. They know how valuable personal discussion can be in a time when so much business is done through forms, websites and other automated processes. In the last 10 years, the dedicated staff have assisted with nearly 140,000 inquiries, more than 26,000 business registrations and 3,650 consultations, and more than 4,000 people have attended enterprise centre seminars and special events. Since 2004, nearly 17,000 jobs have been created.

Again, join me in recognizing the small business centre in Brampton for its remarkable service to the Brampton area.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Mrs. Julia Munro: Last week I was honoured to attend Men of Courage: the First Provincial Conference on Male Sexual Victimization, here in Toronto. It was hosted by the Men's Project, a counselling agency that has helped men and their families since 1997. They offer healing for men who have experienced sexual or physical abuse as children, anger management and fathering skills.

One of the issues raised at the conference that I give this government full credit for is calling for a public inquiry into the events in the Cornwall area. Former MPP Gary Guzzo also deserves a lot of credit as a driving force to hold this inquiry for many years.

Conference attendees also supported changes to the Criminal Code to increase protection for young people by raising the age of consent to 16 and toughen the dangerous offender provisions. I'm glad that the federal Liberals have finally seen the wisdom in allowing this bill to move forward.

Violence of any kind against any person is wrong. We should all be grateful for the work the Men's Project does to help heal male victims.

AGNES MACPHAIL

Mr. Michael Prue: The year 1993 was the 50th anniversary of the election to this House of Agnes Macphail, the first woman to take her seat in this Legislature.

That was also the year that the member of provincial Parliament for part of East York, Gary Malkowski, came before the council of the borough of East York and asked that the borough do something to recognize this historic and wonderful woman who had represented our community. It was the decision of the East York council to establish a yearly award to honour people who did great things and did them in a way that we thought Agnes Macphail would have approved.

Each and every year on the anniversary of her birth, March 24, we set aside in the borough of East York an opportunity to recognize an individual with outstanding contributions to our community. You'll be proud to know that we have done so even after amalgamation.

This year, the award went to Geoff Kettel. Geoff Kettel is a wonderful man who lives in the Leaside area

in East York. He has distinguished himself on the board of health he has worked in citizenship in helping newcomers he is an advocate in areas of law, a housing provider and an environmentalist. Not only did he get the award, but today is his last full day of work for the Ontario civil service. He will be retiring, and we in East York know we can count on him even more in the future to do the good things he has done in the past.

HOLI FESTIVAL

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: On Sunday, March 23, I had the honour of joining the Holi festivities of the Hindu community in Hamilton. Holi festival is also sometimes called the festival of colours, which is celebrated to welcome spring, and what a welcome it was after the harsh Canadian winter we had.

I had the pleasure of attending the festival with my friends Vera and Ashok Kumar, who are members of the community. The festivities took place at the Hindu temple, Hindu Samaj of Hamilton. There were many cultural activities that afternoon, including a beautiful dance performed by a group of young children in bright costumes. The crowd was overwhelmed by the performance, as was I. The stage was filled with thousands of rose petals and it was absolutely beautiful.

The Hindu Samaj of Hamilton is a temple that stands as a monument of co-operation between many different community groups in Hamilton. I want to thank the Hindu community for their warm welcome. I had an opportunity to meet many of them and several of their community leaders.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Recently we witnessed yet another example of the games this Liberal government is prepared to play and the people they are prepared to use to further their own ends.

Two weeks ago, the Minister of Finance, with great pomp and ceremony, announced something called investing in Ontario communities. The gist of the announcement was that the government would dedicate a portion of its surplus to municipalities when the provincial surplus exceeded \$800 million.

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When the minister announced what is now clearly a phantom fund, his budget showing a much smaller surplus well below the proposed trigger number would have been at the printer. As the Minister of Finance stood there receiving the praise of Hazel McCallion and other mayors from across the province, he knew very well he was giving them sweet nothing—a kiss on the cheek from Hazel and sweet nothing for her voters; sweet nothing for Ontario municipalities; sweet nothing for the people of Ontario except more taxes, more spending and more barrelling down the wrong track towards the have-not status that the Liberal government has been aiming for for going on five years—shameful conduct on behalf

of this minister and the government he represents. The mayors who unwittingly participated in this sham announcement deserve an apology.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Helena Jaczek: It's with great pleasure today that I rise in the House to share with you how many of the great investments that were proposed in the budget will affect my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham, situated in York region.

Aside from the many exciting initiatives that will affect all ridings, including mine, such as investments in health care, education and job skills, I'm very pleased that this budget has an emphasis on infrastructure. This is a key component to the ridings in rapidly growing York region, and Oak Ridges–Markham is no different. We all depend on public transit, roads and bridges to get our families to where they need to go in a safe and reliable manner. On top of that, investments in infrastructure create jobs in the short term and strengthen our economy in the long term.

From the \$497 million in 2007-08 for public transit, York region received funding for Metrolinx projects, including \$52 million for Viva Highway 7—Pine Valley Drive to Kennedy Road; \$89 million over two years for inter-regional GO Transit; and \$293 million for Yonge subway capacity improvement, which is part of the eventual Yonge subway extension to Richmond Hill.

This government understands the importance of investing in people. By making strong investments in our infrastructure today, we are creating a strong foundation on which the people of York region, and all Ontarians, can build and succeed.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Parents in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga believe in a strong, publicly funded education system. The recent Ontario budget was one of interest to them as it included significant new investments in our schools and in our students.

Parents in my community are not alone in their support for our education plan. Some of Ontario's leading educators are speaking out as well. I would like to share some of their positive words with you and with my colleagues.

John Campbell, chair of the Toronto District School Board, said, "There is another \$250 million coming to Ontario's schools, and I think on the whole the government has continued its really outstanding commitment to public education."

David Clegg, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, says, "We appreciate the \$315-million increase in per pupil funding announced in today's provincial budget as well as the new funding to support literacy, numeracy and special education."

Loralea Carruthers, vice-president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, said that they ap-

preciate "the stability of funding and the recognition of the commitments that the government has already made to school boards, and we've seen those in the budget."

Marilyn Dulmage said, "All around, I think it's good news. The only surprise should be a happy one."

I am going to run out of time before I run out of educators who support this budget, and I'm sure every member of this House is hearing similar statements from educators and parents.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. David Oraziotti: Our government's 2008 budget is great news for Ontarians and certainly great news for the people in Sault Ste. Marie.

We have provided more resources for housing, public transit, infrastructure and our municipal partners. The \$1.5-billion skills-to-jobs program will help support Ontario workers, and we are eliminating the capital tax for businesses four years earlier than expected. In Sault Ste. Marie, we're providing \$15 million for a new invasive species centre, which will help expand our research and innovation capacity within the community, creating new jobs and further strengthening our local economy.

We're also providing \$1.4 million in additional capital funding for our hospice to help improve end-of-life care and ease pressure on our hospital. Helen Ross, the executive director, said, "The Ontario Liberal government has recognized the need for residential hospices and has moved forward to support all of us who believe that everyone has the right to die in dignity, free from pain and surrounded by their loved ones."

Despite the positive reaction from a wide array of provincial stakeholders, including the CAW, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Ontario Medical Association, the Conservatives and NDP have suggested that the Ontario government is not doing anything to help the provincial manufacturing and forestry industries. They must have our government confused with the federal Conservatives, who have yet to contribute a single cent to Ontario's forestry sector, since we have supported it with a \$1-billion aid package.

We're certainly not interested in economic lessons from a former member of this Legislature who saddled our province with a \$5.5-billion deficit. Even though the federal government is completely ignoring their responsibilities to Ontarians, our government is delivering on the priorities that Ontarians want and deserve.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RIGHT TO HOUSING ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LE DROIT AU LOGEMENT

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 47, An Act to establish the right to adequate housing as a universal human right / Projet de loi 47, Loi visant à consacrer le droit à un logement convenable comme droit humain universel.

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. Cheri DiNovo: This Ontario government spends about 14 cents—actually less—a day on adequate affordable housing. That's less than half of what they spent in the year 2000. That's according to my friend Michael Shapcott here, of the Wellesley Institute.

This bill will, along with the United Nations, insist that housing be seen as a right, allowing the thousands waiting—125,000 households on the waiting list—to challenge this government's neglect.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

LAKE SIMCOE WATERSHED

Hon. John Gerretsen: Our Premier, Premier McGuinty, has stated his commitment to ensuring stronger protections for Lake Simcoe. For the nearly 350,000 Ontarians living in communities close to Lake Simcoe, these protections are absolutely critical. But they're also very important for the many people who visit and enjoy the lake every year.

Earlier this afternoon, along with my colleagues, the member from Barrie and minister of culture, and my parliamentary assistant, the member from Oakville, I had the pleasure of announcing three new measures by our government to protect Lake Simcoe and its watershed.

First, as of April 1 this year, new interim limits will be in place for phosphorous discharges from industrial and municipal sewage treatment plants. These measures will help protect water quality in Lake Simcoe while we work on developing a long-term protection strategy.

Secondly, we have formed the Lake Simcoe science advisory committee to ensure that our strategy, including any proposed legislation, is based on the best available science.

We need to better understand the issues facing the health of Lake Simcoe and its watershed and look at what actions we must take to improve and protect the health of the ecosystem.

I was joined this afternoon by many stakeholders that have an interest in the lakes, but as well, by Dr. Jennifer Winter, one of the co-chairs of the Lake Simcoe advisory committee, together with Dr. Peter Dillon, who will be the other co-chair. They will use their considerable scientific experience and knowledge of Lake Simcoe to look at the present state of the lake and its watershed, the

pressures on the system today and in the future and to provide advice on how best to approach managing it.

We are committed as a government to developing a strategy that joins together both environmental protection and planning growth. Our goal is not only to protect Lake Simcoe, but set a benchmark for sustainability.

Our government recognizes that a great many people are passionate about this issue and want to be involved in protecting the Lake Simcoe ecosystem. This is the reason for the third measure announced today—the release of a discussion paper on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry.

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We are consulting with Ontarians so we can develop a long-term, comprehensive strategy that will work for everyone.

Our government recognizes farmers are already doing a lot of good work to reduce the amount of phosphorus going into the lake. We will consult with them and the entire farming community to find ways to reduce it even further.

We also want to get input from cottagers, recreational users, business individuals and corporations, First Nations communities, environmental groups and municipalities—everyone who cares about protecting and sustaining the lake. We know that there are a lot of good ideas out there, and we simply want to hear them.

We will also be creating a stakeholder advisory committee to advise us on the best approaches to improve the long-term future of the lake.

With the pressures from population growth, urban and rural development, new invasive species and climate change, we need to take strong actions now to protect our water so that it stays healthy and protected.

What we do today will build a better, more sustainable environment and a brighter future for ourselves and our children.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

LAKE SIMCOE WATERSHED

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of the Environment. First of all, I want to congratulate the members that you've appointed to the advisory committee. I wish them well in their work.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in 2006 I introduced a private member's bill followed by a Lake Simcoe protection resolution that was successfully passed by this Legislature. I know that both the Liberal Party and the Progressive Conservative Party campaigned in the 2007 election with strategies or potential protection acts that would have a positive impact on Lake Simcoe.

The minister will recall that in his former position as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing he began the IGAP process, the intergovernmental action plan. The very minimum number of people who are expected to live in Simcoe county in the next 25 years is 247,000 people, which is a 60% increase in the population. There's no question that whatever growth occurs in

Simcoe county will have a major effect on Simcoe county and of course on the water quality in Lake Simcoe.

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority acknowledges that it will cost a minimum right now of \$170 million to clean up Lake Simcoe and protect it in its present form. We can study this thing to death, but one thing that will be required will be money. We'll need money for infrastructure projects and cleanup as well.

I can tell you right now that I was disappointed in the provincial budget on Tuesday because I would have expected, following the federal budget and the federal announcement where the federal government has committed \$30 million to cleanup projects, that you would have seen some money for cleanup projects on Lake Simcoe. So you've got to come to the table. First of all, you absolutely have to create a partnership with the federal government. This is no time to finger-point at each other. This is a time when everyone has to be at the table to make sure we clean up this beautiful asset that we have. So money is needed, of course.

I also want to point out that there are lots of ideas out there. I agree with the minister that there are a number of things we can do. I look at some of the new technologies that are available in sewage treatment, but those same technologies are available in all the septic systems that surround Lake Simcoe. There are literally tens of thousands of septic beds in communities around Lake Simcoe. I think we should look very seriously, as we go down this road, at allowing this technology to proceed and actually have these sorts of systems installed.

I know there was a conference just a few weeks ago in Mr. Miller's riding, the onsite septic system installers and contractors' conference—and unbelievable technology out there for the future. I'm sure we're going to have to grasp hold of that.

I think I speak on behalf of our caucus and most people around Lake Simcoe. I know I have 100 kilometres of shoreline in my riding on Lake Simcoe. The protection of Lake Simcoe is a priority. We really do want to work with you, but we want to make sure this is not a finger-pointing game, that we all work together—federal government, provincial government, and municipalities—to make sure that the development that takes place around Lake Simcoe is positive and enhances the quality of the water in Lake Simcoe, and not let it deteriorate it any further but improve it.

Mr. Speaker, I have a minute or so left. I would like to let the member from York-Simcoe say a few words as well.

LAKE SIMCOE WATERSHED

Mrs. Julia Munro: The minister in his statement earlier made reference to the fact that he expects support from the opposition. I want to be very clear about the fact that I, too, share an obvious interest in the lake and have certainly tried very hard over the years in working with community groups and bringing forward any ideas that

would support this. So I want to say at the outset that I think the minister was fairly safe in making those comments about the opposition.

But while I, again, applaud the idea of having a science committee, a committee of experts in reviewing, I have some questions. What happened to the LSEMS agreement? It expired. It was only renewed for a single year instead of the normal five. It takes money to continue. MNR needs to have money to be able to provide the right science and studies on Lake Simcoe.

LAKE SIMCOE WATERSHED

Mr. Peter Tabuns: There's no question that we have a problem in Lake Simcoe; none at all. I listen to the minister; I listen to Rick Smith from Environmental Defence. You can talk to anyone in that region, and you know you've got problems with phosphorus, you've got problems with algae, you've got problems with the lake, which some characterize as at the tipping point.

That lake, aside from its natural value, is worth something like \$200 million a year in tourism. So economically, environmentally and biologically it's an important place. And so, given that you have statements like "a lake at the tipping point," what's the scale of response of this government to this challenge?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: To consult.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To consult. This minister talks about population growth. Well, my goodness, is this a government that has the power to actually put south Simcoe into the greenbelt? Is this a government that would have the power to have opposed Big Bay Point? Is this a government that could have helped the citizens who opposed Big Bay Point? No. This government will talk about the problem and is very happy to put in place a science committee. I've got no quarrel with the people who are on it, but in terms of what has to be done and the scale of the problem and the immediacy of the problem, this is dereliction.

The cap that was announced today: It may well be—and I'm interested in seeing numbers—that the cap on sewage going from sewage treatment plants will allow more sewage to go into the lake. I don't know; I'd have to see the numbers. Based on what we were given, it looks like there may well be an increase in sewage. The way the minister was talking about this cap making accommodation for new development, it sounds to me like more sewage going into the lake. That doesn't sound like the direction we want to be going in.

If you look at the material that was provided to us, this government could act now to deal with a problem that's twice as big as the problem from sewage, and that's stormwater going straight into the lake. You don't have to wait a year; you don't have to wait five years. You don't need another report. If you've got stormwater going into the lake, you need to put in place measures that stop that happening. That's twice the problem we have from these sewage treatment plants—twice the problem.

So you've got some things that you can do immediately, within your control and in your hands, to deal with a lake that's facing profound problems, and you're not doing them. You're putting money into the extension of the 404: \$250 million. That will mean more development on the lake and further pressure on the biological viability of that lake. Is that rational? Is that something that's within the power of the government to decide? Absolutely. Is it going to act? Absolutely not.

Enforcement: The member from Hamilton East and the member from Hamilton Centre have both dealt with problems in Hamilton where environmental laws are not enforced. So, frankly, you can announce as much as you want. If in the end you don't have the people on the ground to enforce and you don't move forward, then really it's just a law that's a pretty bauble, maybe a fashion statement, but not something that is of consequence. Talk to these members about the issues they face in their communities. Talk to the Environmental Commissioner and read his report. You know that you're not enforcing the law. Why would we have any confidence that it will be enforced in this case? I don't see why we would have confidence in that.

1400

You talked about climate change and its impact on this lake, and yet last year, when the Premier talked about his climate change plan, his legislation that he would bring forward—we haven't seen a plan; we haven't seen any legislation. I have to tell you that the environmentalist who commented on this budget, Keith Stewart, from the World Wildlife Fund, said, "Not here," for action on climate change. You have some targets that you put out there to decorate your platform, but in terms of actually leaving a world for our kids that will matter to them, Minister, you're not doing what has to happen. You've set it aside. You are not willing to take on the tough task. You're not willing to put the money in place. You're not willing to put the legislation in place. So in the end what that means is that this lake will continue to be in trouble and this province will be in trouble. You are not acting the way you could act within the powers you have and you're not acting the way you must act, given your responsibilities. I don't think you have anything to be proud of today. In fact, you should just go back to your office and hope this day passes quietly.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Leader of the Opposition on a point of order?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Mr. Speaker, this may be more on a point of privilege, and I'll look for your advice. It appears on the surface as a breach of the rights and privileges of the opposition members of this Legislature. We were told last night, and again today, in terms of the municipal roads and bridges fund, that members of the government party are making announcements across the province in terms of allocations. The information is not being shared with members on this

side of the House. This may not be the tyranny of the majority but it certainly appears to be the arrogance of the majority.

Hon. Michael Bryant: First, the parliamentary requirements that the member is referring to are with respect to presumptions about what the Legislative Assembly of Ontario will or will not do, the ultimate example being Minister Leach's jumping of the gun in terms of suggesting that a law had passed when it in fact had not. None of the correspondence, none of the public statements, none of the releases and none of the publications that have been put out by the ministry had come anywhere close to violating that. The member may not like the fact that we're doing good things, but we're going to continue to do them and talk about them as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll take the member's point under advisement and consult with the table and I will report back to the House. Thank you.

WEARING OF PINS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I had a chance earlier to speak to you about this. As you know, today is March 27, international day of epilepsy, and we've been given these pins to wear by members in the gallery. I ask for unanimous consent so that we can wear them.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? Agreed.

VISITOR

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to draw the members' attention to the west members' gallery to recognize a young lady named Brett Winslow. She is here from the University of Akron on the legislative intern program and has been working in my office. This is her second-to-last day, the last day the Legislature will be sitting. I appreciate all her hard work and ask the members of the Legislature to show our appreciation for her coming to Ontario.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you, and we thank the other two interns as well who have been here from the University of Akron. We trust that it has been a good opportunity for them to learn more about the parliamentary system here in Canada.

The member has left, but I do want to acknowledge that he was here: The former member for York Centre from the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments, and the 34th and 35th Parliaments for Markham, Don Cousens, was here, but he did have to leave. We acknowledge his presence.

As well, on behalf of the member for Northumberland-Quinte West, we welcome Mr. and Mrs. Stewart, and their daughter Jane, who are here to visit their daughter Tola, who is a page in the Legislature. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

On behalf of the member for Hamilton Mountain, we'd like to welcome Mr. John Dolbec, the CEO of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, who is here today as well.

On behalf of the member for Peterborough, I'd like to welcome Mr. Paul Dietrich, president of Parkview Homes and president of the Peterborough and the Kawartha Home Builders Association and vice-president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association, and his son Thomas Wilson, here in the east gallery. Welcome to you as well.

On behalf of the member for Parkdale-High Park, we have Mr. Shapcott from the Wellesley Institute, and a number of individuals from the St. Stephen's Community House staff and clients, some of whom have experienced homelessness. We'd like to welcome those individuals. As well, from the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, we have Sherrie Golden. To those individuals, welcome to Queen's Park today as well.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. This government has refused to acknowledge the endless economic warnings that Ontarians have been bombarded with for months. Now the deputy chief economist of Desjardins Group has confirmed what everyone but your government has seen coming: Ontario will be in a recession in the early part of this year, a technical recession.

Rather than attack this crisis head-on with a bold, courageous, long-term battle plan, after burying its head in the sand with its tax-and-spend regime, this government is now ducking for cover, "battening down the hatches," as the media have reported on it, with their budget. It's filled with one-time, one-year measures that will do nothing to protect people's jobs and help them pay their bills. This budget has failed the people of Ontario. Premier, where is your long-term recession-fighting plan? It's certainly not in your budget.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I thank the member for the question. We have a plan; you just don't like the plan. It's a five-point plan. It's designed not only to address our interim challenges associated with the economy, but it's also designed in the long term to enhance our productivity and our strength. That plan consists of five parts, not one part. A one-part plan would consist exclusively of cutting corporate income taxes.

