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of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 31 March 2008

Lundi 31 mars 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 31 March 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 31 mars 2008

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Norm Miller: The McGuinty Liberals' tax-and-spend budget is the wrong approach for Ontario's small businesses and entrepreneurs. The government found itself with \$5 billion in unplanned revenue this year. That is to say, they received \$5 billion more than they planned for in last year's budget. What did they do with that money? They went on a year-end spending spree—not very prudent, I would say, with economic storm clouds on the horizon.

A recent article in the National Post by Kevin Gaudet points out that Ontario's spending is increasing at unsustainable levels when economic growth is forecast to be only 0.5% this year. He goes on to say:

"Finally, there is the alarming trend by which the McGuinty government has expanded Ontario's debt. During his tenure, Mr. McGuinty has grown taxpayer-supported debt from \$148.7 billion to \$167.7 billion. That is an additional \$19-billion bill handed to future taxpayers.... Ontario taxpayers pay \$1 million an hour in interest—the equivalent of nearly a dime of every tax dollar sent to Queen's Park. This figure could jump dramatically if interest rates surge.

"The idea that a government can spend its way to prosperity has been discredited. Mr. McGuinty and his government cannot give anything to Ontarians that they don't first take from them in taxes today—or tomorrow through debt."

Another Liberal, Bob Rae, has already proven you can't spend your way to prosperity.

WHISTLE COMMUNITY RADIO

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I rise today to celebrate an innovative new service in the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville within my riding of Oak Ridges–Markham. WhiStle Community Radio is an entirely new volunteer-run radio station which began broadcasting on March 14 of this year at 102.7 on the FM dial.

The name WhiStle radio is derived from Whitchurch-Stouffville and was chosen to emphasize the local nature of its programming. One of the founders of WhiStle radio

is Mrs. Sibylle Foppa, who, as a newcomer to Canada and mother of a two-month-old baby, found herself at home listening to CBC Radio daily. It was from those radio broadcasts that she discovered so much about her newly adopted country. However, she thought how even more valuable it would be to have a truly local radio station bringing community news and information to residents in its broadcast area. So WhiStle radio was born to help residents old and new enjoy their rapidly growing community. Whitchurch-Stouffville grew by nearly 5,000 people in the last decade, with similar growth anticipated over the next 10 years.

I'm especially pleased to announce that the efforts of the founders of WhiStle Community Radio have been recognized by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which has approved a grant of \$15,000 to purchase the equipment they needed to launch their programming. I want to congratulate this band of radio pioneers for their spirit and determination.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mrs. Julia Munro: On Friday, I attended the central Ontario automotive sector economic symposium hosted by Nottawasaga Futures, south Simcoe county's economic development agency. Carmakers are facing major challenges in the global economy, and Canadian companies face even more challenges with a high dollar and labour costs. Many at the symposium spoke of the real risk Ontario faces, that it may lose a part of its auto industry, perhaps even a large part.

Attendees spoke about one of their key frustrations in dealing with this issue, the fact that the Ontario government has no plan or vision to help. They are waiting in vain for some sort of energy policy that will give them a safe and secure source of energy. They are very frustrated about the time it takes to get approvals of any sort from the Ontario government. And they are unhappy with Ontario's infrastructure deficit. The money the Liberals handed out in the last week of the fiscal year is a slush fund. There is no plan and no vision.

When will this government plan infrastructure spending to help business so these businesses can then create jobs and build prosperity?

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue: It would probably come as no surprise to taxpayers in the province of Ontario today to see

from all the lists in the Toronto Star that on a modest home priced at \$380,000 throughout the GTA they pay huge taxes, ranging from a low of \$2,322 a year to a high of \$5,745. It should come as no surprise to them, but what might surprise them is that Ontarians have the dubious distinction of paying the highest property taxes in the entire world. Not one other country, not one other jurisdiction, has as high property tax as we have in the province of Ontario.