We are cutting business taxes, as you well know, but beyond that we're also investing heavily in the skills and education of our people, because the best workers get the best jobs. We're investing in innovation, because we want to do more to help Ontarians turn their ideas into products and services that will be in demand on the part of a global economy. We're investing heavily in

infrastructure—roads and bridges—so that we can create jobs in the short term and enhance our productivity in the long term. We also believe in entering into strategic partnerships with the business community. We've done that in the past and we intend to continue doing it long into the future.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think the National Post summed up the government's plan pretty succinctly: "Good times: Spend and tax; Bad times: Spend and tax." Ontario is seeing the loss of almost 200,000 manufacturing jobs, and predictions are that another 250,000 will disappear in the next two years. The retraining plan, which this government touts as the major highlight of its budget, is only going to help 20,000 people. That's less than 5% of the people who can't pay their mortgages, who can't provide for their families.

Ontarians need a government and a leader who can put out a blazing fire in the economy, and this Premier comes armed with an eyedropper. Premier, why didn't you use this budget to bring in a comprehensive, multi-year economic growth package so that hard-working families, businesses and municipalities can plan for the future?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's difficult to understand where the Conservative Party is coming from these days, because they criticize us, on the one hand, for failing to cut corporate income taxes in a dramatic and reckless fashion. That would deprive us of a revenue base of, in combination with the removal of the health premium, some \$5 billion. They're saying we should have done that, and they're also saying at the same time that we haven't invested enough in new skills and education opportunities for the people of Ontario. You can't have it both ways. I think leadership demands that you make some difficult decisions. We've decided to cut some business taxes, but we've also decided to invest in our people. The reason that we remain so hopeful, the reason that we refuse to panic, is because we believe in the people of Ontario. It's their entrepreneurialism, their energy, their dedication and their commitment that have created 450,000 net new jobs in the last four years alone.

1410

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This country is going in another direction, but only the Premier knows best in this country, apparently.

This budget was an opportunity to chart out a long-term plan, to lay out the welcome mat for investment, to tell working people that they don't have to leave Ontario to find well-paying and secure jobs. Economic recovery does need a bold, aggressive, multi-year plan, and it doesn't happen with your approach of tossing out one-time, one-year crumbs and there's no plan for anything more to come.

Premier, you were on CP24 this morning, and you've been saying what we've been saying for months: that you can be short-sighted. Will you commit to immediately bringing in a multi-year economic stimulus package that will get Ontario out of the recession that's clearly on our doorstep? Premier, the people of Ontario are looking for

strong leadership to take them through tough economic times, and your budget is failing them.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition tells us he's looking for something that's bold and aggressive and multi-year in nature. I want to remind him about our new proposal found within this budget. It says that if you create a new business in the province of Ontario during the course of the next 10 years, whether you enjoy a profit of \$1,000 or \$1 billion, you will pay zero income tax. Now, there is a catch. You've got to base that business on an idea that comes from any Canadian college, university or research institute. It's the only idea of its kind, to my knowledge, in North America. That's bold, it's aggressive, it's multi-year; it's in keeping with the innovative abilities and the aspirations of Ontario entrepreneurs.

JOB CREATION

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: With all due respect, we've seen your plan before. It's the same old failed tax-and-spend policy that got your now federal Liberal cousin Bob Rae's government to the deepest recession in the province of Ontario since the Second World War. Now we hear concerns of a potential Dalton McGuinty recession in the province of Ontario. After this budget, Ontario now stands alone in embracing the old tax-and-spend policies of the past. Other provinces have moved forward, reduced the tax and regulatory burden and have attracted new well-paying jobs.

I ask the Premier: What makes him so smart and the rest of the Premiers wrong? Aren't they on the right track when their job creation has dwarfed private sector job creation in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: There's a bit of a myth that my good friends opposite are looking to perpetuate, and that is that somehow the jobs that are being created in Ontario are exclusively falling within the domain of the public service. I wanted to speak to that with a couple of facts. First of all, we are now running the second-most-efficient provincial government operation in the country. Secondly, we have the fewest number of civil servants per capita in the country. So I say to my friend opposite, as he likes to bandy this myth about, from time to time he should visit the truth and he will understand that we're actually doing very well in that regard—the second-most-efficient provincial government operation in the country and the fewest civil servants per capita in Canada.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, you've got to be kidding. We have seen the \$100,000 club absolutely balloon under the Dalton McGuinty government here in the province of Ontario. I can't wait to see this list on Monday to see how many more bureaucrats he has hired in the \$100,000 club, because it will put his friend Bob Rae in a distant last place when it comes to increases in government spending. Premier, I think you know that Mary Webb, the Bank of Nova Scotia economist, described the pittance of tax relief that you boast about as only a one-time boost. It's like taking \$1,000 out of a working

family's pocket and expecting them to be happy that you gave them a loonie back in change. Your policies have brought Ontario to the verge of a potential McGuinty recession. Isn't it time that you followed the path of the other provinces and created a positive environment for business investment and private sector job creation?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just so we can remove it from the abstract to the concrete, let's understand what my friend is railing against. He says that we should not have expanded some folks who have been hired in the broader public sector. Let's listen to some of the people they would not have us hire: nurses, MRI and CT technologists, home care workers, public health unit inspectors, water inspectors, meat inspectors, labour inspectors, teachers, librarians in our schools, guidance counsellors in our schools, autism therapists for our children, children's aid society social workers, child care staff, university and college professors, crown attorneys, police officers, parole and probation officers, and bus, subway and streetcar drivers.

What I'd ask my friend to do is understand that when he tells us we should be cutting corporate income taxes, what he's really saying, and should say to Ontarians, is that he wants these people to be fired.

Mr. Tim Hudak: If the Premier looked at the success in other provinces, and looked at the success under the previous PC government of one million net new jobs being created in Ontario, a record in private sector job creation that was the envy of North America—Premier, your record, on the other hand, has created maybe a net 100,000 private sector jobs, which the previous PC government created on average in a single year alone. Where you'll be the star, where you'll be the gold medal winner, is bloating the civil service and the \$100,000 club that we'll see on Monday when that list comes out.

Premier, isn't it time to stimulate the economy? Isn't it time to avoid the McGuinty Ontario recession by cutting taxes on businesses and working families today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I will say that I do look back with some envy at the economic conditions that prevailed when the Conservatives were in government. They had a 60-cent dollar, they had oil at \$30 a barrel and they had the economy of our greatest trading partner, the US, growing at a very good clip. Notwithstanding that, they left us with a \$5.5-billion deficit, they closed hospitals, they fired nurses, they attacked public education and they fired water inspectors.

We are not going back to those days. We have a balanced, responsible, thoughtful approach to grow this economy and, at the same time, protect public services that the people of Ontario are entitled to be able to count on every single day.

PROVINCIAL PURCHASING POLICY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Last week your government voted down the NDP's Buy Ontario bill calling for 50% local content for mass transit vehicles. Then, under the cloak of the Easter long

weekend, your government announced a watered-down sell-out Ontario plan that mandates a paltry 25% local content for transit vehicles. Why is this Premier so intent on selling out Ontario manufacturing jobs in the transit sector?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm actually glad that the member asked this particular question, because it allows me to talk about his good friends on the city council of Toronto, who I think are very pragmatic when they're in government. The reason they're pragmatic in government is that they know they have to make decisions based on very careful assessment of a situation. They want to determine that what they are doing is best, in their case for their municipality, as well as for the province.

You will know that when you put forward your particular proposal, it has a tendency to place us somewhat in jeopardy in terms of the exports we have. Ontario is the most export-oriented jurisdiction I can think of. If you want to place that in jeopardy—I know you wouldn't, because you are a member who understands well, being a member of this House for a long time, how important exports are.

We have a balance that I think most people will think is very reasonable. It will be helpful, and certainly the city of Toronto—

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

1420

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's interesting that you cite the city of Toronto, because a Liberal councillor in the city of Toronto got this particular motion passed yesterday, and it reads as follows: "That the TTC clarify its position that 25% Canadian content applies to the first phase of the LRT purchase, and further that the chair and mayor be requested to urge the government of Ontario to set a higher requirement for transit purchases in Ontario."

Since this government claims to be taking the lead from the TTC with the sell-out Ontario plan, why won't it now admit it made a mistake, and adopt the NDP's 50% Buy Ontario plan?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like to say to my good friend from the north that I wish it were that easy and that simple. It really isn't.

I must say this as well. In fairness to my friend from the north, I say this: I was a member of the opposition as well, and I know that in opposition you have certain liberties that you can take, certain proposals that you can make to the people of the province. They sound very good in opposition, and we all recognize that. We've all been there; I have to say that.

But we analyzed it very carefully. We got some good advice on this. We believe, for instance, that in the projects we're talking about, almost 82% of the spending on these transit projects of \$17.5 billion will automatically be spent in the province of Ontario. In addition to that, the procurement of the rolling stock will add even more to that.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Minister, it's not just the NDP opposition that's calling for this. It's the Toronto Star and most of the Ontario media, but more important, it's the council of the city of Toronto that has taken this position as well.

So you can't have it both ways. You can't one day say, "Oh, we're going to do what the city of Toronto says and we're just going to do 25%," and then the next day, when they clarify their position and say, "Clearly we need more than 25%," say that it doesn't work.

My question is this: When will this Premier understand that you need to take your heads out of the sand as a government and do what's right by supporting this 50% Buy Ontario bill put forward by the NDP?

Hon. James J. Bradley: One of the things that we felt was very important, first of all, is that we build and extend subways. I know you probably didn't agree, but your leader, remember, was against extending a subway north of Toronto. The people in Thunder Bay said they could not understand that.

With that project alone, millions of dollars would be spent in the province of Ontario; a lot of jobs would have been created. I recognize that what the city of Toronto actually did, as opposed to a resolution coming to another level of government, is very revealing. I commend the city of Toronto on the action they took. I looked carefully, when examining all the jurisdictions, at what Toronto had proposed. We came down on the side of what Toronto had actually done as an entity in power, and I'll tell you, they're pretty smart people.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I would like to know if the Premier can please point out where child care appears as a line item in the McGuinty short-change budget.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you very much for the question. It gives me an opportunity to reiterate our commitment to child care in this province. As you know, we've already created 22,000 new spaces in this province, and we have expanded the number of people eligible for subsidies, because we understand how important child care is, not just for the parents who are able to work because they have good-quality, licensed child care, but also for the kids, because we know that kids who get a good start in life go on to be successful.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I guess my question hasn't yet been answered. I want to know what line item in this budget speaks to the issue of child care.

The members across the way should know that in the Quebec budget that came out about two weeks ago, there is a \$600-million line item for child care. If it can be done in Quebec, it can be done in Ontario. So I want to know: Where is the child care line in Ontario's short-change budget?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would suggest to the member that she look at page 51 in the budget.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The bottom line is this: You can look on every single page of this budget, and nary a word, practically, about child care. There is no line item in this budget, and everybody who's had a look at it, including all of the stakeholders in child care, know that there's no line item for child care.

How is it that Quebec can deliver \$7-a-day child care? How can it be that parents in Quebec can have children in child care for \$2,000 a year where in Ontario it costs families \$18,000 a year for one child in child care? It's because this government is not committed to the provision of child care in this province. Why is the McGuinty Liberal government killing new investment in public child care in the province of Ontario, and why are parents having to continue to pay extremely high fees for child care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Perhaps the member opposite has missed the announcement that we're actually investigating a very important initiative in child care, an initiative that will bring full-day learning to four- and five-year-olds in Ontario, an initiative that will free up thousands of spaces across this province for children in child care.

Our commitment to children is beyond reproach. The new Ontario child benefit will start rolling out every month—up to \$50 per child per month starting this July, and growing to \$91 per child per month. It's an important commitment to the children of the province and an important commitment to our future.

SKILLS TRAINING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Yesterday, he was forced to come clean on where his Second Career strategy funds were coming from. It came from Prime Minister Harper's community development fund. It's federal money.

Today, I would like to know why he waited until just now to arrange signing the framework agreement and why he included federal money as a major investment in his budget without first signing on the dotted line.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I was very pleased, in my press conference and in all public pronouncements, to acknowledge the federal contribution to the skills training fund. I'm delighted that today we have been able to finalize the trusts that have been established for the community development fund for new police and acknowledge that the Prime Minister indicated today that it's important to work with his provincial counterparts. We are delighted to do that even though there are issues we don't agree on and even though that approach is very different from the approach of last Monday.

I'm delighted that we could sign these trusts. There's a lot more to do. We've outlined what those areas are. But when the federal and provincial governments work together, we can make things better for—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thanks, Minister. Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I bet the minister was the kid who spent his allowance before his parents gave it to him.

This government has led Ontarians to believe that the money for skills training was already there. They didn't tell Ontarians it was federal money until after my question yesterday. First, the Premier criticized the federal government's trust that is funding the Second Career strategy. Next, the finance minister takes the federal fund, gives it a new name and pretends it's his own. Now we find out the minister didn't do his homework. He has just signed off on the framework agreement and he is just now securing the funds for the centrepiece of his budget.

So I ask the minister: Tell this House how we can trust you with the budget, the financial planning of the government and managing taxpayers' dollars.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: It's a shame she's trying to drive a wedge between us and the federal government.

Interjections.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: To the honourable member: Don't take my word for it. Take the word of the Toronto Star; take the word of the Globe and Mail; take the word of the Windsor Star; take the word of the Sudbury newspaper; take the word of 19 editorials in support of this budget; take the word of Len Crispino, president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and Ian Howcroft, president of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters; take the word of Hazel McCallion, Doug Reycraft, David Miller.

Our five-point plan is the right response to a challenging time. This party gets it. This party is working through these challenging times. We're delighted to welcome federal assistance in any way it comes—

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

1430

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Yesterday, the Solicitor General denied any knowledge of OPP Commissioner Julian Fantino telling officers they should use force, if necessary, when facing protests last June on the aboriginal day of action.

Will this minister tell the House when he was first advised of Commissioner Fantino's police crackdown?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Quite rightly, the police operations would have been developed independently. I would be referring this question to the minister responsible for community safety if he were here.

The good news is that at the end of that day, of course, it was a peaceful day. As well, the national chief, Mr. Fontaine, has referred to the need, primarily with respect to the federal funding of health care and education on reserves, for further concern to be expressed in the 2008 national day of action. I know the member is very supportive of improving the living conditions of aborig-

inal peoples, not only in his riding in northern Ontario but across the province.

Hon. James J. Bradley: He should be the leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: Well, that's—I know that the member will want to encourage nothing but peaceful protests, and I look forward to working with the member on aboriginal affairs in the days and weeks and months to come.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Further to the minister: You know that this has serious implications on the already fragile relationship between First Nations and the McGuinty government. We have aboriginal leaders who are in jail, and the police plan to break up native protests using force.

Our question is simply this: When will the minister tell Commissioner Fantino to read the Ipperwash Linden report on police conduct?

Hon. Michael Bryant: It's the Dalton McGuinty government that called for the public inquiry into the events leading to the death of Dudley George. It was the Dalton McGuinty government that received the report and made a commitment to, in fact, implement the Ipperwash commission recommendations. It's the Dalton McGuinty government that established the group, as asked for by First Nations, Metis and Inuit leadership, to establish a committee that would determine the implementation of that report on all matters involving all ministries.

We will continue to implement the Ipperwash commission recommendations, and I look forward to getting the member's support on that front. We already have begun to implement Ipperwash commission recommendations in the form of the creation of the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, in the form of the return of the Ipperwash Park within weeks of taking office for a second term, and much, much more to come. We look forward to making great progress on that front.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The riding of York South–Weston is home to many hard-working people who have spent their lives caring for their families. Our seniors helped build this country. They are our parents and our grandparents. They depend on our government to provide them with support systems so they can live with dignity in their advanced years.

I have heard from many of my constituents who are concerned about family members who can no longer remain in their own residences and must transfer to long-term-care homes. In fact, I am sure we all know someone who is in a long-term-care home, and we want them to receive the best care possible.

The minister said he was going to address care issues in long-term care. My constituents would like to know what the minister has done so far.

Hon. George Smitherman: I appreciate very much the chance to answer the question. I know well of the

people the member speaks of, given that that is the riding where I was born, and I've had the privilege of spending some time campaigning there.

Through the efforts we've made so far, we have been able to add 9.55 million hours of additional care in our long-term-care homes. That represents about 6,100 additional front-line staff. That means that we've gone from 2.6 hours of paid care per resident day to 2.94 hours of paid care per resident day. But in addition to that, we've enhanced by 36% the amount of funding that we have for food in our long-term-care homes, and we've increased the comfort allowance. That's something that allows our long-term-care residents to make payments for personal items and for gifts for family members. When we came to office, that hadn't been touched in more than a decade.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: The minister has been talking about these investments a lot recently, and I'm sure there are residents who are benefiting. However, I know that in my own riding of York South–Weston there are homes that need more staff and more resources so they can provide enhanced quality care to residents. Would the minister tell my constituents how the money announced in Tuesday's budget will turn into real help that our seniors desperately need?

Hon. George Smitherman: I do very much look forward to the opportunity at estimates to discuss this with the opposition parties because they have been unable to read the budget documents to date.

As a result of the commitments made by the Minister of Finance and our government, I'm very pleased to tell everyone who is interested that the long-term-care sector will be receiving an increase of more than \$280 million this year. That represents a nearly 10% increase in funding for long-term care. That will be about base services. It will also be about enhancing the proportion of people who are working for our loved ones in long-term care by adding 864 additional personal support workers; that's the equivalent of 1.68 million additional hours of care. We'll be implementing a regulated minimum average standard of care, and over the course of next few years our investments in a total of 2,500 personal support workers and 2,000 nurses will represent more than eight million additional hours of care at the bedside, which will allow us to raise to 3.25 the minimum average standard of paid care in our long-term-care homes—very substantial progress since we began this mission.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of Finance. On March 18, the Minister of Finance introduced a bill in this House that he said at the time of introduction would result in a minimum of \$200 million in additional capital funding. In his statement he said, and I quote, that this funding will be “above and beyond the investments and supports the province already provides.” At the time, Mayor McCallion welcomed that announcement. In fact, she was quoted as saying, “It depends on how much money we get. No matter how much, even if it

is only a little, it will help with infrastructure needs in” the city of Mississauga. Will the minister tell the House and Mayor McCallion whether, when he introduced his legislation on March 18, he knew that in fact his budget would show a \$200-million shortfall from triggering the very legislation he introduced that day?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What I said was that we won’t know our final revenue numbers for the year that has just passed until subsequent to the budget presentation. Our best estimate right now without those is that the surplus will be \$600 million. I note for the member that there was \$1 billion of money for infrastructure. Some of that will accrue to Mississauga and other municipalities in the greater Toronto area. Once public accounts are completed and the auditor audited our books, we will know precisely what the amount available for additional infrastructure for municipalities is, and we anticipate that that will be sometime in the summer upon publication of public accounts.

Mr. Frank Klees: That is not what the minister said when he introduced the legislation. It is not what the expectation was of anyone—certainly no one on this side of the House—who heard his announcement.

I would like to know: Either the Minister of Finance was knowingly leaving Mayor McCallion with the false expectation that she and her municipality would be receiving additional funds, or the minister, seven days before he was to table his budget in this House, was not aware that his surplus would be \$600 million, not the \$800 million it would take to trigger the legislation he was introducing. Which is it? Did the minister know what was in the books, or did he knowingly leave municipalities and this House with the false impression that additional infrastructure funding would be forthcoming for municipalities?

1440

Hon. Dwight Duncan: What the municipalities know is, they got \$1 billion—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Member from Halton, would you please withdraw your comment?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Would you please withdraw your comment?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Withdrawn.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite referenced Mayor Hazel McCallion. Let me just read to him what she said on the day of the budget:

“I think that the budget has dealt with a lot of challenges that we’re facing in Ontario, such as unemployment and the programs they’ve come forward with to get people retrained.... So the budget was an overall big advancement, in my opinion, for many things that we’re facing, municipalities and the province as a whole—and I have to tell you, I really endorse, as you could see from the applause, that it’s time that the federal Minister of Finance, Mr. Flaherty, stop recommending people not investing in Ontario. I think the Prime Minister should get him under control.”

Not only do municipalities get \$1 billion in the budget; they, and we, will look forward that in the event that the surplus exceeds \$800 million, every penny of that, from \$600 million over, will accrue to municipal infrastructure, adding to the tens of billions we’ve already spent.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question actually was for the Minister of Housing, but perhaps he’s not here today because of the gaffe he made yesterday. So I will direct—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I remind the member that we’re not to make reference to the attendance of one of the members, and just ask her to keep that in mind. Thank you.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: So reminded, Mr. Speaker. So I will direct my question to the Premier.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would just ask that you see the uproar that it causes within the House. You’re letting your own clock run. Just acknowledge that you should not have made that comment. Thank you.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I withdraw that, Mr. Speaker, and ask my question to the Premier.