This is in part due to downloading of some \$3.2 billion of provincially mandated programs, and in part it's also because there are few jurisdictions in the world where senior levels of government give less to their cities than we do here in Canada and in Ontario, and the two cents on the gas tax just doesn't cut it. The mayors asked for one cent on the GST and they didn't get it, although there was an opportunity for this government to have acted earlier this year.

Today, we see that taxes are rising throughout Ontario. This is just the tip of the iceberg. As the government well knows, come September, October and November, MPAC will come out with its new property figures, and the government had better be ready at that time, or the howls of protest will be nothing compared to what they saw in the Star today.

ANNIVERSARY OF GREEK INDEPENDENCE

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many friends and neighbours of Hamilton Mountain who joined me on Saturday, March 29, for my first open house at the Hamilton Mountain constituency office. It was a great day and I had over 100 guests.

I would also like to add that on Sunday, March 30, I had the honour to walk in the Greek Independence Day parade with the Premier, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour, alongside His Eminence Archbishop Sotirios of Toronto and the president of the Greek Community of Toronto, Mr. Costas Menegakis. We were also joined by other members of this House, including Mr. Michael Prue and Mr. Peter Tabuns.

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After nearly 400 years of rule by the Ottomans, Greece declared its independence on March 25, 1821. Long before that, the ancient Greeks created a culture that valued liberty and dignity, and the modern Greeks have demonstrated that preserving freedom is a powerful motivating force. The anniversary of Independence Day is a national holiday in Greece and is a day of celebration throughout the world.

I have walked in this parade for many years. It is a day very important to my family and all Greeks across the world, both young and old, both Greek-born and Canadian-born like myself. We will never forget the great struggles for freedom and liberty. On important occasions such as this, fellow Greeks say with pride, "Zito É Ellas, Zito O Canada."

CITY OF LONDON

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I rise in this House to speak about important recent investments our government has made in the great city of London. On March 28, Minister Matthews, Minister Bentley and myself announced in London an \$11-million Innovation Industrial Park to build local roads, water mains, sanitary services and storm water management facilities.

By investing \$11 million in an industrial innovation park and \$2.5 million in Original Cakerie two weeks ago, our government is investing in Ontarians by creating hundreds of jobs. The people of London and the province of Ontario thank this government for this investment.

I would like to thank Her Worship, the mayor of London, Anne Marie DeCicco-Best; Mr. Peter White, CEO of the London Economic Development Corp.; and Mr. Jim MacKinnon, president of the building trades council for taking part in our recent announcement. As well, I would like to thank our government for its continued support and commitment by investing in London and moving Ontario forward.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Bill Mauro: Our government's 2008 budget is good news for Ontario and it's great news for my constituents in Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Our budget continues to invest in roads, bridges and community infrastructure. In fact, the McGuinty government will immediately invest almost \$9 million to repair roads, bridges and community infrastructure in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. Project totals announced in Thunder Bay–Atikokan for both the budget allocation and the MIII program include \$3 million for Thunder Bay, \$1.7 million for Atikokan, \$1.9 million for Neebing, \$1.8 million for Oliver Paipoonge, \$45,000 for O'Connor, \$35,000 for Gillies and \$52,000 for Conmee. This funding will allow communities to build, fix or expand their local infrastructure in the upcoming construction season.

This funding totals almost \$9 million for community infrastructure and will go a very long way, especially in our smaller communities with large geographic areas and small assessments and tax bases. I've had the opportunity to communicate this information to my respective mayors and reeves, such as Steve Harrasen in Neebing, Lucy Klusterhuis in Oliver Paipoonge, Ron Nelson in O'Connor, John Valente in Gillies, Bob Rydholm in Conmee, Lynn Peterson in Thunder Bay and Dennis Brown in Atikokan. They are all very excited for their municipalities.

This government is making fantastic investments in northwestern Ontario through our 2008 budget and the MIII program, and I look forward to sharing more good news with my constituents in the near future.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Last week, Liberal members were busy announcing big cash falls for their ridings, calling

the money “roads and bridges funding.” Six days have passed since they made these announcements and still no information on my riding’s fair share of the money. In fact, no money announcements have been made in any PC member’s riding. So far I’ve found out only about Bruce county, and this is because Bruce is partly represented by a Liberal member. The problem seems to be that this is privileged information; otherwise, how do you explain why it’s only Liberal members who have this information?

For days my staff have been on the phone making calls to several different ministers and staffers, but to no avail. That includes the Ministry of Transportation, Public Infrastructure Renewal, Finance and even the Premier’s office. Their staff say they don’t know how much we’re getting. In fact, as of 1 p.m. today, the totals have not been made available to me or other PC colleagues.

How is it possible that Liberal ridings get this money before anybody else? Where is the justice in that? I have no doubt that it’s either the people in the ministers’ offices who are deliberately stonewalling us, or the money is for Liberal ridings only.

This is about playing dirty, malicious politics. I find their actions arrogant, and highly hypocritical of a government that speaks so often of inclusiveness and openness. The \$400 million they announced for non-GTA municipalities should be a good-news story, a moment for them to look good to the people of Ontario. So why withhold this information? Perhaps it is for the privileged only—Liberal-held ridings—and none for the rest of us.

I know someone here has the municipal allocations for all of Ontario. I would like to ask the minister to please share the numbers with the members on this side of the House too. Break the slush fund—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Members’ statements?

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Jim Brownell: Last week, the Minister of Finance delivered a budget that included a number of exciting initiatives that will be extremely beneficial to rural Ontario. I am especially proud of what this budget has in store for rural communities in eastern Ontario and my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

The ultimate goal of these initiatives, as it is with everything we do in rural Ontario, is to enhance opportunities for growth and support a high quality of life in our rural communities. For instance, the budget proposed to increase funding for the rural economic development program, or RED, as we call it, by \$30 million over the next four years. The budget also proposed to invest \$53 million over the next three years to add 50 more family health teams by 2011-12, which would target rural and underserved communities.

One further aspect that I especially look forward to is the development of the eastern Ontario development

fund. Led by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, this fund will provide support for business investment and economic development in eastern Ontario. The fund is also aimed to support initiatives in key sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and the budding bio-economy sector.

We have seen how investments in these sectors in other parts of the province can help truly transform communities and businesses. These are the investments that this government is proud to make in partnership with those who serve in our rural communities.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Last week, in the riding of Huron–Bruce, it was announced that there was \$18 million for all the municipalities. It’s a slush fund that this government had at the end of the year. There was \$400 million to be given to all the municipalities across the province. Since then, I have not been able to find out what monies went to Grey county. It’s not held by any Liberals there, and unfortunately, the Liberal ridings have this slush fund.

This is different than the MIII that was given out on Friday. We tried in our office to get somebody in one of those offices on Friday. They were all out with the ministers handing out this MIII money. We got that, but we had to go to a special website to get it.

But I want to tell you, it’s either my privilege, or there’s something wrong here that we do not—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): If the honourable member—on Thursday last, the leader of Her Majesty’s loyal opposition, your leader, wasn’t clear if it was a point of order or a point of privilege. I took his point under advisement and I will be making a ruling and speaking on the very point that he rose upon, and which you have just risen upon. So perhaps when all the members are present here, closer to question period, you’ll be able to hear my comments that will speak directly to your issue.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to standing order 109(b).

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Mr. Balkissoon presents the committee’s report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: The report is pretty straightforward. It is the assignment of ministries and government offices to stand in committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Pursuant to standing order 109(b), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

1350

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PAYDAY LOANS ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 CONCERNANT LES PRÊTS SUR SALAIRE

Mr. McMeekin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 48, An Act to regulate payday loans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 48, Loi visant à réglementer les prêts sur salaire et à apporter des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'll make a statement under ministerial statements.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

Hon. David Caplan: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following changes be made to the ballot list of private members' public business:

That Mr. Bailey and Mr. Hillier exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Bailey assumes ballot item 63 and Mr. Hillier assumes ballot item 14; that Mr. Mauro, Mr. Zimmer, Mr. Oraziotti, Mr. Moridi, Mrs. Mitchell and Ms. Aggelonitis exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Mauro assumes ballot item 43, Mr. Zimmer assumes ballot item 36, Mr. Oraziotti assumes ballot item 21, Mr. Moridi assumes ballot item 12, Mrs. Mitchell assumes ballot item 10 and Ms. Aggelonitis assumes ballot 9; and that, notwithstanding standing order 96(g), the requirement for notice be waived with respect to ballot items 9 through 14.

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

Agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'm pleased to stand in my place today and to introduce our proposed Payday Loans Act, 2008. This legislation, if passed, would provide a fair and balanced approach to regulating the payday lending industry in Ontario. It would protect thousands of Ontarians who, from time to time, rely on payday loans to help them through a short-term financial squeeze.

We recognized early in our first mandate that consumers needed more knowledge and clear information about payday loans to help them make better borrowing decisions. We were one of the first provinces to urge the federal government to regulate payday lenders and their business practices.

Last spring, the federal government enacted Bill C-26, amending the Criminal Code, and in so doing shifted responsibility to the provinces to regulate the total cost of borrowing for payday loan agreements.

Our government held consultations last summer to gain needed insight from consumers and lending officials on the direction Ontario should take in this matter. And in August 2007, we made it law for payday lenders to prominently display the terms of any loan on signs in their stores. We also required lenders to explain to customers exactly what the total costs involved in these types of loans would be. That was the first step, and today we begin a second, significant step.

I would like to highlight some of the initiatives in our proposed plan to regulate approximately 700 payday lending outlets in Ontario.

First, it would create a licensing regime for payday lenders to ensure fairness in the provision of payday loans. Licensing payday lenders would immediately provide all users of payday loans with the same strengthened protection.

Second, it would ban a variety of harmful practices that currently exist in the industry. Under this proposed act, payday lenders would be prohibited from making concurrent and back-to-back loans. These are the so-called rollover loans where a borrower takes a loan on a loan and is saddled with exorbitant interest rates and a damaging cycle of debt horror stories. We won't allow that to happen. We also will not allow payday lenders to impose unreasonable default charges or cancellation fees.

Third, the legislation would aim to educate the public, providing consumers with information they need to protect themselves and make more informed choices. The lenders themselves would pay for this with the establishment of an educational fund for financial planning.

In our 2007 throne speech, we committed to begin the long, hard process of addressing poverty in Ontario. We cannot, and will not, allow people to take further advantage of the most economically vulnerable consumers in our society. So under the proposed legislation, we would

set a maximum total-cost-of-borrowing cap to limit the amount payday lenders can charge. There will be no hidden fees. All charges to the borrower must be included in the cost of borrowing.

This spring, we will set up an independent expert advisory board to recommend what an appropriate upper limit would be to the total cost of borrowing for payday loan agreements in Ontario. Board members will be drawn from the business community, the social and poverty advocacy sector, and the academic world. The board will consult for input before recommending an upper limit on the total cost of borrowing for various payday loan agreements. That will be our next step, our third step, in protecting Ontario consumers.

That, however, will not end our work. The ministry's consumer protection branch will conduct inspections, investigations, respond to consumer complaints and may impose administrative monetary penalties for non-compliance.

The proposed Payday Loans Act, 2008, provides that licences may be revoked or suspended in specified circumstances, including if a licensee contravenes the legislation.

Ontario has led the country in looking at specific provisions and protections for consumers who use payday loans, and we will continue to lead the country with our good work.

If this legislation passes, we will have the strongest payday lending rules in the country. The cost of payday loans will be clear and more easily understood, and we'll begin a process to actually provide a cap, or caps, on the total cost of borrowing.

If passed, this legislation would deliver real and positive changes and increase public confidence in the integrity of this industry as we continue to protect Ontario consumers and their families. And that has to be good news for all of us.