Yesterday, the Minister of Housing said that money in the budget had been allocated for new affordable housing; it has not. The meagre \$100 million is simply to repair existing buildings. I ask then: Why has this government allocated no money for new affordable—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: We’ve certainly tried to be very clear in this regard. We’re using some of our year-end money—\$100 million, in fact—to repair some 4,000 units. That would help nearly 10,000 Ontarians.

You will understand that we are in a period of slow economic growth. We’ve received all kinds of pressure from the right, saying that we should cut taxes in a dramatic and reckless way. We have refused to do that. Notwithstanding these challenging economic times, we think it’s important for us to move forward on a new front, in a thoughtful way, towards poverty reduction in the province of Ontario.

That’s why we have in place a new poverty reduction committee, headed up by Minister Matthews. We have already moved forward with respect to a new dental plan for our working poor. We’re doubling the student nutrition program to ensure that kids in school are not hungry and are capable of learning. We’ve done something on housing and we look forward to doing more on housing.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Certainly, with 125,000 households waiting for eight to 10 years on average for affordable housing, that is not an adequate answer. We have homeless in our gallery here, so I would ask the Premier again: Since homeless are dying on the streets of Toronto, why is there no money allocated for new affordable housing in this budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I want to remind my colleague that there are 18,000 new units being built. We are putting in place 35,000 rent supplements. Beyond that \$100 million, we've also put in place now, through this OSIFA mechanism, the ability for our housing authorities to borrow up to 500 million additional dollars to make additional capital improvements.

There is a need, obviously, for us to do more in the area of housing. There's a need for us to do more in the matter of poverty generally. That's why we've decided to take this on in a thoughtful way. We'll be putting in place—I've asked Minister Matthews to come forward with some recommendations. We're looking for some specific indicators that we can agree upon when it comes to poverty. We're looking for some specific targets and a focused strategy to help us get there. We want to do something in a measurable, thoughtful way that's effective—something that no government, frankly, has done yet in Ontario.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, this Saturday, March 29, at 8 p.m., people across this province and around the world will turn off their lights for one hour, Earth Hour, to show their support for taking action on climate change.

Last year, Earth Hour made its debut in Sydney, Australia. It was an enormous success. This year, it has become a global phenomenon. Earth Hour 2008 will take place across six continents and involve millions of people. I know that in my community, the city of Ottawa has signed on to participate in Earth Hour, and families throughout Ottawa–Orléans and Ontario will be turning off their lights to mark Earth Hour and show their support for tackling climate change. Minister, is the Ontario government participating in Earth Hour?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I would like to thank the member for the question, because indeed Earth Hour is an extraordinary global event in which Ontario is very proud to participate, particularly since it's only the second year since Earth Hour started. It sends a powerful message about making a difference. I would like to commend the World Wildlife Fund for the idea.

Canadians are showing their support. As a matter of fact, I think the website crashed yesterday with the number of people who tried to sign on from Canada and Ontario alone. Our government is glad to be part of that. I noted that at 8 o'clock on Saturday, all non-emergency lights in government buildings across Ontario, including the Legislature, will be switched off. I would like to thank the hard work of the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and his assistant, Peter Hargreave, and all those people who are involved in actually making it happen.

I would encourage all members of this House and all of our 67,000 Ontario civil servants to turn off their lights at home as well. I encourage everyone in this province to turn off their lights for one hour to see how one simple

action can make a difference as far as the environment is concerned.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Turning off the lights for one hour is a simple step everyone can take. Through this simple action, people will see first-hand how a simple change in their lifestyle can make a difference.

There's so much more that each and every one of us can do every day to reduce our environmental footprint. By taking transit, turning off appliances that aren't in use, and changing to energy-efficient light bulbs, we can all be part of the solution. High school students in Orléans are participating in the second annual Climate Change Challenge and preparing a video of what they can do as individuals to reduce their carbon footprint.

Minister, how is our government helping Ontarians to make the everyday changes that will make a big difference for our environment?

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'd like to thank the member for that supplementary. Certainly our government wants to help Ontarians make those environmentally friendly choices.

First of all, we are making significant investments not only here in Toronto but throughout Ontario in transit. As you know, we intend to spend up to \$17 billion on some 52 projects around this province for people who take public transit rather than drive their own cars.

The home energy audit and retrofit programs provide rebates for energy audits and for home energy improvements.

Through sales tax rebates on hybrid electric vehicles, Ontarians can get up to \$2,000 by way of a rebate when they purchase a hybrid car.

In this week's budget alone, we are proposing a retail sales tax exemption on qualified new Energy Star household appliances and light bulbs to the end of August 2009—as well as bicycles. There are so many small things that we can all do, each and every one of us, in our day-to-day lives to make a difference for the environment.

Once again, we encourage Ontarians around this province to all take part in this Earth Hour on Saturday at 8 o'clock. Turn off your lights. Do it for the environment; do it for—

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

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre de l'Ontario. When will the Premier commit to eliminating competitive bidding in home care?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not going to make that commitment. What my commitment remains is to ensure that we provide the best-quality home care. I understand the member's position on this, but it's not one that I can accept.

We think there's room to improve the competitive bidding process. The Minister of Health has acted on this

and frozen it for a time, but we want to take a look at it and make sure that we get it right.

One of the issues of concern that was drawn to my attention is that we need to attach more value to continuity of care. For example, Mr. Speaker, if we switch from one home care giver to another for your mother, that can represent a tremendous disruption in her life. So we need to find a way to attach value to continuity of care, but no, we won't completely reject outright the competitive bidding process.

1450

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm really happy to hear that continuity of care will be a factor. But I want you to know that this week, the Ontario coalition, and today, home care workers and SEIU members, held a press conference to ask for an end to competitive bidding in home care. The Premier knows well that the current competitive bidding model has decimated not-for-profit home care providers. In fact, it was only after massive community opposition to the loss of two long-time not-for-profit care agencies in Hamilton that the Minister of Health finally halted the process.

Why won't the Premier do the right thing and end this competitive bidding in home care once and for all?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I say I'm not prepared to do that. Coincidentally, a few moments ago I was talking to the Minister of Finance here about the growing cost of health care. Health care now consumes about one half of program spending; I guess it's close to \$40 billion. One of the things we need to do is find a way to help manage those costs, and the competitive bidding process is one way for us to do that.

Notwithstanding the process that the member criticizes, we have 93,000 more Ontarians who are now receiving home care, over the last two years alone. We also have a \$700-million aging-at-home strategy that we want to begin to put in place to continue to build on health services offered in the home.

So the member opposite's heart is in the right place, but we have a responsibility to pay some attention to some of the costs associated with the delivery of health care at the beginning of the 21st century. We think the competitive bidding process is an important aspect of helping us to manage those costs.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jeff Leal: My question is for my good friend the Minister of Transportation. The good people of Ontario, especially those in my riding of Peterborough, are concerned with the increasing congestion on our roads, as well as with the safety and upkeep of Ontario's roads and bridges infrastructure, so long neglected by previous governments. As we all know, the government has been proactive in tackling this infrastructure deficit with funding programs such as COMRIF and, most recently, the MIII program.

Can the Minister of Transportation please provide me and my constituents with what his ministry has done for the good citizens of the riding of Peterborough?

Hon. James J. Bradley: A very good question. He's been working hard on behalf of his constituents. I think congestion is a problem faced by most municipalities.

Our budget this week announced a roads and bridges infrastructure fund of \$400 million. This fund will benefit each municipality across the province. I'm sure the member for Peterborough was pleased to share with his municipal colleagues and his constituents that the city of Peterborough and Peterborough county received more than \$4 million. The purpose of the funding is for repair of municipal roads and bridges

But funding to roads and bridges is not enough to combat the growing problem of congestion on our roads. That is why our government initiated the gasoline tax-sharing program, which has ensured long-term, sustainable funding to municipalities for public transit. This year alone, the city of Peterborough received over \$1.4 million. That's \$5 million over the past four years. They're going to get 50 new, fully accessible transit buses.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much. I'd like to again address the Minister of Transportation. There's been a lot of talk lately, as there was in the most recent federal budget, of a commuter rail link between Toronto and Peterborough. Since being elected to this House in 2003, I've been advocating on behalf of my great constituents for a GO link from Peterborough to Bowmanville, which is the eastern extension of the GO train line. This is a public transit initiative that will make the lives of Peterborough residents much easier, as they can more readily access the greater Toronto area on their daily commute to work or for pleasure, as well as help to decrease congestion and allow people to leave their cars at home.

Minister, I ask you this afternoon: Could you please update this House on where this currently stands?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm happy to update the member, and I want to acknowledge his persistence over the years. I'm pleased to say that just this morning the Premier and the Prime Minister jointly announced three important initiatives to help support Ontario communities—the Premier and the Prime Minister.

One of these initiatives is the public transit capital trust, which expands on existing federal funding to provide an additional \$195 million of support for public transit in Ontario. This partnership with the federal government will allow us to go forward with important public transit improvements.

The member for Peterborough will be happy to know that it includes funding to help launch a regular GO bus service to Peterborough. It also includes funding for a joint study which will take a look at the possibility of a commuter rail line to Peterborough from Toronto. Speaker, I'm sure you'll agree that this is an important study and that these studies are important for matters of this kind—

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

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Spending announced in this year's budget is a 64% increase compared to spending just seven years ago. That's a faster increase than any other province in Confederation. On top of that, business taxes remain the highest in the country.

A healthy and booming economy might be able to bear the brunt of tax-and-spend policies, but during economic downturns like the one we see on the horizon or the one that we're already in, high tax rates and big spending programs are economic suicide. This is a fundamental tenet of the Keynesian counter-cyclical economic theory that made Ontario an economic powerhouse, and that when ignored, results in disaster. We experienced this first-hand in 1991, when consecutive NDP budgets exacerbated and extended the recession. Minister, do you recognize that history is repeating itself? Why are you scheduling Ontario for another long recession?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: This government has cautiously and prudently invested in the things that Ontario families need and value: a good health care system and an education system that we can all be proud of, with more students graduating from high school and more students accessing post-secondary education than ever before.

This government, in doing that, has also balanced the budget three years in a row. We inherited a huge deficit of \$5.6 billion. I'll point out to the member that every year that expenditures have increased on those things that families have asked this government to do, our revenues have increased more. That's why we have been able to pay down debt.

Our five-point plan is the right plan for challenging times. We continue to put the interests of families ahead of distant economic theory, and we'll continue to balance the budget in a responsible fashion.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Minister, I think you know where Ontario is headed. The minister likes to present his budget as balanced, but there's nothing balanced about the huge spending on one hand and paltry tax cuts on the other.

I hold in my hand the 1991 Ontario budget. As Ontario braced for recession, the NDP budget promised expensive skills training programs for workers, an increase in targeted corporate welfare and no incentives for new investment. Anyone who reads this document will feel an eerie sense of déjà vu. The only difference is that this government will spend more than double—more than double—what was spent in 1991. Minister, why do you ignore the lessons of the past, why do you ignore the gloomy predictions of economists and why do you ignore the economic realities of our present-day economy?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: We continue to invest in the things that are of value to Ontarians. Those values include health care and education. We do it, sir, in a responsible fashion, recognizing that we have an obligation to prudently manage the province's affairs.

These are challenging times. The high dollar, the price of oil and the state of the US economy make budgeting more difficult than it has been in the recent past. That being said, we have a balanced, pragmatic response to our reality that sees us reflecting the values that all Ontarians hold: good, high-quality public health care and education within a prudently-managed and responsible provincial budget.

1500

CONSERVATION

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Recently, 180 acres of Eramosa Karst was transferred to the Hamilton Conservation Authority, yet despite being an integral part to the karst ecosystem, the adjacent 80 acres of government-owned land were left unprotected.

Why is the McGuinty government planning to sell the feeder system of 80 acres for development instead of doing what's right: donating it to the Hamilton Conservation Authority to ensure long-term protection of the karst?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield: I apologize. I have laryngitis. I would be very happy—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment. Recognizing that she has that, I would give the member an opportunity to stand down that question. Ask a new question and then speak directly to the minister after. Do you have another question that you would be prepared to ask?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Yes. Minister Caplan—ORC.

Hon. David Caplan: I don't have laryngitis, so I'm happy to answer the question.

I want to thank the member because I had the opportunity to attend at the Eramosa Karst the dedication and the transfer of the deed over to the conservation authority. It was actually a very cold and rainy day, which was perfect because karst, of course, acts as a natural rain barrel. It's a significant geological feature.

I know that for the scientists and the people on the conservation authority it was quite a day of celebration as we took this significant natural feature and took all the lands they had identified at that time that were required for protection and we put it into the hands of the conservation authority.

No government, I would say, in my memory, has the kind of track record this government does when it comes to protecting vital lands like the Eramosa Karst, like the 1.8-million-acre greenbelt, which, unfortunately, members of your caucus did not see fit to support.

Mr. Paul Miller: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that the minister understood the context of the question, and I don't know where he's going with attacking the NDP on it. It's beyond my comprehension on that one.

The government likes to talk about protecting our precious water resources, so here's a perfect opportunity to do that. These 80 acres are the ecosystem feeder system for the karst. If you sell it off and put it to development, that ecosystem will be destroyed. The animal life, the natural paths and the escarpment will be ruined forever. The city of Hamilton has also requested that the ecologically important 80 acres feeding the karst be preserved.

Will you do the right thing for the Hamilton environment and announce today that these lands are being transferred to the Hamilton Conservation Authority? This is a must. It will be a crime if this is not done for the preservation of these wonderful lands and caves and animal life in that area. I don't know how you could possibly not do it.

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, I have been to the karst. I have walked the land. I don't know if the member has, but I can tell you that this valuable geological feature, this valuable and natural heritage, has been preserved for future generations to come. In fact, the record of this government is second to none when it comes to protecting these natural features.

Quite recently I had the opportunity, working with the Minister of Natural Resources, to transfer lands in the Lynde Marsh, as we have in the Bruce Trail, as we have in Halton.

Interjection: Rouge Park.

Hon. David Caplan: My friend opposite reminds me of the wonderful dedication of Rouge Park and Hunter park.

This is the legacy of this government. We have taken these valuable lands and put them into permanent protection and preservation. I know I can count on the member to work with us as we move forward in the future to identify future natural and geological—

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

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. My constituents, of course, listened very intently this week as the Minister of Finance presented his budget. As a very rural riding, of course, we want to hear the words "agriculture, farming and rural." Minister, could you tell us what kinds of investments were made in the recent budget in agriculture and in rural Ontario?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Thank you to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who is a very strong rural voice in this government. I think that the budget document does demonstrate that the McGuinty government will continue to invest in rural Ontario. We will invest in our farmers. The budget at the Ministry of

Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has increased. I know that folks across the way don't like to see those dollars go to people who support the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Fifty-six million dollars will be directed to our Pick Ontario Freshness strategy. This is what farmers have told us they need. They need the government to help promote fine-quality Ontario products.

I want to talk about the land transfer tax for farmers. Actually, this is a corporate tax cut for farmers. Any farms that are incorporated and want to transfer the property to a family member will no longer have to pay land transfer taxes for that transaction.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I know there certainly has been very positive response to the land transfer tax initiative in my riding. Could you tell me more about some of the things? I know that many of my constituents—we always want more. Could you tell me what else we have in the budget for farmers and for rural Ontario?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I think it's important to keep in mind that investments in rural Ontario certainly do benefit farmers and all other rural residents. Our government continues to invest in those measures that will expand access to primary care, like more family health teams. We're going to invest in more personal support care workers in our long-term-care facilities. We also have in this budget \$30 million to expand broadband services and \$30 million for the rural economic development program. In this budget, we have invested \$12.5 million in the Vineland research station—I think a very clear demonstration that the McGuinty government values the role that rural Ontario plays and the fact that agriculture is the second-largest economic driver in the province. The Premier and the Minister of Finance have recognized that. We are prepared to partner with our agriculture and rural partners to continue to keep Ontario growing.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, to welcome to the Legislature today two guests who are making their first visit to Queen's Park: Mike Reinders and Paul Wilson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: "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;”—1873, I believe—“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 agree with this petition. I’m pleased to add my name to it as page Laura comes and takes it from me.

HOME CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: I have the pleasure of introducing a petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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

“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;

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

“We call on the government of Ontario:

“(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 affix my name to it.

1510

DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY

Mr. Reza Moridi: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas 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 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;

“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 support the protection of this property of such historical, scientific and natural significance” from being used as commercial development.

I present to you today about 200 signatures which were presented to me during the rally held at Queen’s Park on January 16.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: “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 been an integral part of our spiritual and parliamentary tradition since it was first established in 1793 under Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe; and

“Whereas the Lord’s Prayer’s message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their ‘daily bread’ and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for 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, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the daily recitation of the Lord’s Prayer by the Speaker in the Legislature.”

I affix my name in full support.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU.

“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

“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;

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

"We call on the government of Ontario:

"(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 fully support this petition and affix my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I'd like to acknowledge the work of Dr. Tom Short from Credit Valley Hospital and some of his patients for signing it. 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 sign and support this petition and to ask page Alexander to carry it for me.

LORD'S PRAYER

Ms. Laurie Scott: "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 is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for 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."

This is signed by hundreds of people from many, many churches in my riding. I affix my signature to it and hand it to page Adam.

HOME CARE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: This petition comes from many people from Oxford, Brant and Elgin counties.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"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

"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;

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

"We call on the government of Ontario:

"(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 it, and I'm signing it.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Kuldip Kular: This petition is for children in smoke-free cars to support Bill 11.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas children exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk for respiratory illnesses including asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, as well as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and increased incidences of cancer and heart disease in adulthood; and

“Whereas the Ontario Medical Association supports a ban on smoking in vehicles when children are present, as they have concluded that levels of second-hand smoke can be 23 times more concentrated in a vehicle than in a house because circulation is restricted within a small space; and

“Whereas the Ipsos Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Ontario Tobacco-Free Network indicates that eight in 10 (80%) of Ontarians support ‘legislation that would ban smoking in cars and other private vehicles where a child or adolescent under 16 years of age is present’; and

“Whereas Nova Scotia, California, Puerto Rico, and South Australia recently joined several jurisdictions of the United States of America in banning smoking in vehicles carrying children;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to approve Bill 11 and amend the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban smoking in vehicles carrying children 16 years of age and under.”

I agree with the petitioners. I affix my signature on it and ask George to take it.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas GO Transit:

“—has been plagued with frequent service disruptions, often leading to trip cancellations and stranding passengers at GO stations;

“—has consistently shown poor on-time performance, which declines each year;

“—has blamed many of the disruptions on long-delayed construction projects it has recently undertaken;...

“—fails to provide accurate information when major delays occur;

“—shows little regard for passengers’ schedules or concerns; and

“—just approved a fare hike effective March 15, 2008, in spite of consistently poor performance and customer service;

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

“—to require GO Transit to provide a rebate on fares paid when GO Transit equipment failure, late arrival of equipment, staff shortage or rail congestion results in a cancellation of trains or a delay of more than 20 minutes to final destination;

“—better and more timely notification of transit cancellations, modifications and delays; and

“—more cars added to trains to ease the overcrowding, which causes safety concerns.”

I’m pleased to submit this to the House and pleased to add my signature to it while page Adam takes it from me.

1520

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I have a petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the federal government’s employment insurance surplus now stands at \$54 billion; and

“Whereas over 60% of Ontario’s unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa’s unfair eligibility rules; and

“Whereas an Ontario worker has to work more weeks to qualify and receives fewer weeks of benefits than other Canadian unemployed workers; and

“Whereas the average Ontario unemployed worker gets \$4,000 less in EI benefits than unemployed workers in other provinces and thus not qualifying for many retraining programs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to reform the employment insurance program and to end the discrimination and unfairness towards Ontario’s unemployed workers.”

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

HIGHWAY 35

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been planning the expansion of Highway 35, and that expansion has been put on hold by the McGuinty government; and

“Whereas Highway 35 provides an important economic link in the overall transportation system—carrying commuter, commercial and high tourist volumes to and from the Kawartha Lakes area and Haliburton; and

“Whereas the final round of public consultation has just been rescheduled;

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

“That the Liberal government move swiftly to complete the four-laning of Highway 35 after the completion of the final public consultation.”

It’s signed by many people from my riding, and I affix my signature.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Charles Sousa: “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 would like to acknowledge Dr. Richard O'Connor for collecting these signatures, and I sign mine as well.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Parkdale–High Park has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Premier concerning affordable housing. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Beaches–East York has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Finance in yesterday’s question period concerning the Ontario disability support plan and Ontario Works funding. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2008 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2008

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 26, 2008, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Mr. Michael Prue: It’s my honour today to have the whole hour. I hope to keep you entertained for that time. Okay, I can see some members cringing already.

Before I start the debate, I’d like to preface my remarks by talking about the people of Ontario and their efforts to try to reach the minister through the standing committee on finance. As the members might know, every January and/or February, the committee on finance travels the province to hear deputations from people around this great province of Ontario, to hear what their hopes and dreams are and what they would like to have found within the four walls of the budget.

Being one of the members of that committee, it was my honour to travel with my colleagues from the Liberal

and Conservative parties to visit many cities. In fact, we visited eight cities over the period of some eight or 10 days of hearings. We listened to 175 deputants; we took more than 100 written deputations from people who could not get on the list. We took all of that information in in order to find out what the people of Ontario hoped and dreamed would be contained within the budget.

I want to state from the outset how impressed I was with the demeanour of the people of Ontario, how impressed I think all of us were, from all three parties, at the very good suggestions they had to make on broad ranges of topics: everything from aboriginal communities to school buses; everything from what we needed in our schools to welfare cases and how much money the government should spend in various jurisdictions.

But the sad reality is that the government members of the committee—who had an obligation, in my view, to report to the Minister of Finance and to try to document and give some life to the statements that were made—rejected every single consideration that was put before them. The government members passed four vacuous, empty, meaningless motions commending the Minister of Finance for the good work that he had done in the past few months since his appointment and nothing else.

I think we missed an opportunity in this Legislature, from the opposition sides, but primarily from the government side, to advise the Minister of Finance of where the budget should be heading; where the 175 people we chose to speak to us wanted us to go. All of that was missing.

So when the Minister of Finance stood in his place a few days ago and spoke about what he wanted to do, he did so without knowing what the 175 deputants who were chosen by this Legislature had to say. He did all of his statement without knowing, in fact, what the people of Ontario actually wanted. In my view, this was a disservice to the finance minister, it was a disservice to this Legislature and it was a disservice to the people of Ontario.

It is our opinion that the finance committee has an obligation to pass this information on in the best and most thoughtful recommendations it could make. I am stating this for the record here today in the very real hope that when and if the finance committee is again struck for next year, in anticipation of next year’s budget—which, in all likelihood, given the financial circumstances that this province and the western hemisphere is finding itself in these days—that the finance committee will take its job seriously; that the government members will take their job seriously; that they will listen to the people of Ontario and that they will give the finance minister, whoever that finance minister might be, the benefit of the considerable wisdom of the people of this province. Without that wisdom that is ingrained in some 13 million people, how is it to be transferred and how is it to be reflected in the document which we are debating here today?

I do have to state for the record that the government motions were four, they were vacuous and they contained

no real information. I would ask that the members of this House commend the Conservatives for their dissenting report. I would like to say that although I do not agree with everything they put in that report, because I am philosophically opposed to some of the things they stood for, the dissenting report did try to capture—as much as they could, and in the terms that they believed—what some of the deputants had put forward.

I would also like to commend myself for putting in a dissenting report as well.

1530

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you.

What we tried to do in our report was talk to those 175 people and try to give voice to some of the things they had to say: talk to the people from the aboriginal community who are looking for fairness; talk to the people on Ontario Works and ODSP who were seeking some kind of meaningful increase in the payments in their all-too-miserable lives. We tried to give some kind of weight, and I would hope that even if you, as five government members, have to follow what you are told to vote on, you will file your own dissenting report and put in what you honestly think the people of Ontario want to say to us. Quite frankly, I found the whole thing almost as frustrating, or even more frustrating, than listening to what the Minister of Finance had to say when he presented his budget, not having one shred of information from the people of this province. Next year, I hope the members will be far more amenable to the people of the province of Ontario.

On to my main remarks: There's a big crisis. We've been talking about that crisis in this House since we resumed after the Christmas break a couple of weeks ago. The big crisis in this province has to do with the number of jobs that are being lost. I listened to the government side, and they said, "We've created bazillions of jobs." I suppose jobs have been created; I know they have. I know they've been created in the finance sector. I know they have been created in some of the service sectors. Some of those jobs pay the same, and some of them pay less. But where we are losing our jobs is in our competitive advantage that Ontario has had since Confederation, in the field of manufacturing and in the field of resource industries, particularly as it relates to forestry.

During last fall's election campaign, and continuing through the winter and spring, we in our party have been clear about the jobs crisis in manufacturing and the resource sectors. We believe it's the number one challenge facing this Legislature. Since June 2004, nearly 200,000 good-paying manufacturing sector jobs have disappeared in this province. That number does not include the almost 10,000 people who have lost their jobs in the forestry sector. To put this all into perspective, since 2003, when the people of Ontario decided to throw out one government in favour of another and the McGuinty Liberals started to occupy that side of this Legislature, Ontario has lost 18% of its high-paying

manufacturing jobs, which is the equivalent of about \$6.6 billion in wages that are no longer in the economy of Ontario.

As scary as that number might sound—18% of all manufacturing jobs—I ask members in the House to think about who has been most affected. If you live in Toronto and jobs are lost—this is a very big city with a lot of opportunities. A job lost one day—you might be able to find one in a reasonable or short period of time. But if you go to places like Hamilton, where 30% of the manufacturing jobs have been lost, you will find that that town, that city, is suffering and that the people who live there are suffering and there are not the resources and the banks and the big companies that a place like Toronto might have for people to look elsewhere. If you go to Windsor, it is even more savage and more brutal: 40% of the population who had manufacturing jobs have seen them flee. Unfortunately, Windsor has the dubious distinction of having the second-highest unemployment rate of any city in this country today.

Under Dalton McGuinty's watch, 10,000 forestry sector jobs, worth \$869 million to the Ontario economy, have been lost. Whole towns in northern Ontario have been shut down. Ontario manufacturing employment stood at 913,000 people in February 2008, and as I said earlier, that's a loss of some 200,000 jobs since July 2004, or about 18% in total. Who has been hurt? I remember in the last Legislature, sitting here on the opposition side, listening over and over and over again to government members, particularly ministers, standing up and talking about the auto sector: how we were number one, how all the jobs were here in the auto sector, how Oshawa was booming, how Windsor was booming, how St. Thomas was booming, how Ontario was now the new place of auto building in the world. I have to say that as you look down that list of manufacturing jobs that have been torn out of the heart of this province, you will note that auto—particularly parts and assembly—steel and, need I say, forest products are at the top of those lists.

Statistics Canada has found that when a worker loses a job in manufacturing, he or she usually loses a job in the \$20 to \$21 range, because that's what manufacturing jobs pay. If they are lucky enough to find another job, it is generally at lesser amounts, because manufacturing tends to be at a higher rate. Manufacturing jobs are the good ones.

For the past four years, the NDP has been sounding the alarm over this crisis in our manufacturing and resource communities and putting forward what we think are constructive policies. Even though I am in opposition, I do not take it as my job to be critical of every single thing a government does. We try as best we can to offer constructive suggestions on what might be done to alleviate the concerns of the people of Ontario.

We have tried, with constructive concerns, to put forward solutions such as the jobs protection commissioner, only to be laughed down or shouted down every time we talk about it. It has been successful in other provinces where it's been tried. It has been able to

bring together companies and unions and companies and workers in order to try to save manufacturing jobs before they are forever lost. It is an idea that may work, it is an idea that should be explored, but it is not an idea that has ever made the lexicon of the government members opposite.

We have talked about an industrial hydro rate, to no avail. We have shown that in countries and in places that have an industrial hydro rate, you can actually protect and save jobs. If you look at Germany, they have two rates. They have a rate for consumers and ordinary people in their homes and then they have an industrial rate which is significantly lower, because the German government understands that in order to protect the jobs and make sure that people have meaningful work to do, you have to protect the industry. And if they have to do so by charging a higher rate for individuals, who can choose to turn off the lights—as many of us are going to do this coming weekend—and companies which cannot choose to turn off the lights, other than to put people out of work, they will choose the lower rate for companies. We have suggested that the government look at this, but again, to no avail.

We have talked about tougher plant closure legislation, so that when a company merely decides, even though they may be making a profit, that it's cheaper to go and move holus-bolus to another jurisdiction where the work is cheaper or whatever reason they have, it might be just a little more difficult to do that.

I go back even to the time of my youth. I want to talk about this for a minute, because this has been an idea that I have put forward for a long, long time. I had a job, when I was a very young man with no grey hair at all, back in the 1960s—I worked in a place called Dunlop's. It was on Queen Street, in the east end of the city, between Broadview and Pape. It manufactured industrial rubber goods, mostly conveyor belts and other industrial uses of rubber. There were hundreds and hundreds of people who worked there. One day they just came in, after Dunlop combined with Pirelli, and announced they were going to shut the plant down, and hundreds and hundreds of people lost their jobs as a result.

What was shocking to me was that that company, even way back then, when it was shut down, was making a profit, and there was no commissioner and there was no government and there was no one to help to try to save the jobs; and many of the men—particularly the men, but some of the women—who were forced out of a job after a lifetime of service found it very difficult. Some of those men with whom I worked committed suicide. There were some whose families were devastated, who lost their homes. There were a few of the younger ones who were lucky enough to find other work and went on to do good things, but there were so many of them for whom that workplace had been their life, who were shut down, shut out and made completely redundant.

1540

I look about closure and I think back to those days, and what was visited upon that place on Queen Street is

being visited in many, many little towns and in many communities across this province. The devastation that is happening to those workers I am sure is the same devastation that I witnessed some 40 years ago, and we have not done anything as a province to it try to protect jobs.

I understand when a company goes bankrupt, I understand when it's not making a profit, I understand that some things cannot continue to exist, but we need some kind of legislation that would force—even if it's just a jobs commissioner who would go in there and say that if the company is making a profit and if there is meaningful work to be done, there has to be a darn good reason to shut down a community and to shut down workers. I wish something like that had found its way into this budget. But obviously there's not; the McGuinty government, this government, has rejected all of the ideas that were put forward.

More recently we put forward other ideas that we think would help this economy. We talked about a manufacturing investment tax credit, and this is not a novel or unique idea; this is an idea that has taken place. They have it in Saskatchewan, they have it in Manitoba, and since just recently they have it also in the province of Quebec. You target manufacturing industries and give them a tax credit, which is akin to helping them to pay for goods and services and even workers' wages when times are tough. Even when they're not making a profit, they can get this tax credit. We think it's a very reasonable idea. We look to other jurisdictions, particularly Manitoba, which has not suffered the same rate of decline in the manufacturing sector—in fact, it suffered no decline at all—while we here in Ontario have seen 200,000 jobs lost. We still put forward this idea, but we don't see it anywhere the budget.

We talk about an aggressive Buy Ontario. I remember, even years ago, there was a Buy Canadian policy. Governments went right out there and said, "Let's protect our work and let's protect our workers." We all understand that if we don't buy from our friends and neighbours—if you don't buy the car that's made in Oshawa but choose to buy the one made in South Korea—that's going to have some devastating impact in our community. The people who work here need to pay their mortgage, need to buy food, need to be part of the community, and we have an obligation to all of them to try to do what is right. We think there should be an aggressive Buy Ontario program for all transit vehicles: 50% of the contract value.

This is not a revolutionary idea of the NDP. This is an idea that is used literally throughout the world. Countries like Germany have it. Countries like the United States have it. Countries like Mexico have it. Quebec instituted a similar policy just last week. We think it's a good idea, but the government doesn't want to listen. I think the government didn't hear it because the government wasn't aware that these suggestions were made by the citizens of Ontario before the finance committee.

We talk about an immediate investment of \$350 million in federal labour adjustment funds in vulnerable communities. What the government did come forward—I think with a little skulduggery, if I can use that word, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. David Caplan: I don't think that's parliamentary.

Mr. Michael Prue: I didn't hear that there was an objection. I think it is parliamentary, having once sat in the chair. I don't remember that word ever being unparliamentary.

Mr. Peter Kormos: If calling a member a chippy isn't unparliamentary, how could that be?

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm not going to use that word, Mr. Speaker, but I would thank my friend for his suggestions.

We think the \$350 million in federal labour money should be spent in vulnerable communities. We do acknowledge that this government has chosen to spend some of that in retraining. Our program has been endorsed by economists, labour leaders and even business leaders. However, it has not been adopted by the minister.

My colleague Mr. Bisson had a private member's bill last week. That private member's bill was endorsed by the Toronto Star, the CAW, the transit industry, but was defeated by this government. Apparently they think that buying that 50%-Canadian-content figure accepted as a minimum by experts in the field was far too ambitious, and they seemed to be worried about exports.

I've only got an hour, so I want to go on to some of the other aspects here of the budget for which I feel very badly when I see what happened in the budget.

We had, I think, seven or eight various groups come before the finance committee and talk about the very sad state of affairs in our homes for the elderly. They came and talked about needing 3.5 hours of hands-on care. They talked about needing nurses. They talked about the level of care of loved ones who were often left to sit in soiled incontinence products. They talked about wanting the government to do something meaningful and fast and large in this regard.

When the budget came down, I listened intently to what the Minister of Finance had to say in this regard. I listened intently because for the few weeks leading up to that, we heard the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care opine about the situation and his own offer to wear incontinence products. It was a very sad statement for him to have made. I understand he has apologized, at least in some respects, in that regard.

But the very sad reality is that this is a government that promised a revolution in long-term care. They promised \$6,000 in additional monies per person, per institution, in order to make sure that the long-term care was there. In the release of the budget, it's quite clear that that was not there. One need only do the math, one need only look at what is being offered in this budget, to see that the \$6,000 is not there. The 3.5 hours is not there. All of the entreaties that had been made by the people of

the province of Ontario before the finance committee were not listened to at all. There is about five minutes, according to the experts, or six from some of them who are more generous: six additional minutes of long-term care per person in this budget. It's painfully apparent to me that those people who expected great things from this government in this regard can only be disappointed.

We believe in the seniors of this province. We believe that the people who live in these homes are essential, are important to the fabric of our community.

I know all members probably have had a chance to visit loved ones or at least to go into the homes for the aged. When I was a mayor and a councillor in the megacity of Toronto and went into the Metro homes for the aged, I was justifiably proud of how our community dealt with and treated the people who lived there. The people who lived there had adequate care. They had support. They had money. They had programs. But I also have to say that in the last 20 years, the quality of that care has not kept pace with the very real demands of the community.

If you went into the homes 20 years ago, most of the people were competent. They understood what was happening to them. They were able to help in their own welfare. They were able to do their own things. When I go there today, sadly, that is not the case. When you go there today, you will see that about 80% of the people have some form of dementia or Alzheimer's disease, or something that is robbing them of their own human dignity. The people that they have to speak and to act on their behalf are the workers, because very often they don't have family or, even if they do have the family, the family is not present in any meaningful way. They may come once a month or every so often for a visit. Sometimes they don't come at all.

I know that when my own mother-in-law was in one of those homes and suffering from forms of dementia, and as her quality of life slowly declined, it was literally impossible for me to get there all the time that I wished I could have, or for my wife to get there as well. We had to rely on the people in those homes to do what we could not do: to make sure that she ate, to make sure that she took the pills that were necessary, to come and bring some happiness into her life, to sing some songs—even the minister from the United Church who came on Sunday to deliver a sermon, which I think not that many people probably even understood, went there dutifully each and every Sunday to present that so that the women who were in that home for the aged could feel they were part of the community. They could sing some songs when Christmas came; they could sing the carols. I know my own mother-in-law used to love to go to that. I was told by the minister that she was particularly active when it came to singing the old songs.

1550

That kind of care is even more important today than it was 20 years ago. And if 20 years ago we gave 2.25 hours to people who were not incontinent, to people who were not suffering from Alzheimer's disease, then I

would suggest that the minister stating that it's up to 2.7 now or 2.8, or whatever figure he used, is simply not good enough.

There are other health care priorities that are missing in this budget. We proposed a number of practical measures to the finance committee that we wanted to be implemented in the 2008-09 budget. All were voted down by the Liberal majority on the committee and all of them were missing in the budget. We asked for important things like funding for community health centres. We think that community health centres are the way to actually save the government money because you won't have to put the money into more expensive hospitals and emergency care facilities.

We asked that money be put into aboriginal health centres because the worst-health-afflicted people in our province are those of the First Nations. I challenge any members who have ever been in First Nations communities, anyone who has ever travelled especially across isolated northern communities, to tell me that you think that our aboriginal communities, our First Nations people, have the same quality of health care that we expect here in southern Ontario. It simply doesn't exist. We wanted the money to provide publicly funded oral health care such as check-ups, fillings, extractions and emergency care to all of the Ontario children who live in the far north and who are cut out because of distance, because of lack of funds. And none of that was talked to in the budget.

We talked about special funding to a provincial network of CHCs and AHACs in order to ensure that every Ontarian who needs access to primary care can gain access to these services. This would have required 20 new CHCs or AHACs a year over the four-year mandate. None of that is going to be done.

We talked about ending the three-month wait period for OHIP coverage required of newly arrived immigrants. Ontario is the only province in Confederation that makes new immigrants wait three months to get OHIP coverage.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm going to repeat this for the member from Mississauga who doesn't know his history: Ontario is the only province in Canada today that makes new immigrants wait for three months. This government, if you didn't like what past governments have done, could change it. Why are we the only ones left?

I had a gentleman call my office two weeks ago. I'm not going to use his name here in the Legislature because I think he might be uncomfortable with that. He has been married to a wonderful woman—who was not born in this country—for the last three years. It has taken the immigration department a long time to process her papers, but about three months ago, she finally got her landed immigrant status. Then there was a delay of a couple of weeks or months while that was conveyed to the Ontario government, who finally said, "You are going to be eligible for OHIP sometime in about three weeks from now." The sad thing, though, is that she is pregnant and it is a difficult pregnancy that she is

experiencing, and she has a form of diabetes that is impacting or could impact upon the birth.

I phoned and went to the ministry and said, "Can you not make an exception in this case? This woman has lived here for three years. She has paid her taxes here in Ontario for three years. She is a permanent resident of Canada. She is about to give birth to a Canadian citizen who will be born in a hospital in Toronto. There is difficulty with the pregnancy. Her husband is not rich, nor is she. This is potentially going to cost a lot of money if there are difficulties related to the birth. The answer came back: No, they're not going to do that. They're not going to make an exception in her case or any other case.

I was going to tell the man, "Why don't you move to Quebec, or why don't you move to Manitoba, Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland? Why don't you move to Alberta, British Columbia or the Northwest Territories?" Every other province would do something for them, but in this province we don't care about immigrants, in spite of what some government members might say. If we really, truly cared about them, we would treat them on the day of their landing the same as we would treat any person who was born here.

I wish the minister had listened to what we had to say in the finance committee, or that the members of the finance committee reported, because I think some government members might be very comfortable to do that for their communities, especially the communities that have large numbers of immigrants in them. None of that is in the budget, though; not a single thing.

I would like to talk about poverty.

Mr. Speaker, might I ask the clerks—I'm not sure how much time I have, because the clocks are just telling me the time and it hasn't been on since I started.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): You have until about 16:27.

Mr. Michael Prue: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm about halfway through.

I'd like to talk about the anti-poverty strategy. We had, I think, 15 deputations that talked about poverty in Ontario. Some of them had great hope in their eyes. They came into the committee with great hope in their eyes, because in the last election the Liberals talked about developing a poverty strategy and doing away with poverty in Ontario. They came looking for some kind of down payment. They came before our committee and said, "We really need to have something done, and we are looking for a real anti-poverty strategy."

Every third question in the committee was mine; that's the way it works. The government side would get one person to question, the Conservatives would get the second and I would get the third, and we'd rotate. So to every third one of these people who came to talk about poverty I would put the question: "What is it exactly that you're looking for as a poverty strategy? How much money are you looking for in this budget to help alleviate the poverty, particularly of those who are on Ontario disability support? How much are you looking for?" In every single case where that question was asked, it

ranged between 10% and 25%. One said, "As long as it's in double digits, I don't care"—I remember that. All of them were looking for something meaningful in this budget to erase the radical and terrible actions that had taken place under the Harris Tories back in 1990. All of them—particularly people on ODSP—were looking for an opportunity to enjoy the fruits of this province, to live not daily in abysmal poverty but to actually have an opportunity to enjoy some of the benefits of living in Ontario.

In 2003, Dalton McGuinty promised to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement. That has not been ended. When questions are asked in this House, as I did this week to the minister—"When is this going to be ended?"—there is no talk about ending it, even to this day. We know the government is talking about an Ontario policy, where monies are going to come forward, and I don't say that's a wrong policy. I think that if Ontario wants to implement a system similar to the national system, then good for you. But it is immoral, in my suggestion, for this government to take the money that the federal government gives to our poorest children and claw it back from them. You are clawing back the money. Even your own program is going to give some \$50 to people who are receiving the national child benefit, but you are still going to be clawing back, in 2011, \$72 from our poorest citizens. I don't know why the finance minister wants to continue this.