1400

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. David Caplan: I'm very proud to rise today in the Legislature to share with my colleagues about yet another significant step that our government has taken to revitalize, to renew, and to restore vital local infrastructure in communities right across Ontario. Since taking office more than four years ago, this government has been unwavering in its commitment to eliminate the massive infrastructure deficit that we inherited.

My friends on both sides of the aisle may remember that back in December we launched something called the municipal infrastructure investment initiative, which I tend to call just MIII. MIII started as a \$300-million grant program to be used by municipalities on the local infrastructure projects of particular importance to the people in their local communities.

Several weeks later, as we all know, Premier McGuinty announced that the government would be adding an additional \$150 million to the investment, bringing the

total funding amount to \$450 million and ensuring that as many communities as possible might be able to benefit. That is a total of \$450 million that we are making available for projects like building safer roads and bridges, improving waste management systems, ensuring cleaner water, and upgrading sports, recreation and community centres.

I'm delighted to tell this House that just last week we released the names of the 243 municipalities and local service boards that will be receiving funding under the program. Whatever projects are being funded—and the specific infrastructure needs in these communities are as unique, I would say, as the communities themselves—we know that they are of critical importance to the people who live there. So I'm proud to say today that these projects are expected to lead to some 6,700 new construction jobs right across the province.

Initiatives like MIII are part of a comprehensive, overall plan for infrastructure renewal that we have put in place to compensate for years of neglect by previous governments.

It builds on the success of our historic \$30-billion-plus ReNew Ontario infrastructure investment strategy, which represents the biggest investment in infrastructure in more than a generation.

And last Tuesday, in this very chamber, my colleague the Minister of Finance tabled the fifth McGuinty government budget, which contained, among other excellent initiatives, \$1 billion in new funding for municipal infrastructure in 2007-08. That includes \$400 million for the municipal roads and bridges fund for communities outside of Toronto, \$497 million for public transit in the greater Toronto area and Hamilton, and \$100 million to rehabilitate existing social housing units. These investments will create an estimated 10,000 jobs during construction.

I am very proud and delighted to say on behalf of this government that we've made and will continue to make desperately needed investments in the schools, in the hospitals, in the roads and bridges, in the clean water and other public infrastructures which Ontarians deserve and on which they depend.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Before we turn to responses, I would just like to ask all members to welcome today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Scottish Parliament led by Mr. Alex Fergusson, the presiding officer. Please join me in warmly welcoming the delegation to Ontario from Scotland. Welcome.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. On behalf of the official opposition, I want to commend the minister for bringing forward this legislation. I know that

he did so after consultation with the industry as well as the public.

We in this House have been calling for this kind of legislation from both sides of the House for a number of years. I want to recognize the member for Welland, who I believe was the first member to bring forward a private member's bill to deal with this issue. There is no question that we have a responsibility in this Legislature to bring forward legislation that protects the consumer. That is his role as the minister. It is our role as a Legislature to ensure that when people do make financial transactions, they are protected.

I would suggest, however, that we give consideration to changing the terminology that we're using, even that the minister has used; and that is, to limit the cost of borrowing. I would suggest that the real issue is the cost of lending, and that's what we should be limiting. I understand that essentially it's the same, but the obligation is on the part of the lender to ensure that the lending practices in this province are fair and that they are not abusive to the very people who are in need.

I would ask the minister as well to ensure, as he considers the various stages of bringing this legislation forward, that he give consideration and allow us, as the members of the Legislature and the public, to come forward through public hearings to not only deal with the legislation here but also to point out that there is a need to expand this kind of consumer protection.

I have an example in my own riding of Newmarket–Aurora, where individuals within the professional community—in this particular case, it happens to be a lawyer who is dealing with mortgages. Consumers who are in financial stress are remortgaging their homes, and those who are engaging in this practice are allowing mortgages to be rolled over and rolled over to the point where people are actually forced, at the end of the day, to sell their homes to the very lawyer who's involved in mortgaging their properties, and are found to be homeless as a result of that. These are things that we, as legislators, have a responsibility to deal with, and I look forward to having the opportunity to expose people like this, who should be standing up for and protecting consumers, and they're taking advantage of them.

So with regard to this legislation, I would also say that we will work with the minister to ensure that what we do is more than just bureaucracy that deals with this issue, that they are meaningful measures that in fact will address the issue.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to address the announcement made by the Minister for Public Infrastructure Renewal. The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound earlier made the comment that what we should be doing on the issues of infrastructure funding is dealing with these matters as matters of priority importance, not as matters of partisan slush funds.

While we welcome all investments in infrastructure, we would ask that we do so on a non-partisan basis, that all members in this Legislature—be they members of the government or members of the official opposition or the third party—have the co-operation of the minister that when announcements are being made, when in fact there is a designation of funding and an allocation of funding for infrastructure, all members are invited to participate in that; that we all receive that information in a timely way; that infrastructure is not used by this government as a slush fund but used in a respectful way, so that we can all participate in those announcements and work to ensure that the funding is designated for the purpose intended.

We welcome these announcements, but what we ask this government to do is to be conscious of its responsibility towards all members in this House when announcements like this are made.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want first to respond to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services in regards to the payday loans announcement that he's just made. I have to say that it's certainly about time that there's been some movement on this issue here in the Ontario Legislature. I think the previous responder mentioned that it was an NDP member in this Legislature, Mr. Peter Kormos from Welland, who first raised this issue. He was very diligent in trying to get this issue on the agenda because he knows, like everyone else, that the system of payday loans in this province is nothing but usury. The bottom line is that it's our most vulnerable people, and oftentimes vulnerable communities, that are plagued with this nightmare of payday loan organizations that continue to drive people deeper and deeper into poverty. It's absolutely unacceptable.

1410

Members of this Legislature will also know that just recently, in the last session, the member from Parkdale–High Park, Cheri DiNovo, also put a private member's bill in place to try to deal with his horrific situation of payday loans here in Ontario.

As I looked through the bill and listened to the minister's words, the reality is that there are major pieces to the solution that are not being delineated in any clear way. I speak specifically to putting a hard cap on the percentage that's allowed to be charged on the payday loans, and unfortunately that's not in here, and I'm quite concerned that it's not. There very clearly have been recommendations through the process that indicate the cap should be no more than about 35%, that we should cap the interest rates at 35% and that that would be a fair regime to put in place in this regard.

I also noted in the bill, as I was quickly looking through it, that although recommendations are for a 30-day cooling-off period upon entering into one of these loans, all that this government is putting forward is a mere two-day, 48-hour cooling-off period or attempt to

let people have an opportunity to change their minds if they realize they've gotten into a situation that really is not to their benefit financially. That's just not acceptable. If we want to have a true and balanced approach, as the minister indicates, then we need to look at a much longer cooling-off period than a mere two days, after which someone signs away their life in terms of being committed to these kinds of payments and high interest rates.

I look forward to going through the process with this minister to really put into place some teeth that change the regime of payday loans in this province so that the most vulnerable in our communities don't continue to be gouged by these usurious organizations.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I now would like to take a couple of minutes to respond to the Minister of Infrastructure Renewal and indicate that it is unacceptable in Ontario that we have a minister claiming that a measly injection of capital dollars that he announces today, and has been announcing for the last couple of weeks, is enough. Everybody knows that the infrastructure deficit in this province is huge; it's over \$65 billion. Some \$1 billion is a pittance. It's like sending a child with a water toy into a three-alarm fire to try to address the problem. It's unacceptable.

Municipalities in this province need and deserve real programs that are long-term, sustainable and ones that municipalities can use to plan their capital programs into the future—not some one-off, one-time drop-in-the-bucket couple of dollars, not some one-off that's reliant upon whether or not the government happens to be running a surplus in any given year. How shameful is that? Let's not build in a permanent program for municipalities. Let's not do that. Let's say, "If we happen to be frugal and have a bigger surplus than what we had planned, then maybe we'll be able to spread around a little bit of cash." That is unacceptable. Municipalities have been starved for a long time for real capital programs that are sustainable and that are able to be used as a proper planning tool.