1600

It is shameful that people receiving social assistance, both Ontario disability support and Ontario Works, are actually receiving less in provincial benefits, when inflation is taken into account, than they were when the McGuinty government was elected in 2003. I asked a question—I know I'm going to have a late show here tonight—of the finance minister, who claims, somehow magically, that there is a 27% increase. The library was excellent in researching this, and I want to assure the members opposite that that is not the case. I want to assure you that the amounts of money that have been given by this government in its last mandate and in this budget have not even kept up with inflation. The first budget gave 3%; the second budget gave zero; the third budget gave 2%, but it was forward for only half a year, so it resulted in less than 2%; the fourth budget was the same, 2%, but not given till the second half of the year; and this budget is 2%, but not given till the second half of the year. In total, it's less than 8%. Inflation in that same period has been 9%.

I don't know how the government can say, "We are doing good things." There are 230,000 people in the province who are on ODSP—230,000 of them—and 185,000 of those are single persons. I want to underline that: 185,000 of the 230,000 are single persons. There is no supplement or other government program that they can get, as some of the ministers often suggest. So their 7% or 8% increase over the last four years is literally that. They don't have any children or other programs from which they can get money.

These are people who their own doctors say are incapable of working; these are people who the government doctors concur and confirm are incapable of working. We in this House should be ashamed that all we can do is perpetuate their poverty; that we in this House can do nothing except say, "The maximum you can have is \$935 a month," knowing full well that no matter where you live in the province of Ontario, you cannot, in most jurisdictions, even rent a one-bedroom apartment for that sum of money.

In this budget, all of those groups that came before us—every single one of them that was looking for a double-digit increase—have to sit there today, I'm sure, and wonder why the minister did not act upon their request. I want to say it's in part because the finance committee did not send that recommendation to the minister, and the minister in turn saw fit to give 2% only in the second half of the budget, thus saving some \$57 million, according to government figures that I've asked for, by not giving it right away. I'm sure the poorest people in this province could use that \$57 million far better than most of us.

I'd like to talk, again on poverty, about the minimum wage. It's tough out there. It's tough out there when you talk to people who struggle at \$8 an hour—at the end of this month, it's going up to \$8.75 an hour. You talk to them and you ask them what that 75 cents an hour is going to mean to them. They're pretty bright, and most of them can tell you that if they work a 40-hour week, that's about \$30 extra a week. I'm sure every single one of them is going to be very happy to get \$30 more a week. The same way that municipalities are happy to take any crumbs that might be thrown to them, and just as other people who are getting crumbs thrown to them seem to be happy about it, so will they.

But you have to ask yourself: Why does this Legislature condone people who work full-time in Ontario living in poverty? Why do we condone someone who goes out and scrubs floors living in poverty? Why do we condone someone who goes out and delivers handbills having to live in poverty, or someone who does menial work or factory work or any work having to live in poverty?

We believe that that is not something that is sustainable in the long run. We believe that the government should take meaningful action to increase that at a faster rate. Perhaps, had you increased it at any kind of rate in the last Parliament, it may not have been necessary. Had it already been up to \$10.25 by the time you got here this time, it may not have been necessary to do what we are asking you. But you didn't do it then, and we are asking you again: Please increase the minimum wage so that a person working full-time in the province of Ontario is above the poverty line. I don't think that's too much to ask. We think that would necessitate increasing the wages up to \$11, \$11.25, and then hitching that to inflation, so that people would be assured that if they work full-time, they don't have to go to food banks.

The government announced in the budget that they're doubling the support for meals for children at schools and community centres through the student nutrition program. When I read that I thought, "This is great." Having grown up in Regent Park, I remembered the many hungry kids. I was not necessarily one of them myself, but I remember the hungry kids with whom I went to school who were eyeing or looked longingly at an apple I might have, or who saw some of us eating lunch and they themselves had none. I remember that, and it stuck with me my whole life.

I thought, "Here's a nutrition program," and until we did the math, I thought it probably wasn't a bad thing. But if this government is saying they are doing a good thing by way of students and children, then they have to acknowledge that the extra money in the program is about 50 cents per child per week.

I went home last night—I do the shopping in my house—and looked around at what I had bought for 50 cents that I would give to a kid, what a kid could get for 50 cents. It was an orange or an apple or half a stalk of celery, something like that; that's what you would get for it. I'm sure the children would want that, I'm sure the children need it, but I'm not sure it's sufficient. If that is your poverty strategy, then I'm not sure that it is enough.

We moved a number of motions, all of which were defeated, to end the clawback so that families could keep the \$122 that are being clawed back now. We moved to implement a full Ontario child benefit that would provide equal benefits to all low-income families, including those on some forms of social assistance. That was defeated. We moved a motion to introduce a \$10.25 minimum wage effective immediately and to increase—that was defeated.

I don't know what this government's poverty strategy is, but I do know that when those people who came before our committee heard what the finance minister had to say, they must have been hugely disappointed and must have wondered why they were not listened to.

Other things: property tax reform; fair funding for our cities. It was bizarre to listen to the finance minister in the days leading up to the budget, when he hauled in the mayor of Mississauga, the head of AMO and the finance budget chief of the city of Toronto to announce that if there was more than \$600 million at the end of the year, after everything was done, sometime in August there would be money for cities. They were all smiles and were all sitting there thinking, "What a wonderful thing."

When the press asked me at the end, they seemed to be kind of happy with this. I retorted, I think rightly, that these are municipalities across this province, some 480 of them, who would be happy if they got anything. So even if there was a promise or a potential of some money, they would be happy. But you can imagine their frustration and my frustration when the minister stood up to deliver his budget and when, inside the four walls of that budget, there was an acknowledgment that there may be only a \$600-million surplus, that that \$600-million surplus

would go to paying down the debt, and that there may in fact be nothing for the cities.

I think the cities ought not to have been surprised because, a few days before the budget was delivered, this side of the House got a copy of the new bill, the bill that somehow is going to give the money to the cities. Very careful reading showed that the cities were earmarked to get money only in the first year and only if there was money available, and that in the second and subsequent years it went to wherever the Minister of Finance said it would go. Also contained within the body of that bill was the provision that it could be cancelled literally at any time. So it was an attempt to buy the cities. I don't know why the government is not doing what the government promised it would do. If you want to give the economic wherewithal to the engines of economic development of our province, which are the cities, then you should do something meaningful in this budget and every budget to make it happen. The easiest, the best and the fairest system is to end the download.

1610

When the Harris Tories brought in the download, it was devastating to our towns, municipalities and cities across this province. It was absolutely devastating. They will tell you that there's \$3.2 billion in taxes that they collect that go to provincially mandated programs over which they have very little control. They will tell you that if you could take that \$3.2 billion off, there would be monies available for them to do what they need to do to build the infrastructure. They will tell you that there are opportunities for this government to change the tax regime so that cities and towns get the monies they need.

I remember when the federal government reduced the GST from 7% to 6% and from 6% to 5%. When the province asked, "What about cities?" the federal Minister of Finance made a very sensible suggestion. I don't agree with Tories a lot, but it was a sensible suggestion. He said that if the province—any province—if Ontario wanted to boost its provincial sales tax by 1% to offset the reduction and give that money to the cities, they could do so. I know that my leader, Howard Hampton, sent a letter to the Premier, following the last election when that happened, suggesting that the NDP would support him if he unilaterally made that move, that the 1% that was being taken off the GST be added to the PST and earmarked for the municipalities. That could have been done in this budget, but it wasn't. As a result, you have cities and towns running around saying, "Give me money; give me money; show me what you'll give me." They all seem to be happy that in this budget there are monies earmarked for one year for things like transit and bridges and da, da, da. But there is nothing there for the long term.

We know that in the next budget—the figures are already there. The revenues of the province of Ontario have gone up approximately \$5 billion a year since 2003—every year. They've gone up from \$88 billion to \$93 billion to \$98 billion, and they keep going up by about \$4 billion to \$5 billion a year. I ask the members to

look on page 108—I think that’s the page—where it shows that the anticipated revenue for the province of Ontario for next year is going up \$200 million only, that the recession is biting and that the finance ministry officials know there’s not going to be money. So if anything meaningful needs to be done, it needs to be done in a long-term way—not to say that “This year we’re awash and we have several billion dollars and we’re going to throw some out the door and you’re all going to be smiling, municipalities.” And indeed they may all be, but next year they’re not going to be. If the recession lasts longer than I hope—and I hope it doesn’t come at all—then I’m afraid that many people, including our municipalities, will not be smiling quite so much.

The NDP believes in fair property taxes. I noticed with some interest that the Minister of Finance has a new policy for seniors. I’m not going to say that it’s a bad thing to give seniors \$250 a year to stay in their houses. I don’t think it’s going to make that much of a difference to that many seniors. Property taxes average around \$2,500 to \$3,000 per house, depending on the municipality—

Mr. Peter Kormos: Seventy cents a day.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, it’s 70 cents a day. If it’s going to keep you in your house, then, good, I’m glad they get it, but I don’t think it’s likely. I think what is missing here is that our poorest senior citizens don’t own a house. More than half of those who are over 65 years of age in this province do not live in their own home. They rent an apartment. They live in a seniors’ residence. That is where they live. There is nothing in this budget—no \$250 going up to \$500 the year after—for them. I have to question the fairness of that.

I also have to question why this is being done at this time. I’m trying not to be cynical. But I do know that this fall MPAC is going to be sending out letters in the mail. This usually comes out in September, October, November. I’d like to say that the scariest thing in the fall isn’t Halloween; the scariest thing in the fall is when you get your MPAC letter if you own a house, because you open that letter and you see how much they now say it’s worth and consequently you know how much your taxes are going to go up. That’s the scariest thing. I think that what has been done here in this budget, without being cynical, is to shield the seniors who are going to come forward in massive numbers this fall on the four-year cycle when they see the values of their houses going up astronomically. They are going to be told, “Don’t you fret; don’t you worry. You’re getting your \$250.” But I do have to question why seniors who live in apartments, why seniors who live in homes, why they are not eligible for the 70 cents a day, because they, in most cases, are poorer than those who own their homes.

The same question was raised by the apartment owners. I don’t think there was much in their heart trying to protect poor people. I think they were trying to protect themselves. But they did raise the point, and it was a good point to raise, that their tenants won’t be seeing any of that additional money.

The reform of the property tax is coming, and when it comes I don’t know what the government is intending to do. They skilfully and carefully made sure it happened after the election and took it off the agenda as an election item. But the reform of the property tax needs to take place so that we do not live in fear every year, every two years, every four years or however often reassessments take place. We need a model where people buy their property and know what it’s worth and know the taxes they’re going to have to pay. We need a model where the municipalities don’t have to raise approximately 25% of all the monies they raise to pay for provincial programs. We need a model that implements all of the recommendations of the Ombudsman’s report. I’m looking forward, I guess in September, to see—and to marry that with this budget—what the government’s true intent is.

We go on to child care: not one word in the budget about child care. We look at other provinces, particularly Quebec, which has the best child care program in the entire country, bar none. They had it before two weeks ago. They have an even better one now, having committed some \$600 million to child care. That’s not the case in this Legislature. When the minister was asked today to show which page, there is not a page; there was not a line item; there was simply a line saying that we believe in quality child care. I don’t know what that does to the families and the kids in this province that need it.

The Liberals have failed to deliver on their 2003 commitment to invest \$300 million in new provincial money to expand the regulated not-for-profit child care sector. The commitment of \$25 million re-announced in this year’s budget will have little impact on the quality or affordability of child care in this province. We tabled Bill 26 today. It was defeated when all but two members of the government made sure and voted against it. So much for this government’s commitment to quality child care.

In terms of municipal infrastructure, I’ve already spoken about that. I am mindful that I have some seven or eight minutes left, so I’d like to go on to climate change. There’s precious little in this budget about the environment—precious little at all. In the statement from the finance minister, in the 14 pages that he read out, I don’t remember that the environment was mentioned at all.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: I’m being told by my colleague—but it must have been a pretty skimpy line, because it went right by me.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: The \$56 million—

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay. I’ve been told that there’s a whole \$56 million out of a \$96-billion budget, and the \$56 million is being put forward for some kind of cleanup.

1620

Other provinces have really embraced the idea of Kyoto. Other provinces have really embraced ideas, whether you agree with them or not. You look at British Columbia, which has gone way out on a limb, talking about carbon credits. You look at other provinces like

Quebec, with meaningful plans to address climate change. And the statement in our budget—all the minister could muster was a weak statement that the McGuinty government will work with other provinces and US states to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The other provinces are bold. They're exciting, they're coming up with ideas, and they're willing to put some money and some muscle into it—and this government is willing to talk. There is no climate change plan. There are no meaningful programs to address climate change. There is no funding. It's a triple play of negligence.

We need a climate change plan introduced into this House immediately for debate, so we can get on with doing what Ontarians expect of us here—to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in keeping with the Kyoto protocol. If the government does nothing, then you play right into the hands of the federal government, which is bound and determined not to implement Kyoto. I think that we have to be at the forefront. We have to at least match that which is being done in Quebec, British Columbia and other provinces.

This budget confirms that Ontario, if they do nothing, remains at the back of the pack of Canada and around the world when it comes to climate change.

You don't have to listen to me. Listen to what the Environmental Commissioner, Gordon Miller, said in April 2007. He said that the ministries of the environment and natural resources were “starved of funding for core functions” and that “at a time of unprecedented public concern for the health of the planet, Ontarians may find it hard to believe that these two ministries are today struggling with fewer resources than in the early 1990s, but that is unfortunately the case.”

Without the resources—and I do not believe that there were adequate ones put in this budget—it will be impossible for us to develop the new regulations on energy efficiency and greenhouse gas caps that are required to address climate change. All we saw was a joint increase of 3.5% for the ministries of the environment and natural resources—not enough to do the job; not enough to provide Ontarians with the environmental protection they want and deserve.

The Environmental Commissioner has shown the drastic underfunding of the ministries of the environment and natural resources, and the increase that is here still falls short of the resources required by the MOE and the MNR to properly protect our environment and our resources.

I think I have some four minutes left. I have spoken about forestry. I had much more, but I'm going to go on.

I want to conclude with our First Nations. It's no secret that there is a strained relationship between the First Nations and the McGuinty government. We had literally a dozen groups come and talk to the finance committee, as we travelled the province, about what we could do to help First Nations. None of it found its way into this budget. The McGuinty government's failure to carry out its duty, to properly consult with First Nations prior to allowing resource development on First Nations

traditional lands, has resulted in KI leaders being in jail. I'm not saying for a minute that the McGuinty government put them there, but the McGuinty government's failure to live up to the constitutional requirements of the province of Ontario, its failure to live up to its duties as a signatory to Treaty 9—Ontario is a signatory, along with the federal government, to Treaty 9 for much of northern Ontario—has resulted in six or seven leaders being in jail today.

It's a very sad day in Ontario when First Nations leaders are forced to protect their own aboriginal rights and traditional lands against mining companies because the government failed to properly consult with them in the first place.

Beyond that, what was there in this budget for First Nations? We know that the children in Attawapiskat are studying in portables. We know that their school is unfit, that there was a diesel spill and that the kids can't go in. I've been in that school. You cannot stand the smell in that school. We know that a new school is needed. We know the federal government is not paying for it. But I think we have an obligation in this province for those students, who are our students, who are Ontario students, to give them the kind of training that they would get in Scarborough or in Mississauga, that they would get in London or in Thunder Bay. We have that obligation, and I would like to see some money there.

I also think there needs to be some money for the NAN, for the policing. Do you remember when a First Nations person died in one of the police stations? You have to remember that they're locked in the police station and they can't get out. It's a jail; they're locked in at night. It did not meet the fire code, and it burned to the ground. That poor man died. That is not a lone station; the police stations in northern communities are all unable to meet the fire code.

The NAN leadership has been down looking for money, and they got brushed off by the minister of this government. They were told, “No money until the federal government commits money.” That isn't what they were looking for. They were looking for the Ontario government, the leadership of Mr. McGuinty and the leadership of the new minister, to do something. That leadership was woefully lacking.

If you want to be serious, if you want to indicate to the First Nations community that we are on their side, you can't say that we're going to do it in partnership with the federal government. You have to say that we're going to do it and that we're going to make the first move; that we are serious in this province about our First Nations community; that we are serious that they are Ontario citizens; that we are serious that they have a place in this Confederation.

I believe that one of the ways we can do that is by indicating to them that the \$23 million they need in total to refurbish their police station, to get their recruits, to have adequate policing in our northern communities, is done. In many of our northern communities, what happens is, if there is a domestic dispute at 2 or 3 o'clock

in the morning and they phone for the police, there are no police to come to undertake what's necessary because they only have enough funds to have a police officer during the day. They don't have anybody there at night. Oftentimes the chief or some other person in the community is called upon to show up at 2 or 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and undertake police activities, things for which they are not trained, to take people to jails—that are not safe for them to be in—to cool off overnight.

I'm indicating from here that my time is almost up. I think that if I could close on anything, it is that this province needs to do as much as is humanly possible to implement a program whereby our First Nations are not shut out of this province, they do not walk away from the table, but they embrace this province for the opportunities that should be available to them. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your leniency.

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to seek unanimous consent, related to your earlier announcement on the late show, for the late show requested by the member for Parkdale–High Park to be taken up on Tuesday, April 1, instead of today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have unanimous consent to move the late show to next Tuesday? Agreed? Agreed.

Further debate? The member for Pickering–Scarborough West.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: This is my first opportunity as the newly elected member—actually, Pickering–Scarborough East, but that's pretty close, considering it's the first time up. Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for recognizing me. I'm very pleased to be on my feet today and having an opportunity to speak to the 2008 Ontario budget. I'll be sharing my time today with the member for London–Fanshawe.

I've had the opportunity over the past three days, first to hear the Minister of Finance make the presentation on our budget, and subsequently, during the last two days, to hear from both the official opposition and the third party. After that amount of time, I think it's kind of necessary to come back to what the budget is really about, as opposed to what both the official opposition and the third party would like the budget to be about.

Quite frankly, we've taken our marching orders from the constituents, from the election in the fall of last year. This budget, to a large extent, reflects on where we're going within that mandate. It was only two days ago that Minister Duncan rose to present this budget. It's a significant budget to the people of Ontario and a significant budget to the Liberal Party and our caucus, as the first budget of our renewed mandate, of a second majority McGuinty government.

1630

It's our third consecutive balanced budget presented. As we finish this year, if my math is right, it will actually probably be the fourth year in which the government will end up in a balanced and surplus position. We're

reaching into unprecedented territory with the plans we have ahead.

This budget speaks specifically to the concerns that Ontarians have, whether those Ontarians are laid-off workers wondering how they're going to afford to be retrained for new careers—not just wondering how they are going to find an opportunity to do the same old job they were doing, but real opportunity to prepare for a new economy.

It speaks to low-income families who can't provide dental care for their children, with the beginning of our program for poverty reduction ensuring that those young people and adults have the type of care they need in regard to their dental care.

It speaks to low- and moderate-income senior homeowners who do have concerns about their capacity to meet all of their needs, including their property tax needs, as the valuations on their houses increase, and effectively the resources they have available to them are there but they can't afford to draw on those, or don't want to draw on those, out of their family home.

It speaks to university and college students as they struggle with the high cost of their education, the rising cost of their education.

To each of those, Minister Duncan said that we've heard. We've heard the concerns of Ontarians and we're going to make things better in this province in a strategic and thoughtful manner. To all of them, our government has said that, together, it's our plan to make Ontario a stronger place.

In his budget statement, the minister outlined a few of the challenges that Ontario faces at this point in time. We are all quite familiar with what's happening. The US economy is slowing down at this point. We're all hopeful that it will rebound in a short time frame. But, having said that, it would appear that there will be a period of instability within the American economy.

Oil prices are on the rise. The minister, even in question period, as has the Premier, has referenced the changes that have occurred in only a few short years, with oil now in the area of \$100 a barrel.

We have a higher-than-anticipated Canadian dollar. It wasn't that long ago that people would have said that a Canadian dollar at par for an extended period of time was not something we were likely to see. Now, in effect, that's exactly what happens. We're in the par range, whether it's 98 cents, 99 cents, \$1.01, \$1.02, but it's staying there at this point in time and we have to adjust to that reality as well.

We have to take into account the growth forecasts, and those have been reduced. Our projections are such that we are taking into account that lower growth rate within the economy and still maintaining a prudent approach to budgeting.

We know, in spite of the fact that our economy is resilient, that certain sectors, some communities and, frankly, far too many families are not fully sharing in Ontario's prosperity. Our budget recognizes and acknow-

ledges the needs of these key sectors, these communities, and particularly these families.

The Premier in his comments, as well as the finance minister, has spoken to what is seen as a centrepiece in the budget, and that's the investment of \$1.5 billion over three years in a skills-to-jobs action plan. It's matching the skills of Ontarians with job opportunities. We'll train unemployed workers for new careers, not just the same careers. We're going to expand apprenticeships, build more spaces in the colleges and universities that have been so successful here in the province of Ontario, and assist students with key education costs, whether that's in technology or the hard-copy books they so much depend upon.