In the meantime, municipalities are crumbling. We see water main breaks constantly. We see roads and bridges that are close to collapse. In a province like Ontario, how do you expect to have a decent economy if the very pieces of that economic infrastructure, like our roads and our bridges, are falling apart? It is absolutely unacceptable. The reality is that, just to try to keep up with infrastructure demands, municipal budgets have been bursting at the seams. Yes, as one of my colleagues mentioned during members' statements, the reality of downloading has been very troublesome, and what has happened, because there have been no dollars in municipal budgets, is that they've had to rely on operating dollars to put into the capital programs that should have been funded in partnership with this province for many, many

years. It's unacceptable that this drop in a bucket is all that is being provided.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There are a few individuals we would like the House to recognize, please.

On behalf of the member from London North Centre, I'd like to welcome David Simmonds from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. Welcome today, Mr. Simmonds.

On behalf of the competing Ministers of Public Infrastructure Renewal and Labour, and trying to decide which riding the page Christopher Dimoff is here from, we would like to welcome Tom, Kathy, and Zoe Dimoff here to visit Christopher Dimoff from the riding of Scarborough Centre. Welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, I'll recognize some guests of page Samuel Kloppenburg from Arva: his parents Marnie and Davie, his sisters Sophie and Lyla, and friend Greg. Welcome to the Legislature today.

On behalf of the member from London North Centre, I'd like to welcome Menina Casalino, a grade 8 student from Villanova College, and her teacher, Rosalie Naworynski, who are in the gallery today as part of a job-shadowing opportunity won at the Youth in Motion and women in politics conference.

The member from Simcoe-Grey would like to welcome guests from the Canadian Federation of Students: Jen Hassum, Hildah Otieno, Toby Whitfield, Nora Loreto and Ken Marciniac. Welcome to the Legislature today.

I'd like all members to recognize the member from Hamilton Mountain, as she celebrates her 40th birthday today. Happy birthday, Sophia.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Okay, 29. We can't say that she's 16, because she wouldn't be eligible to be sitting in this chamber.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On Thursday, March 27, the leader of the official opposition, Mr. Runciman, rose in the House with respect to the announcements he said were being made by government members in their ridings concerning monies made available in the budget through the municipal roads and bridges fund. The leader of the opposition complained that the information about this funding was being provided to government members only.

The member acknowledged that he was not certain if this was a point of privilege, and indeed I can confirm that it is not. As I mentioned in a ruling delivered earlier last week, the privileges that members of this House enjoy are very narrow, and they relate exclusively to members' parliamentary duties in this chamber. The fact of government announcements being made or infor-

mation not being shared with opposition members does not give rise to a question of privilege.

Numerous Speakers have addressed similar complaints on numerous occasions. In October 1997, the Speaker ruled on a similar point of privilege, in which an opposition member had not received government information at the same time that government members, certain municipal officials and even the press had received it. I will quote Speaker Stockwell from his October 9, 1997, ruling, because I think it was extremely well said at the time and applies as strongly today as it did on that occasion in 1997:

“I appreciate that the member would have preferred that all members could have received the information at the same time. However, the Speaker cannot require the government to release such information—or to release it at a certain time. There is nothing in our rules or our practices that would permit a Speaker to control the dissemination of that kind of information. It is clear from any number of previous Speakers’ rulings that these types of situations do not amount to a prima facie case of privilege.”

I will reiterate former Speaker Stockwell’s point: “Let me make this point, however. In a written submission to me on the matter, the government House leader”—this was the government House leader at the time—“acknowledged that a more coordinated distribution of the information in question would have been desirable. I agree, and to quote a previous Speaker, these kinds of administrative discourtesies do give rise to ‘a valid grievance of which the government should take serious note.’ I am certain that, in future, every care will be taken to prevent a recurrence of situations similar to the one on which I have just ruled.”