Through a \$355-million Second Career strategy, we're going to assist some 20,000 unemployed workers with long-term training that launches them into new, well-paying careers. The government has plans to expand apprenticeship programs, targeting 32,500 new registrants annually—a 25% increase by 2011-12.

Most importantly, our people will be training in areas where growing industries are experiencing a shortage of workers. It's incredibly important to focus the training, not on training people to do jobs that aren't there, but on training people for jobs where there are actually shortages of workers. When tens of thousands of jobs in this province go begging because we don't have people ready and able to take up those challenges, the economy suffers.

Starting this fall, we'll provide a new textbook and technology grant for some 550,000 full-time college and university students. Students from rural and remote areas in this province, who don't necessarily have ready access to our urban environments and our urban colleges and universities, will benefit from a new distance grant to assist them with their travel costs so they can share fully, as do other students, in the opportunities at colleges and universities here in the province of Ontario.

There's a commitment of some \$970 million to go toward building places where students can learn, building places for training in our colleges and in our universities.

It's not only our students, those who are going to drive the economy in the future, for whom we have to have concern. We have to have some special concern for those who have actually created the environment in which we live now: our seniors. Our seniors have contributed so much to this province's success over so many years.

This budget proposes a property tax grant to help low- and moderate-income senior homeowners pay their taxes and stay in their homes. In the early part of next year, the province will provide grants of \$250 to some 550,000 senior homeowners, and the grants would rise to a maximum of \$500 in subsequent years. Over a five-year period, this would amount to almost \$1 billion in savings to seniors across the province. This is in addition to the property and sales tax credit that's already in place for both homeowners and those renting seniors of low and more modest incomes.

Mr. Mike Colle: That's \$625.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: You're right: That amounts to about \$625 a year. When you add that onto the \$250 and then \$500, you can see that low- and moderate-income families will be eligible for up to about \$1,000 to well offset the expectations they have in property tax.

Mr. Jeff Leal: These are grants, right?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: These are direct grants to them.

To help ensure that Ontarians have an opportunity to be at their best, particularly our children, the new cabinet committee is working on a strategy to reduce poverty. In leading that, Minister Matthews has led the charge, in effect, to more effectively begin the process of ensuring that we move children in particular out of poverty so they can share in the bounties of this great province.

Improvements to dental care, to make a difference in the health and well-being of thousands of low-income families: The government is going to provide some \$135 million over the next three years.

To ensure that no student has to start school hungry each day, we'll provide good, well-balanced food to thousands more children by doubling our investment in the student nutrition program over the next three years.

There's help, as well, for those who find themselves unable to be in the workforce for any variety of reasons. There's help for some 690,000 Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program recipients. The government will increase social assistance benefits by 2% in 2008-09. This is in addition to the Ontario child benefit.

The time is short, because many members of the Legislature, many members of our caucus, want the opportunity to speak to this budget and the things it's going to do directly in their communities and for Ontario more broadly.

The budget really is about ensuring that Ontarians have the opportunities that they want and the skills they need to succeed so that, together, we can make this a stronger Ontario.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: First, I want to thank my colleague the member from Pickering-Scarborough East, the parliamentary assistant for the Minister of Finance, for his eloquent detailing of the highlights of the budget.

As you know, this budget, when announced a couple of days ago, didn't talk about the details.

I listened to the member from Beaches-East York speak for almost an hour about the elements of the budget. I'm always interested when he speaks, and I listen to him speak about many different subjects and issues, especially today when he was talking about the budget.

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I agree with him to a certain extent about certain issues. While I agree that we're not having a good time right now in the province of Ontario or North America, the economic circumstances are changing. There is an economic shift.

We had the chance last year or the year before to meet with the head of the CAW, Buzz Hargrove, when he came to our auto caucus and spoke to us after his visit to China. He told us about how much an engineer in China

makes a year in comparison to an engineer in Ontario. It is a huge gap in salary, and also for an engineer in Mexico and in many other jurisdictions in the world.

Not a long time ago, I was reading in the paper about how a car produced in China would cost about \$5,000. The same, similar-condition car would be produced in India for \$4,500. For the same car, it would cost Ontarians almost \$12,000.

There is a shift in the economy in North America and worldwide. That's why this budget speaks to the future of this province, about a plan for the future of this province by trying as much as possible to maintain the jobs we have by supporting companies, factories and manufacturing jobs across the province to maintain their existence and to keep hiring and maintaining the jobs they have in this great province of Ontario.

Also, we try to attract many other jobs to come and open by providing financial support and giving whatever is necessary in order to get them to come and open in Ontario and hire Ontarians to work in those factories in those jobs. To a certain extent, we are successful in attracting a lot of companies. Great examples are Toyota in St. Thomas, Hanwha in London, Hino in St. Thomas, the Original Cakerie in London, and many other factories and companies trying to open in Ontario. They come to Ontario not only because Ontario has a good location or mass of land, but because Ontario offers other things, like skilled workers, a good health system, a good education system, a safe environment, and a government willing to work with them and give them whatever support they need in order to progress and succeed.

No doubt about it: There is a lot of competition. Not long ago, a barrel of oil was \$60 or \$70; today, it's almost \$112. Not long ago, our dollar was almost 80 cents compared to the American dollar; now, it's almost \$1 or \$1.01.

Not a long time ago, the economy in the United States was performing excellently. As you know, we deal with the Americans, our neighbour to the south, on a daily basis. Basically, our economy is dependent on them in terms of trade, manufacturing, production and many different issues because of the population differences between us and them. We have a population of 13 million; they have a population of 350 million. That is why, if their economy is going down at the present time, there is no doubt about it: It's going to affect our economy. We share a lot of shifts in our economy. When you hear the leaders of the United States talking about job losses by the thousands and hundreds of thousands in some states, there's no doubt about it: It is going to affect us; it is going to affect our economy.

So what do we do? Do we sit on our hands and cry? No. We have to reinvest in the future. That's why this budget speaks a lot about innovation and research. We invest in universities and colleges, invest in communities, because we believe strongly that communities and municipalities are our strong partners. They give us the ability and the strength to carry on for the future.

This budget, despite what my friend from Beaches–East York is saying, paid a lot of attention to the environment. London alone got \$56 million for the cleanup of some polluted sites. This is \$56 million just for London alone, and for infrastructure, almost \$6 million to fix roads and bridges. And we're looking forward tomorrow to another announcement for infrastructure, an announcement to support the city of London to proceed for the future. And there's a lot to come.

London is a great area for education. We have great colleges like Fanshawe College; we have a university like the University of Western Ontario. We are working with those centres to strengthen our economy. We had a chance, with the Minister of Research and Innovation, a couple of weeks ago to meet with Western university to talk about the potential and possibility to bring two sectors together, the university with industry and companies and factories, to work together to enhance their ability, to enhance their research, to enhance their production in order to be able to compete at a national level and an international level. I think this project is the first of its kind and it is unique, because the only way we can compete in the future is when we bring intellectuals and the production facilities together in order to enhance our productivity and our products to give us the chance and ability to compete on a global level.

We in this budget look after our vulnerable people. I know the member opposite spoke a lot about this area, and I share all the concerns, the thoughts and the feelings and passion about this issue. I'm also passionate about it, because I'm one of the people who came a long time ago to this province. I came in 1989. I couldn't speak English back then. I didn't have a job; I didn't have a family. I didn't have any support. So I know how newcomers feel when they come to this province. They need support and they need whatever possible to give them the ability to fit and integrate in this province of Ontario.

I wish we had in this budget a trillion dollars, not just a hundred billion, because we have a lot of things we have to fix; we have a lot of issues we have to deal with. But due to the lack of our ability in terms of financial ability, we have to manage our budget in a careful way. We have to spread it out to cover as many different elements as possible to keep our economy spinning and working. We have to touch on every single aspect of our lives, from the social to health and education and infrastructure and the environment—many different elements. Because it is our responsibility as a government to spend in a way that can give us money back in order to keep spending in the future, we want to invest in order to get back some of the investment: successful investment to give us the ability to reinvest in our economy.

He spoke about health coverage, the three months in order to be eligible to be covered healthwise in the province of Ontario. This is not against the immigrant, to the honourable member who spoke, because many people travel, they go to live in the United States, and when they get sick, they come to Ontario and get treated. And in the meantime, they pay taxes across the border and they

benefit from our health care. It is not against anyone, just—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you, member from London–Fanshawe.

Questions and/or comments?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I am pleased to respond to the comments and look forward to speaking in just a few moments. But the part of his speech that got my attention quickly was when he talked about how he was going to make an announcement tomorrow. That's incredible, because this is pork-barrelling at its best. The government has allowed the Liberal members to do announcements. They haven't even given us a copy of the communities that are going to receive any money, and you're out here bragging in the House, you are bragging in this Legislature, that you're going to make announcements. None of the opposition members for the New Democratic Party or the Progressive Conservative caucus are allowed to make announcements. We can't even call the MPP liaisons and get a list of where the money is. It's the year-end slush fund at its best. It's no better than last year's sponsor scandal, or whatever we called it—Collegiate or whatever we called it at the time. It is an embarrassment to this House when this sort of thing takes place. There's absolutely no reason that every MPP could not have the opportunity to make announcements in their own ridings, and you stand in this House and brag about the fact that, "Oh, I'm making an announcement tomorrow—another announcement tomorrow." We don't even know where the money is going in our ridings yet, if at all. That's an embarrassment to your party and pork-barrelling at its best. There's no reason that that should happen in this Legislature. All Ontario citizens should be treated equally. We all represent the citizens of our ridings, and we deserve the right to know which money has been delegated to the different ridings. I feel that the government owes us an apology for this kind of conduct. In a time when we have just gone through the Gomery commission and Collegiate and all this garbage, we still have this pork-barrelling taking place in this House.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I'd ask honourable members to just keep the cross-floor banter down to a minimum.

Further questions or comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First, I'd like to address the comment made by the honourable member for London–Fanshawe about the wait for OHIP for new immigrants. This is outrageous. It's an outrageous comment. What this province does is something that no other province does. You heard our honourable member from Beaches–East York delineate this very clearly: Our province does not allow new immigrants to access the OHIP system for three months. That's what they do, and no other province does that. This is anti-immigrant—I'd use a stronger epithet, but I won't. This is an anti-immigrant policy. There are no two ways about it; that's simply the fact. If

other provinces could do it, we should do it, and we should do it morally and ethically.

When I was thinking about this budget—I will have a chance to speak a little later—I was trying to come up with a metaphor to describe what this budget feels like to me, and I could think of no better one than *Oliver Twist*, when he goes, hat in hand, and says, "Please, sir, a little more." This is an *Oliver Twist* budget. "Please, sir, a little more." All of Ontario must feel, the morning after, like *Oliver Twist*. They've had their little tablespoon of gruel, but it's not enough. It's not enough to sustain them. It's not enough to feed them. It's not enough to house them. It's not enough to provide health care for them. It's not enough to provide adequate education for them. It's not enough to provide incentive for industry. It's simply not enough.

This *Oliver Twist* budget, this crumbs-from-the-government-table budget, also has other aspects. The other metaphor—I'll go into it later—is pie: Never pie today, always pie tomorrow, because most of these promises are for an election away.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's really a delight for me to provide a couple of comments on the excellent speeches by my colleagues from Pickering–Scarborough East and London–Fanshawe, because they clearly set out an agenda over the next year—our fiscal plan, our budgetary plan—to make those kinds of key investments. When I'm at Tim Hortons, in the great riding of Peterborough, these are the kinds of things that people talk to me about in Tim Hortons language: making investments in health care, making investments in public education, making investments in skills training to support those great manufacturers we have in our riding. This is a budget that provides, I think, significant support in a whole wide variety of areas.

I understand, when I look across the aisle, that there's a clear philosophical divide between us and the official opposition and between us and the third party. In the fall, there was an opportunity for all three parties to put their ideas for the future of this province on the table and allow the electorate to examine them. We have the responsibility, and have been given the great privilege, of governing the province of Ontario over the next four years.

We've put forward our budget, which I think is a very prudent budget, that makes sense from a fiscal perspective and that will have a lot of positive impact on people in the province of Ontario. One of the things that will be particularly helpful in the riding of Peterborough—we have the DNA Cluster, which is developing leading-edge research in the area of anti-viral vaccines, potentially to produce a vaccine that could be used in a pandemic situation. The announcement we made in our budget to provide a 10-year corporate tax exemption for new industries coming into Ontario to pick up leading-edge research is the kind of driver that will expand our economic base in Ontario. In fact, it's something that I know Jim Flaherty will give us a standing ovation for.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's interesting that this budget is obviously in the eyes of the beholder. I was shocked when I found the statistic that this year's budget represents a 64% increase over the spending of just seven years ago. It's absolutely amazing that this Ontario budget has risen so quickly so fast. The member for London–Fanshawe talked about the comparisons of then and now, what our government faced in eight years, from 1995 to 2003, compared to what they face today. He talked about the US dollar versus the Canadian dollar, and about the robust economy that was playing out in the United States and a number of other issues. Well, I was impressed that at least he recognizes what those issues are. But in the economics of the world economy and in macroeconomics, you play the hand you're dealt. In the hand that you're playing out here in Ontario with this budget, you're going to place Ontario in a very, very precarious situation and we're going to be faced with a slowing down of the economy, a rising of government expenditures and a sharp reduction of government income. That's exactly the same situation that we faced in 1991. I referred to that in my question today to the Minister of Finance. In 1991, the government tried to spend its way out of a recession. The result of that was an absolute disaster. It placed Ontario in a situation where it ran deficits of \$14 billion or \$15 billion a year for four years running. It put Ontario in a situation where we were the last province in the country.

This time we're starting out from the position that we are the last province in this country as far as economic development is concerned. That's—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The member for London–Fanshawe or the member from Pickering–Scarborough East—which will it be?

The member for Pickering–Scarborough East has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to thank the members from Simcoe North and Parkdale–High Park, as well as Peterborough and Halton, for their comments on the speeches made by myself and the member from London–Fanshawe.

I want to take the little bit of time we have left. I think we have to step outside and ask: So what are the experts, the stakeholders, those who are affected by this budget saying the day after in a variety of ways? Let's listen for a minute to Len Crispino, the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce:

“The provincial government has decided to take a prudent approach. By the elimination of the capital tax, we think it is something that is going to be very positive. The cost allowance will help bring some money back into the pockets of companies.”

Kris Barnier, the co-chair of the Ontario Worst Roads Campaign and CAA Ontario:

“This budget clearly shows the Ontario government understands the need for a multi-pronged approach to sustainable transportation.”

Doug Reycraft, the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario:

“Investing in job creation and municipal infrastructure is a sound investment for Ontario. Investing an additional \$1 billion in municipal infrastructure means more job creation, sustainable, competitive communities and a better quality of life for Ontarians.”

Buzz Hargrove, the president of the Canadian Auto Workers:

“The Ontario government's announcement today that it will spend hundreds of millions of dollars on improving transit, roads, bridges, water systems and other projects will not only help rebuild our communities, but also create jobs at a crucial time....”

“Spending more on infrastructure, training, housing and manufacturing is exactly the right way to respond to an economic downturn.”

Finally, in the bit of time that's left, Adam Spence, the executive director of the Ontario Association of Food Banks:

“We are welcoming what the provincial government has put forward....”

“What we have are the right steps towards poverty reduction in Ontario....”

“We've seen those first investments made. That's positive....”

“The provincial government is headed in the right direction ... we've seen the dental care program, the 2% increase in social assistance and the student nutrition program.”

Visitors

Mr. David Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order: I'd like to introduce three guests who are visiting in the Legislature today. They are members of the Service Employees International Union. They are personal service workers—home care workers. They've been here for the day. They've been visiting a number of members to discuss issues that they are keenly interested in. I'd like to introduce them now: Claudia Dacres, Yvonne Greaves and Winsome Smith.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That's not a point of order, but welcome to your guests.

1700

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. David Caplan: I'd like to rise, pursuant to standing order 55, and give the House the business for next week.

On Monday, the House will be considering the Supply Act.

On Tuesday, day 4 of the budget motion.

Wednesday and Thursday are to be determined.

2008 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2008

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise to speak today on the budget on behalf of our party.

I am going to do something to begin my comments, and I'm going to give the government credit for something. I know we don't always do that in budget speeches, but there was so much debate around PSA testing. I know we've had a private member's bill from Mr. Tascona from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, when he was here. I know Mr. Mauro put a private member's bill through on PSA testing.

I've got to tell you, in our riding of Simcoe North, the Ontario Provincial Police and the Orillia prostate awareness group put on the Ride for Dad each year. They raise tens of thousands of dollars each year. I'm glad it's come forward. I'm glad it's in the budget, and I hope the criteria will encourage many guys to take up this testing. It will, in fact, save lives.

As I said, I think it's worthy of putting on the record.

Other than that, I did find the budget a lot like the throne speech. It was very brief and very vague, and it's very hard to track exactly where the money's coming from for a lot of the different programs.

I have really taken an interest this winter—because I work fairly closely with my federal colleague, Bruce Stanton, the MP for Simcoe North—in trying to understand all the different programs that are available to the province of Ontario through the federal government. I think I've got a pretty good handle on exactly how it's being spent. Anyhow, I did want to comment on that today because over the last two or three weeks there's been a lot of bickering.

But now I'm reading this almost-like-a-love-story, this press release that came out from the Prime Minister's office and the Premier's office today, announcing that the province has signed on to three programs today: the community development trust, the public transit capital trust 2008 and, guess what, the police officers' recruitment fund. They've signed on to that as well.

I've got lots to say on that today, because all I've been hearing in the budget speech—I don't know how many times they bashed the federal government in the budget, and they turn around and here's this love story today in this press release from the Prime Minister and the Premier. So it's a bit difficult.

Anyhow, the Building Canada fund: I've heard that \$16 billion over the next five years or 10 years is being spent by the minister of infrastructure renewal. I've tried to find out when they will sign on to Building Canada. I know that a number of provinces and territories have signed on now.

But I'm going to tell you right now: There is \$3.1 billion on the table from the federal government over the next seven years for the province of Ontario. So, if you take the \$3.1 billion and you multiply it by three—provincial, municipal, federal; that's the way the Canada-Ontario infrastructure programs have normally worked since the Rae days when the NDP actually introduced the Canada-Ontario infrastructure program—that's \$9 billion in infrastructure spending over seven years.

I don't know if the government is actually including any of that money in the budget. I suspect that they are, but they're not giving the federal government any credit and they haven't signed on to it yet. I heard the minister say a minute ago that, in fact, Alberta hasn't signed on either. Now, why would we worry what Alberta was doing? We're supposed to be the leaders in Ontario. BC signed on. Quebec signed on. Well, you know what?

Anyhow. Minister, you can do a hit on this if you wish. What I want to know is when the minister is going to sign on the dotted line and take advantage of \$3.1 billion from the federal government. That's what I want to know.

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Scott knows because you cut the microphone off on him at ROMA. You didn't give him a fair opportunity to respond.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No, you didn't. That was—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. Honourable members, we're just going to tone this down a little bit before you end up in the middle of fisticuffs or something.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: When you start bringing out numbers like \$3.1 billion and the government hasn't signed on, you wonder why. All my municipalities are asking me why they're not signing on. That's \$9 billion in infrastructure spending over seven years that we could be taking advantage of.

The community development trust was announced. That was a billion dollars by the federal government for all the municipalities in Canada. My understanding is, it was to help municipalities and jurisdictions that had lost manufacturing jobs.

Now, after all the money that they bragged about under—what was the program called? I've got it right here—the skills upgrading course, anyhow, where they were going to try to educate or retrain 20,000 of the 200,000 people who have lost their jobs. Under the community development trust, there's \$358 million available to the province of Ontario. They signed on to that today. Here's what it says. This is federal money coming into Ontario: "Ontario's \$358-million share of the trust will be used for programs to support improved productivity and competitiveness, technology development and training for affected workers...." So I think some of the money you're using under your skills to jobs action plan is federal money. It's federal money. You didn't give the feds any credit in the budget speech. You said they weren't even a partner, and here you are using \$358 million of that money right here.

I think the public should know these things. I'd like to see the government clarify if I'm all wrong on these numbers, but I don't think I'm too wrong.

Let's talk about TCU—training, colleges and universities. We know that, effective April 1, the provincial government is getting a transfer of \$311 million specifically under the labour market agreement to training, colleges and universities. Is that being used at

the community colleges for retraining? Is this also part of that skills-to-jobs action plan? I bet it is. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that \$311 million is going there and not to training for apprenticeships and other areas where that money could be spent. It would be interesting to follow and just see exactly where that money has come from.

By the way, I think you should know that that \$311 million is effective this year. There's also a 3% escalator from this point on. Next year, it will be \$311 million plus 3% coming from the federal government. It would really be nice if we could get along with our federal partners the way we got along with the Chrétien government. We worked closely with them until we found out about Gomery, and then we had to disband. We couldn't deal with people like that anymore. We tried our best over here when we were in government.

I also want to talk about another program. I'm really glad the minister is in the House today because I don't understand why—the federal government put \$68 million on the table for a COMRIF top-up. I know municipalities have received the federal share of that because the federal government gave up trying to get the provincial government to sign on the line, to sign on to it, and they gave out \$68 million without any provincial share. For example, the town of Penetanguishene got \$1.2 million for the Robert Street water treatment plant. The next thing they did was call me and ask, “Where's the provincial share?” We haven't signed on to it. That's a top-up of \$68 million on COMRIF, which would have amounted to—if you take the \$68 million, multiply it by three, the three partners, it's close to \$200 million.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You know what? All I'm doing is pointing out the problem, what I'm hearing from my constituents and what I'm hearing from my federal partners, because it seems to be a lopsided argument on that side over there when it comes to federal-provincial relations.

The labour market agreement has also put in \$1.2 billion over the next six years specifically for retraining. I'm told that the Ontario government, under the skills-to-jobs action plan, are putting in \$1.5 billion over three years. My guess is that part of the \$1.5 billion is from the \$1.2 billion that is coming from the federal government. If I'm wrong on that, put it on the record. But you know what? I would really like you to write me a letter, because my federal people are telling me this and you guys aren't making it clear over there.

1710

Again, I applaud anyone who tries to retrain people who are losing their jobs. There's no question about it; 20,000 people—that's great. But you know what? We've lost 200,000 jobs. We've lost 200,000 manufacturing jobs, and 20,000 is 10% of the people you're trying to retrain.

Ms. Laurie Scott: One in 10.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: So you're going to get one in 10. Maybe you can announce that in your riding, London–Fanshawe. However much money your riding's

going to get for that, maybe you can announce that tomorrow as well, because we don't know how much you are going to get. Anyhow, I'm babbling on about that too long, but the reality is that that is a real concern.

Something that is very important to me is the \$156 million for the police officers. That's out of a \$400 million program from the federal government to hire 2,500 new officers. I asked the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services the other day when he was going to sign on, and he bad-mouthed the government: Stockwell Day bumbled this and he fumbled this and he didn't know what he was talking about. And guess what? Guess who signed onto the plan today? Dalton McGuinty signed on, Dalton McGuinty and Stephen Harper. It's a five-year plan, like it was all along.

Now, a five-year plan for 1,000 new police officers in Ontario. Here's the problem: We want 500 of those officers for the Ontario Provincial Police—you promised it prior to the election; 500 officers—and not contract police officers, not the municipal contract officers. The minister would lead you to believe that he hired 1,000 new officers. He didn't. He hired—

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You trained 1,000. You paid 35% of the cost of it. It's \$100,000 minimum to put a police officer in a uniform; you paid \$35,000 for each officer. That's what it is. I'm just saying, that's not 100%; that's 35%.

What I'm asking you to do with the Ontario Provincial Police is pay 50% of the \$100,000; pay \$50,000 toward each officer. You can do that if you do 200 police officers a year, and after the end of five years, you've got 1,000 officers and half of them go to the Ontario Provincial Police.

I can tell you right now, I'm going to bring this up over and over again until you hire 1,000 police officers. We did it the last time. In the last Parliament, you had no intention of hiring the officers, but we nagged you so much in the House and at press releases that you finally started doing it. You moved around until you got around 900 of them actually in place by the time the election rolled around.

We're asking you—and we're putting on the record today on behalf of the Ontario Provincial Police that we believe there should be 500 officers put on the streets over the next five years. And then, go directly to the Ontario Provincial Police for programs like the Internet-luring child pornography units, all the specialized units that the OPP have and the resource people to go with them, not municipal contract policing sections.

Another thing I want to talk about: It was really interesting that I had an opportunity to speak today following the comments made by Minister Gerretsen on his Lake Simcoe protection strategy. Really, what it amounted to today was, he named a committee, because he had made the other announcements prior to that.

The reality is that you've got to start working with the federal government on Lake Simcoe. There are two silos happening there. You've got 30 million bucks, \$30 mil-

lion on the table, and there's actually a committee in place, the PROPEL committee, with residents from all around Lake Simcoe recommending to the federal government what projects should get this money. And they're out there working.

So we've got this \$30 million over four years being spent on specific projects that will clean up Lake Simcoe, and yet we have the provincial government over here with no money on the table, but doing a strategy on the lake. I think we've got to get together on this. We shouldn't be playing politics with something like water quality in Lake Simcoe. Let's get this thing together; let's get the two ministers together, Minister Gerretsen and Minister Baird, and find out where we're going with this so we don't have finger-pointing on this thing all the way through the process.

Minister Gerretsen is in a very awkward position. He's the person who brought out the intergovernmental action plan for Simcoe county that said the county of Simcoe would have a 60% increase in population over the next 25 years. The biggest problem with the intergovernmental action plan, Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out to you on a number of occasions and, I believe, to the mayor of Collingwood prior to that, when he was the warden—the negative point of the intergovernmental action plan was added phosphorus to Lake Simcoe. That's what I tried to point out. It's a problem. You can't go ahead with a plan that adds phosphorus to something as important as Lake Simcoe. The conservation authority pointed that out etc. Now, Minister Gerretsen has switched hats. He's over there with the Minister of the Environment, and he's in a very, very difficult position.

Interjection: He shouldn't have done that.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Yes. He did the Places to Grow legislation and intergovernmental action plan, and it all ends up having a major impact on Lake Simcoe.

On the other hand, I know that Ms. Scott and many of our members in this House who have ridings that abut Lake Simcoe are firmly in favour of trying the very best we can to clean up the lake. But we want to make sure that all the partners are onside and the money is there as well, because according to the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority estimate, it's going to take \$170 million to clean it up—\$170 million. That's an unbelievable amount of money. Even the \$30 million the feds are putting in over four years is—what?—20% or 10%, no, 15% of it. Quite frankly, we need everybody onside; we need the chequebook there—looking forward to having everybody work together on that.

Something that has come up a lot, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pleased that the other day, in your critic's portfolio, you asked the question. I'm getting it more all the time: this whole thing around apprenticeship ratios. What is the problem? I cannot understand why we can't go back to a one-to-one ratio. For every company that has five electricians, they're entitled to up to five apprentices; the same with carpentry and all the other construction trades. Do you know what? It would give a lot of young people a really good opportunity to get that first step in the door,

to get an apprenticeship. We can have all the community colleges across this province training and retraining and doing pre-apprenticeship programs, but if they can't get that first job with an employer, if they can't get someone to let them put their hours in over a five-year period, then they're not going to get their trade.

And what are they doing today? They are heading off to Alberta and BC. I think we've lost, like, 70,000 people who have actually relocated out there because, in a lot of cases, they couldn't get apprenticeships. I myself know some of those kids who have gone out. They just couldn't get jobs here. I think it's really an opportunity here. I'm suggesting this in my comments today, but I believe it's something we can't drop in the House. I think we have to be firm that we'll do our very best to finally make the government see that this is something we have to move forward on.

I'm coming to the end of my time; I have a couple of minutes left, and I just wanted to say a couple of things.

One of the programs you brought out—I mentioned this earlier to the member from Mississauga—was the Celebrate Ontario program. It's all part of the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership program. I liked it. I think OTMP has been a good program over the years. However, the Celebrate Ontario program—what happened this year? They had to have their applications in by February 4. I believe that was Monday or Tuesday of the week.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It was Monday.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Monday, and they had to be in by noon. What happened was that we had a blizzard on the Friday. In my riding, we have something called the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, and they were really counting on getting money for some of their festivals, because they have to raise all their money by festivals etc. They sent their application out by Priority Post. There was a blizzard over the weekend, and Priority Post did not get it to the Ministry of Tourism by Monday at noon. It came in late Monday or early Tuesday morning, and they were flatly denied any kind of reconsideration. I think we have to fix these kinds of problems. Surely to God, in a country like Canada, when you have a blizzard, there must be some leniency. When I talked to the minister's office, she said, "We had a number of those." You'd think that would identify right there that there was kind of a big problem. Anyhow, if we could do anything with those kinds of bureaucratic programs, let's fix those things so that organizations like Wye Marsh can get a fair chance to qualify for that sort of money.

1720

In closing, of course I won't be supporting this budget; that is the first thing. I just don't see where the money is being spent wisely. For a 64% increase in spending, I believe that we're not getting value for those kinds of dollars, value for their money.

But I did want to say that this weekend, if anybody is available, we have the Sweetwater Festival on at Wye Marsh without any funding. We're going ahead anyway. If you want to come out, I will be cooking pancakes on

both Saturday and Sunday morning. You're all welcome. I'll make sure that you get a good batch of pancakes. Come out and enjoy yourselves and we'll raise some money for the Wye Marsh.

I appreciate this opportunity and look forward to the comments from my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you to the member for Simcoe North for his contribution to the debate.

Questions or comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to respond to such passion. Unfortunately, I won't be able to partake of your pancakes, but thank you for standing up for your constituents here.

Again, this is an Oliver Twist budget that offers very little and puts all Ontarians in the position of "Just a little bit more, please." But this is a government generally of, "Why act when you can talk? Why act when you can have a photo op? Why act when you can have a website or a phone line? Why make a difference in people's lives?"

There's a great quote from Hugh Mackenzie of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. He says, "Beyond the end-of-year, one-time only investments in infrastructure, budget 2008 spreads a relatively small amount of funding among a very large number of scattered programs. These announcements will form the basis for news release after news release, but taken together will make very little difference to the real public investment issues facing the province." That's an economist speaking there. He goes on to say, "And most notably for a government that made poverty reduction a key component ... the poorest Ontarians are in a worse position, relative to inflation, today than they were at the end of eight years of sustained attack from the Harris/Eves Conservatives." So there we are; that's what an economist has to say about this budget.

I do agree with the honourable member as well. Another metaphor for you: It's a little bit like swimming through Jell-O, trying to understand this budget, trying to figure out where the money is going, where it's coming from, where it's spent and when it's spent, because so many of the expenses, again, are spread out over years, years beyond this government's mandate, like Move 2020. You have to be elected not once, not twice—re-elected—but three times to actually bring into play the money promised.

Again, I look forward to speaking more in depth. I admire the member's passion, and I thank you again for sharing your thoughts.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's always a pleasure to provide comments to remarks made by my colleague and, if I may say, my friend from Simcoe North.

I want to start out by agreeing with a point that he made. The member for Simcoe North talked about a measure in the budget that he liked, which was the funding of PSA tests through OHIP. I must say, this is one for the guys. This is one that is important for all of us.

I'd like to talk about why that's so significant. The member for Simcoe North and I and many of us, if not most of us, here in this House are members of the baby boom generation, and we are the largest demographic bulge that has ever existed in North American history. For those of us born in that leading edge around the year 1946 and onwards, that leading edge is now into their 60s, and the trailing edge born in the mid-1960s are in their 40s. So all of us baby boomers are now between the ages of 42 and 62. For every senior alive today, by the time we baby boomers hit our peak senior years there will be two, and for every senior alive today, by the time we baby boomers become octogenarians, there will be three.

The message that this budget sends and that the member for Simcoe North underlines is that our demands on the health care system haven't even begun yet. We have got to invest now. We need to build the structures that that baby boom generation that we have all been so proudly a part of are all going to need. We need to make those decisions now. We need to be building today, and that's what this budget does and does so effectively. That type of building of health care infrastructure is not something we can do with a tax cut.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's a pleasure to comment on the member from Simcoe North's articulate assessment of the budget that we had, pointing out the challenges that face particularly his riding. He's a great constituency person and brings forward some very vital points.

He talked about Lake Simcoe and the announcement from the Minister of the Environment today, and the history that he brings with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, when the Minister of the Environment today was the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I have a small portion of Lake Simcoe. We share that with many members in the Legislature. Collectively, he said it right: We all have to work together to clean up Lake Simcoe. We're pleased with the announcement today, but what does it really mean? That's what we're going to be asking in probing questions in the future on that.

He has been a great member in bringing forward the concerns of the Ontario Provincial Police and he says he's not going to let up on that. He also highlighted the fact that the federal government has come forward and the provincial government. Last week they wouldn't sign on but this week they did sign on—similar to the train story that we brought forward from the Peterborough-to-Toronto commuter. There was no answer last week but this week we have some sort of answer; maybe not the perfect answer we want, but the Minister of Transportation actually did hear about it this week, where last week he hadn't heard about it.

Interjections.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm sure the member from Peterborough is very supportive.

So the Minister of Transportation now is up to speed, we hope, but not quite train speed. We hear it's just bus speed.

Mr. Jeff Leal: We're all on board.

Ms. Laurie Scott: We're hoping that the train comes on and the members can get on board with that.

In the short time left, the member from Simcoe North makes a good point on apprenticeships. He was a plumber as a trade before he came here. He still is. There are some good lines with that but I won't use them. But he brings forward that valid point we all want and that's to see the one-to-one apprenticeship go forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We have room for one more question and/or comment.

Hon. David Caplan: I too want to comment and congratulate the member on his speech. I think he has been a little bit misinformed. He indicates that the town of Penetanguishene accessed federal dollars. My question is, because COMRIF is an application-based program, when did they apply? How is their application evaluated? I know that a lot of municipalities were very interested and that's why we worked, as we have been, with the association of municipalities, urging the federal government to have a fourth intake so that all municipalities would have a fair opportunity to access those dollars. Perhaps the member can indicate to this House how the town of Penetanguishene was able to do that while other municipalities apparently were not.

The member also talked about the Building Canada fund, and I'm glad he raised that because we're very eager to access federal dollars. His math is quite wrong and I want to correct him in his assertion that there's \$9.3 billion. That's a ridiculous figure because that's completely unrealistic. But he should know, as I told the delegates at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, that that agreement has been sitting on the desk of the federal minister now for eight weeks. Ontario has sent back its draft, its version, and the federal government refuses to sign an agreement. I think the member could be helpful in urging his federal colleagues to get on with the job, to stop dragging their feet, to make sure that Ontario receives its fair share of federal dollars which go to our local municipalities. We think that certain elements are wrong. We don't understand why the federal government, for example, is carving out of Ontario's share \$276 million for "federal administration." What is federal administration? Why so much money? Why from Ontario's share and not other provinces? This member, I think, has good relations with his federal colleagues who could answer some of those questions for us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Simcoe North has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I want to thank the members from Parkdale–High Park, Mississauga–Streetsville, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal for their comments. I want to congratulate my colleague from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for the fact that her private member's bill got introduced last week as a government bill. I thought that was very positive. It should save emissions from trucks, it should save fuel, and hopefully it will save a lot of lives as well. I want to compliment you on bringing

the bill forward and the minister for highjacking your bill. That's great. It was good of him.

1730

To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, there's a lot of finger pointing going on.

Last week, I asked the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services about the \$156 million for police officers, and it was the worst thing that he'd ever heard of. Everything was wrong about that program that could possibly be, according to him. He turned around this week and signed on the dotted line, because the deadline was March 31.

My contacts in the federal government—I went to the federal caucus meeting up in Deerhurst; they invited a few of us up—tell me there's \$3.1 billion and it's being held up by your office. So I'm going to tell you—

Hon. David Caplan: Why don't they sign it?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Well, I will bring that up again, I'm quite sure, Minister.

But I will be back here next week with a response under the supply bill asking about the \$3.1 billion. It amounts to \$9.3 billion. Somebody's at fault here. It's \$9.3 billion in infrastructure money for the communities in this province, and it's wrong to play politics with it. Let's get that money into these communities so we can build schools and hospitals and roads and bridges, sewer plants etc.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a privilege and an honour to rise, really, on behalf of the people of Ontario, but in particular, the people of my riding in Parkdale–High Park. I'm thinking, too, today of the Tibetan folk. I have almost 4,000 Tibetans in my riding and many of them are now entering the fourth day of a hunger strike, which is why I'm wearing the chupa, the Tibetan garb, in their honour, and told them that I would.

I'm also, of course, honoured to speak to this budget, which I have characterized as the Oliver Twist budget. It puts all Ontarians in that role of coming and saying, "Please, sir, just a little more." I also used the metaphor, in response to my colleague from Simcoe North, that trying to understand this budget is a little like swimming through Jell-O. So between swimming through Jell-O and Oliver Twist, we'll attempt to unravel what this government has put before Ontarians.

First of all, we heard a minister earlier today get up and talk about this unanimous raving response from everyone in the media. This could not be further from the truth. I just wanted to point out a couple of quotes.

First of all, an amusing one from Lorrie Goldstein. He said: "Holy David Suzuki, Batman!

"Whatever happened to fighting the greatest threat known to mankind in yesterday's Ontario budget?

"Incredibly, Finance Minister Dwight Duncan didn't mention 'global warming' at all in his 14-page budget speech. 'Climate change' got only one mention in one brief sentence, on page 10."

Christina said: “While McGuinty”—this was before the budget, of course—“was busy showing off the McBuses, back in the Legislature, MPPs were voting on Timmins–James Bay New Democrat Gilles Bisson’s private member’s bill that would require 50% made-in-Ontario content for new transit vehicles.” We know how they voted. They voted down a program that would see 50% of that investment stay in Ontario.

Then we have Michael Shapcott from the Wellesley Institute, who was here today in the members’ gallery. He says: “Despite the massive funding and program cuts, and the downloading, the provincial political spin remains formidable. In the year 2004, for instance, the Ontario government issued press releases promising a total of 22,620 new affordable homes. The province’s audited financial statement for that year reported a total of 18 new homes actually delivered.”

In fact, since that time we put in a freedom-of-information-act request to find out how many truly affordable homes, as of last year, this government has provided, and let us just say—

Hon. David Caplan: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Is this the same Michael Shapcott who was the NDP candidate in the last election?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The minister knows that’s not a point of order. You’re digging into the honourable member’s time.

The honourable member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Absolutely. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s sadly partisan around here, some days. I have to acknowledge that.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: To interrupt.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Absolutely.

To continue what I was saying, last year we put in a freedom-of-information-act request to find out how many affordable housing units this government had actually provided. This is, I think, very important and very interesting because it’s all, of course, in the spin in the definition of what’s truly affordable housing.

In anybody’s books—certainly in the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee’s books, and I’m sure they’re going to accuse them of being partisan. Cathy Crowe, Order of Canada winner; St. Stephen’s, who was here: I’m sure they’re partisan, including all the homeless people. All the homeless people in Ontario are probably partisan, according to the member opposite.

But despite that, to them what “affordable” means is 30% of their income per month spent on rent. If you are on ODSP, if you are on OW, if you make minimum wage—and remember, we are speaking about 1.2 million people in Ontario who make \$10 an hour or less; we’re speaking about hundreds of thousands on ODSP. “Affordable” for them would be a unit that rented around \$500 a month. This is something that is generally agreed upon by housing activists. How many units, we asked, had this government provided last year? The answer is deplorable. It’s awful. It’s 285 out of 22,620 new, affordable homes promised.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The Premier said that 18,000 new—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Today he said “18,000,” which I’m delighted to say I’ll be taking up with him or one of his staff on Tuesday in the late show.

I want to touch on other aspects of this budget besides housing, which is the most glaring inadequacy of this budget—not one new dollar for affordable housing in this budget, only \$100 million to repair existing housing stock, when Save Our Structures asked for \$300 million for Toronto alone. Instead, we get \$100 million to repair existing housing stock spread across all of Ontario.

If this isn’t an Oliver Twist budget, really: “Just a little more sir; just a little more, sir.” So they get one third of what they need in Ontario alone just to repair existing housing stock, never mind build anything new, despite 125,000 and growing households waiting, on average, eight to 10 years for new housing.

Then, to move on: small business. I am also the small business critic for the New Democratic Party. Again we get an Oliver Twist response to small business in this budget. Last year I put forward a resolution. It’s flattering to know that the government actually read it and decided maybe they should do something about business education taxes that are grossly unfair, particularly to Toronto businesses, so they did something. But of course again another metaphor: the pie in the sky, never the pie now; crumbs from the table. What do they get? They get something happening in the year 2014. My goodness, so we have to elect the Dalton McGuinty government—or perhaps somebody else will be at the helm by then—the Liberal government once again just to see this promise realized. They only accelerate this for businesses in the north, pathetic as it is. So again, hat in hand, small business comes to this government and gets crumbs, becomes again another Oliver Twist figure in light of this budget.

The environment: As I’ve shared with you, there’s nothing in this budget for climate change. Certainly this government’s track record on climate change is absolutely abysmal. We get broken promise after broken promise about the closing of the coal-fired plants. Not only that, but to every environmentalist’s chagrin we get \$40 billion about to be spent on nuclear reactors. Try to find an environmental group in Ontario that supports the spending of \$40 billion on nuclear reactors. Suffice it to say, again, that if we were to ask Ontarians about this, if we had a referendum on this, no Ontarian would want a nuclear reactor in their backyard either. Again this is the answer to environmentalists’ concerns.

No move towards the fulfilling of Kyoto protocols, none whatsoever; instead, a blame game with the federal government, which we know is doing nothing about this, but that’s no excuse for Queen’s Park to do nothing as well, and they are. They’re doing nothing. Even the small gestures around toxic substances are consultative, are bringing it in over a number of years. There’s nothing really substantive in this budget at all around energy or the environment, certainly nothing for renewables. We

look at other jurisdictions like Germany, where 30% of their energy comes from wind power. Can we do that? No, of course not. There's no will on this government's behalf at all.

1740

Again another Oliver Twist moment: the dental program that for children works out to \$90 a year per child who needs it. This is an extraction, and they'll need it, because there's not enough in that dental program to actually put in place a preventive dental care program for the poorest children.

Nutrition, again an Oliver Twist moment: a dollar a week for the poorest children. This is pathetic. This is some \$50 a year for the poorest children for nutrition. Meanwhile, one in five children in Ontario lives in poverty. We should be ashamed of that statistic. This government is not responding to that statistic whatsoever.

In education, there's still no fix for the funding formula despite promises going back to the election of 2003, despite promises that they would. We have a few new dollars for environmental education. Hopefully, in those environmental classes they'll be teaching the children of Ontario how little the McGuinty government has done for the environment. That truly will be a moment in education. If they really cared about children in our education system, maybe they should take a little step: Keep all the pools open. All the pools are closing across Toronto. All the parents want is that these pools stay open. It's a small amount of money. If they cared about children's health, about obesity rates, perhaps they should do that.

On a post-secondary education basis: You heard my colleague from Trinity–Spadina speak very eloquently in this House about how little they've done for post-secondary education. Certainly the Canadian Federation of Students makes a note in their response to this budget that \$150 will pay for maybe two textbooks. It's really not going to help students in Ontario, who face some of the highest student debt ever in the country. That's not going to help them. The McGuinty government of course points to more students going to universities. Of course they're going to universities. They can't get any jobs. There are no jobs out there.

We've heard many members in this House speak about the loss of 200,000 good, paying manufacturing jobs. The McGuinty government talks about creating some 400,000 jobs. Even if you buy this figure, which is somewhat suspect, when you look at the jobs they've created, you look at McJobs, you look at call centre jobs. If you actually talk to those workers who have lost their jobs, find out how they're doing. This retraining announcement again is an Oliver Twist moment in this budget. Only 20,000 laid-off workers have access to it, only one in 10. And even for those who do, the maximum seems to be, if you decipher the figures, which are difficult to decipher, just under \$30,000 over two years for a laid-off worker. Not many workers, particularly in middle age, can afford to keep their families on \$15,000 a year to do any retraining. So I wonder how many will

actually be able to take up this program, and when they do, where will they work? Are you going to ask a 50-something person to retrain, working in construction? Will they go to Alberta, will they go to Manitoba, where there are jobs? Who knows? There's no guarantee of work for them when they finish these retraining systems.

Child care: As we've heard eloquently expressed by our caucus member Andrea Horwath, there's not one dollar for child care, and I did look. The minister in charge of children's services pointed us to page 51 of the budget, and guess what? There's nothing on page 51 of the budget for child care. There's about \$30 million, but it's earmarked for everything for vulnerable people, not just for children. We contrast that, as we have done, with Quebec, which just created 20,000 more new government-paid spaces at \$7 a day in their budget, 20,000 more than they already had—over \$600 million.

We hear about reform to the MPAC system but, as so eloquently expressed by the member from Beaches–East York, when that bill comes in the fall, we'll see how delighted people are about the small Oliver Twist kind of measures with the MPAC system. Our seniors are going to get \$250, as if that's going to help on a many-thousand-dollar bill they're going to receive, at minimum, in the city of Toronto—at minimum. This is pathetic.

Again, for seniors, we see the pathetic response to long-term care: hours of care—about 2.77 by those in the industry's estimates—up a mere five to six minutes a day, for our seniors who have worked so hard, who've paid into this economy and get so very little out of it; putting seniors in that role of Oliver Twist: “Just a little more, sir; just a little more.”

Community health centres—oh, well, maybe in 2011 or 2012, maybe an election away we'll get something. It's interesting, even the new nurse hires that are there are not promised until maybe the year 2011 or 2012 when this is finally implemented. This is again pie in the sky, never pie now. This is Oliver Twist: “Just a little more, sir.” Can't we have those nurses a little sooner? Do we really have to elect the Liberals time and time again just to see the promises of this budget fulfilled?

Again—and I could never do it as well as my colleague from Beaches–East York did, who was of course the mayor of East York—municipalities: Toronto gets shortchanged over \$700 million a year by this government. What do they get? They get these infrastructure announcements. Now, anybody with any political savvy or economic savvy knows about infrastructure announcements. You know, you can say billions of dollars—where do they go, when do they go? Who knows? What the city needs is structural funding on an ongoing annual basis now, not sometime never, not if there's money left over, not crumbs after everybody else has eaten from the budget—not crumbs. They need structured funding. By the looks of the estimate as to what will be left over for the cities, not much. Again, cities come hat in hand like poor little Oliver: “Please, sir, please, just a little bit more.”

What about women? Hey, we're only 50% of the population of this province. We've had a celebration recently—more of a mourning—of 20 years of pay equity legislation. Do you know that under this government's watch women still make 71 cents for every dollar that men make? Do you know who one of the major perpetrators of this inequity is? The Ontario government itself, with its own employees.

Certainly, in employment standards, another of my critic areas, we see no action whatsoever in this budget. We don't see action on the minimum wage and, remember, the \$10-an-hour minimum wage campaign was not even on the horizon when I was elected. This was a grassroots campaign of 15,000 people across Ontario who demanded a living wage and have not got it yet. It's not about the dollar figure; it's about a living wage. It's about meeting the poverty line.

If this government was serious about eradicating poverty or the 25-and-5 campaign, the first thing they'd do is raise the minimum wage to a living wage. That would immediately bring 250,000 people out of poverty, and it would also affect 1.2 million people who make \$10 an hour or less. All of a sudden they would affect them. If they really wanted to affect poverty, they'd do more than this pathetic, abysmal 2% raise for those who are disabled who are earning ODSP—2%, when they gave themselves 25%. They managed to do that pretty quickly, but 2%—oh, no, the Oliver Twists on ODSP have to wait till September to get 2%. Now if they wanted to affect poverty rates, they'd immediately raise the ODSP rates at least 31% to get our disabled members of the Ontario public out of poverty. That's a disgrace.

1750

I only have a minute and 38 seconds left, and so much still left to say about the Oliver Twist budget. Suffice it to say I'm not going to be supporting it. Neither should any Ontarian who struggles, and many Ontarians struggle, whether they are working long hours on minimum wage or whether they're collecting ODSP and barely making ends meet.

This morning, I served breakfast in one of the many breakfast programs that exist around the city of Toronto. Who was there at the breakfast program? Well, I can tell you: seniors, new immigrants, children, families, single-headed families. These are the poor, many of them with jobs, who simply can't pay the rent and feed their children.

So, do other jurisdictions do it better? Oh, yes. Had I time, I would outline all of them. My husband and I just came back from Sweden, which managed to build 100,000 units of new housing a year for 10 years in a community of nine million people. How do they do it? Well, certainly I invite anybody who's watching to send me e-mails to find out how. In the meantime, all of Ontario is Oliver Twist when it comes to this pathetic attempt at a budget. All of Ontario is in that position of cap in hand, accepting the crumbs, asking again, over and over, "Is this the best you can do? Please, sir, just a little bit more."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for Parkdale-High Park for her contribution to the debate.

Questions and/or comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to spend a couple of minutes to talk about our budget. I'm quite shocked by the members from the opposition. They keep on saying that they don't see, they don't see. May I suggest that maybe they should go see an eye doctor.

I had the opportunity to meet with some business leaders in my community with two post-budget breakfasts yesterday morning and this morning. These were people the chamber invited from the farming community and the business community. They were very, very positive in the way we delivered the budget. A farmer this morning congratulated us on how well things are.

To sort of give you some sense of the local newspaper today, the Cobourg Star, I'm just going to read one paragraph from today. It basically says that seniors will get help with property taxes, laid-off workers will get job retraining, that it's very important to maintain hope.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. Honourable member, I think it's against the rules to use your BlackBerry to quote from or to use it as a speech prop, so I'd just ask you to refrain from doing that. Carry on.

Mr. Rinaldi: I was unable to get a printed version, but basically the editorial says that all in all it was a good budget, and this from an Osprey publication that's normally not very friendly to this side of the House. So I tell you, Mr. Speaker, they need to look to the budget a little bit closer. There's a lot of good things in the budget. Can we do more? Absolutely.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to respond. First of all, let me congratulate the member on piercingly bringing the government to account for what they are not doing in this province.

The previous speaker, the Liberal member, referred to Osprey publications. I was just on the phone about five minutes ago with Sean Pearce, who is with the York Media Group, and we were talking about this budget. We spoke about the fact that in this budget it's very clear that the Minister of Finance himself has no idea what is happening and what the true picture of the finances of this province is. I pointed out that seven days before he presented the budget in this House, he had as props in the gallery municipal politicians, including Hazel McCallion, and was telling this House that because of legislation that he was tabling seven days before the budget, there would be at minimum \$200 million of additional infrastructure funding for them. Hazel McCallion applauded the minister. And you know what happened? Seven days later, in the minister's budget, he was \$200 million short of being able to trigger the very bonus infrastructure funding that he was promising just seven days before.

I believe that as people in this province become more and more familiar with how this government does

business, they will lose more and more confidence that the affairs of this province are being managed in any competent way. The people of this province are catching up to you, and I'm telling you—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you.

Mr. Frank Klees:—that our time is up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions or comments?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm very happy to have two minutes to respond in support of what my colleague and friend from Parkdale–High Park said in her effort to exfoliate this malodorous budget, which she has done so, so well.

She talked about housing. Every time you hear a Liberal get up, they talk about the affordable housing they're building. Today, in fact, the Premier stood up and said, on the advice of the former Minister of Housing, no less, "We built 18,000 units," which he claimed were affordable units. The member for Parkdale–High Park said 236 affordable housing units were built. And the Premier stood up and said, on the advice of the man with the great wisdom, the former Minister of Housing, 18,000 units of affordable housing. The Premier stands up and presents it as fact, and all the penguins in this House say, "This is great. This is great." How do you do that shamelessly? How do you do it? They offer \$35 million to repair Toronto community housing buildings that are in total disrepair; \$35 million when people in those buildings are asking for \$300 million as a base of what is needed to repair those buildings. And they proudly stand up say, "Thirty-five million. This is great."

On the poverty agenda, they offer three things: a 2% increase for those on social assistance—this is the great revolution, the poverty agenda, a 2% increase, which nobody is going to reject—and then a picayune little nutrition program, and the other one, the dental program, \$45 million. That's their revolution in poverty. "Yay. Isn't this great?" Shamelessly they stand up and talk about how great this budget is. How do they live with it? I don't know.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's always a pleasure for me to listen to the very articulate words from the member for Parkdale–High Park, but let's get this story straight here. I've been hearing this revisionist version of history. We all know that in 1993, three of their members who were part of the treasury benches back then froze—"Zap, you're frozen"—ODSP rates in the province. That's what they did when they had the treasury benches. It's a fact. And then you roll in the freeze that they brought in in 1993 with the 21% cut from the official opposition, and you wonder why there was a spiral of poverty in the province of Ontario? We were elected to turn that ship around, and we've been doing that consistently over the last four and a half years.

It's too bad I didn't have about eight hours to talk about all of our achievements, because I could fill the eight hours. I was at Tim Hortons the other day in downtown Peterborough, on George Street. Does anybody know where it is, right across from the Holiday Inn?

There were a number of seniors there, because we have a fairly high degree of seniors in the riding of Peterborough. Many of them were veterans of the Second World War, the kind of people who helped to build my community of Peterborough. When I told them that we're bringing in a new property tax grant for seniors of \$250, then ramping it up to \$500, they said that's the stamp of a responsible government of Ontario. Recognizing that we owe our seniors a great debt of gratitude, we recognized that in our budget of March 25. We've enhanced the grant for seniors because those people are still making tremendous contributions to our communities. In fact, I chat with the director of Activity Haven, which is the largest senior citizens' group—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The honourable member from Parkdale–High Park has up to two minutes to respond.

1800

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First of all, as to the comment about seeing an eye doctor, we can't because it's been delisted by the Liberal government. So there's another erosion of the health care system.

Also, he admitted that at least they can do more. I absolutely agree. They can do much more. That is exactly what we are saying over here. It costs \$55,000 a year to keep someone homeless on the streets, so it doesn't even make economic sense not to have housing in this budget. That was a study done in Vancouver recently.

As to the comments about Bob Rae's government and welfare, let me say that we increased welfare rates, so the member doesn't know his history. Suffice it to say that in the immortal words of the member from Welland, we over here hope that Bob Rae does for the federal Liberals what he did for the Ontario NDP. So there you go.

Mr. Jeff Leal: You all support him.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Absolutely. Just to conclude, this is not a laughing matter. There are children going to bed hungry in Ontario. One in five children lives in poverty. This is the reality, and this budget does not address that reality. There's absolutely nothing funny about that.

I would caution everyone in this House that when you bring forward something that purports to do something about poverty and does not, you condemn those children to continue living in poverty. This is absolutely unconscionable. We live in a time where action is desperately required, and we see no action on that file.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for Parkdale–High Park for her contribution to the debate.

It being past 6 of the clock, pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

Debate deemed adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

LOW-INCOME ONTARIANS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Beaches–East York has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given yesterday by the Minister of Finance. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yesterday I asked the Minister of Finance when the recipients of ODSP and Ontario Works could expect the paltry 2% increase. I was mindful of the fact that in the last two budgets the increases were not given until the last half or the last quarter of the fiscal year. In 2007, the increase was given in November 2007. The minister confirmed that the 2% set out in the budget will not be paid until the second half of the fiscal year, likely in the fall of 2008. Then, bizarrely, he made the statement that welfare rates have risen by 27% in the past four years since the Liberals have been elected.

The reality is somewhat different. In the last four years, since the election of the Liberals, the 2004 budget set a 3% increase; the 2005 budget set 0%; 2006, 2%, which was only given in the last half of the year; and 2007, 2%, which was only given in the last quarter of the year. The people on ODSP and welfare are actually worse off today, when you factor in inflation, than they were when the Progressive Conservative government was defeated in 2003.

For greater certainty, I asked the library to confirm that the information I had was correct, and they wrote back to me this morning:

“To help social assistance recipients, the government is proposing to increase the basic adult allowance and maximum shelter allowance by 2% in 2008-09. This would provide Ontario Works and ODSP recipients with an additional \$36 million in income support in 2008-09 and an additional \$87 million in 2009-10.”

So you can see why this is being done: to save \$51 million. Then they went on to say:

“With the proposed increase”—that’s factoring in the 2%—“social assistance rates would have increased by a cumulative 9% since the government first took office in 2003.”

I studied and tried to figure out how the government and how the minister could have come to that conclusion. I looked at what a single Ontario Works case in 2007 receives as a current total: \$548 maximum benefit, and this will increase to \$560 maximum benefit.

I looked at a single disabled—this is on ODSP—which will go from \$979 to \$999. I had this confirmed as well by the department.

I went then to look at how he might possibly come to the 27%, and I am perplexed beyond belief. In the Ontario disability support program, singles are the overwhelming numbers of beneficiaries. There are

184,366 single people on ODSP. Couples amount to 33,850.

If you factor in those on ODSP with children, it is a scant 19,000. So of the 238,000, if there are any children’s benefits at all of the 238,000, less than 10% could potentially get more money.

I looked at Ontario social assistance, Ontario Works, and although there are more children with sole-support parents, the majority of payments are made to singles and to couples with no children. Singles and couples with no children, under both of these factors, have been frozen at 7%.

There is no way, even if you want to include the 2%—which likely will not take place until the last quarter of this budget year—they are still at 7%, and I am perplexed. I want to know from the minister or from his parliamentary assistant where the figure of 27% was pulled. Out of thin air?

If it is from government programs that allow for people who go back to school to gain money, well, people who go back to school under any regime would get money. If it is because children are going to be fed in some of the schools, well, every child is fed in some of the schools. If it is some other bizarre program that every citizen of Ontario is entitled to, then let him say that. But to cavalierly stand there and state that people have got a 27% increase when it is clear from the government’s own records that that is not the case, and where 90% of the recipients have no children and are not eligible for other programs, is patently wrong.

I await the parliamentary assistant’s—I’m sure—learned explanation, trying to get out of this one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: A couple things: I think the minister was more than correct yesterday in many respects when he spoke: The implementation of this year’s increase to the social assistance rate wouldn’t be able to occur until the fall.

This is not a new situation. It’s the computer systems. They are complex and they can’t just readily plug in a couple of digits and kick out all of what has to happen. It would be nice if it would, but it doesn’t. Thus, the implementation will have to occur, as it has in the past, in the fall of this year rather than right away.

We traditionally speak to the issue of social assistance in the context of a family unit when the minister presents his budget or responds to questions. He doesn’t isolate his discussion into a single person either on Ontario Works or a single person on ODSP. He talks about that family unit, often of a single parent with two young children.

What does the composite activity mean in the context of changes to Ontario Works rates? The introduction of the Ontario child benefit: What does that mean to that family? The flow-through on the national child benefit: The increase has been flowing through to the family since 2003; issues such as the Ontario sales tax credit that accrues to that family as well.

So there are a number of elements to the composite annualized income capacity of that family unit. When one begins to assess each of those components and puts them all into place, what does this mean to this family? The numbers and the percentages that the minister spoke to are in that context: both the rate increases on each of those, I guess, four out of the five budget years; the introduction now of the Ontario child benefit and how that will roll out during the 2008-09 budget year after having gone through the down-payment phase, as it was referred to; the change in the rate system in the fall of this year; the national child benefit that accrues—the incremental portion accrues to that family; and other benefits of that nature. That doesn't go on at all to speak to what the budget includes in the context of addressing matters of poverty. Many of these families still find themselves in a situation where statistically they're still considered a family in poverty. Whether it's Minister Matthews, a cabinet committee, as we begin to work more thoroughly through that process, as we fully implement the child benefit, or the introduction of dental benefits to families on low and modest incomes, although not specific to the reference that the minister made, they're all part of a much broader package that we are putting in place for the benefit of those who find themselves in a situation that is one we would like to have all families out of, if we could achieve that.

The minister's comments were fully in that context, the full context of what it means to a family, often a single family, a single parent with small children: the increases in the specific rate; the flow-through of the additional child benefit; the implications of the centrepiece of our last budget, 2007-08, which was the Ontario child benefit—unique, I believe, in this country—that,

when fully rolled out, will provide some \$1,100, if I recall, by 2011 to families with children who meet the various thresholds for income. That includes not only those on social assistance but also speaks to those families who are working and trying to make it who find themselves able to be in the workforce as opposed to those who just can't be there for a variety of reasons. But we're working with them in the context of the minimum wage, which as of Monday will increase by 75 cents.

We heard the member speak during his speech and others across the floor about the need for increasing the minimum wage. We put in place a very strategic plan to do that prior to the election, and this budget was our first additional opportunity to move forward on that. So as of Monday, I believe it's March 31, we'll see the minimum wage go up. Those families who are working will also have increases there but will also be able to take advantage of the Ontario child benefit, which in the past was excluded from being able to support their children for many reasons that kept them out of the workforce. Now they have good reason to be in the workforce if they can be.

I believe the minister in his presentation was trying to reference that broader context, but particularly that family with two small children and what all of these things would mean to them in his commentary with respect to percentage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank both honourable members for their debate. There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. next Monday, March 31.

The House adjourned at 1813.

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Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (L)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (L)	Ancaster–Dundas– Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (ND)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	
Moridi, Reza (L)	Richmond Hill	
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Naqvi, Yasir (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (L)	Sault Ste. Marie	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (L)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader of the Official Opposition, Opposition House leader / Chef de l'opposition officielle, leader parlementaire de l'opposition
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Minister of Revenue / ministre du Revenu
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Greg (L)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	

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Gilles Bisson, Kim Craiton, Bob Delaney,
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Chair / Présidente: Julia Munro
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Legislative Assembly / Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Kevin Flynn
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon, Bob Delaney,
Joe Dickson, Kevin Flynn, Sylvia Jones,
Norm Miller, Mario Sergio, Peter Tabuns
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Public accounts / Comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
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**Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
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Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle, Kim Craiton,
Gerry Martiniuk, Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch,
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht, Mario Sergio
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Social Policy / Politique sociale

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Vic Dhillon
Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo,
Helena Jaczek, Dave Levac, Shafiq Qadri,
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott, Peter Shurman
Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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