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As I said, these types of grievances have been raised on all too many occasions. While the Speaker has no direct authority to solve this matter, as the servant of all members of this House, regardless of which side they sit on, I feel an obligation, like so many of my predecessors, to express disapproval of this kind of activity. Every member of this assembly is elected by his or her constituents to represent their interests, and each member, it seems to me, should have access to the same governmental resources in fulfilling those duties. I echo Speaker Stockwell and many other Speakers who have expressed antipathy at the unequal treatment of members based on partisan lines.

To finish this ruling, I would like to remind the members that the standing orders require at least one hour’s written notice to me of their intention to raise a point of privilege. In raising this matter, the Leader of the Opposition expressed some uncertainty as to how his complaint should properly be raised, and so I allowed him to proceed and, furthermore, decided to take his point under advisement. However, I simply want to indicate to members that I would not expect to do so in the future.

I thank the member for raising the point.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It has been six days since they released their information and we still don’t have it. Maybe you could ask them to give it to some of the rest of us.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I thank the member for his point. I believe I delivered a message on behalf of all members in this House that I hope was clearly delivered that those government members and those ministries will ensure that that information is distributed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Speaker, thank you for your ruling and your helpful comments.

My question is for the Deputy Premier. Last Friday, the government announced a new tax on the purchase of tires. That was three days after the budget, a day the House was not sitting. The budget, of course, made absolutely no reference to a new tax.

Minister, why wasn’t this new tax disclosed in last week’s budget? Why weren’t you up front with the members of this House and, more importantly, with the people of Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. John Gerretsen: As the member well knows, we have an organization called the Waste Diversion Organization in Ontario. They are mandated on the direction of the minister to come up with different programs for recycling purposes. One of those programs happened to be the electronic waste program, which I received today, as a matter of fact. We are going to take a look at that program and deal with the issues contained therein as best we can.

We all know that it’s good for us to recycle, and we all know it’s a heck of a lot better to reuse material as well. It’s simply unacceptable for those kinds of materials that the Waste Diversion Organization has been mandated with to continue to fill our landfill sites. It’s simply not environmentally the right thing to do.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That response falls under the heading of bafflegab. I asked a specific question with relation to a brand new tax that was announced when the House wasn’t sitting and three days after a budget was delivered in this House. Promises were made by your leader, the Premier of Ontario, that no new taxes would be forthcoming with this government, yet three days after the budget was tabled, we had this in-the-dark-of-night and behind-the-curtains kind of approach of this government to break yet another promise.

I am asking you for justification. Why was this tax not revealed during the tabling of the debate, and why have you broken yet another promise?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, there was no tax announced. Under the Waste Diversion Act, programs

are developed by Waste Diversion Ontario. Any funding that is required for that, whether it comes from the producer, the retailer or the individual consumers, will go into that organization—their stewardship funds—to make sure those recycling programs will work.

We have received the program today. It will be posted on the EBR for the next 30 days, and after that a decision will be made whether or not to go forward with the program. But it will not be a tax. It will be based on greater, extended producer responsibility.

If the member doesn't agree that it's a good thing to keep a lot of this material out of our landfill sites, he should stand up and say so. We know where that party opposite stands with respect to the environment. We suffered for eight years under that government.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess it depends on how you define "tax." Is that like, "I didn't have sex with that woman"?

Let's get down to brass tacks are. Are you talking about an additional cost, that when someone goes out and purchases a tire, an additional \$4 or \$5 is going to be assessed to that purchaser? We're talking about small businesses, people in the transportation business, especially today, when we're looking at gasoline taxes and high insurance rates—the challenges they're all facing in the business sector in this province today. Are you suggesting to us that this is not the kind of allocation that you're going to impose on the people of Ontario, especially small business people? Also, are the average Joe and Jane Citizen who are facing real pressures out there, whether it is gasoline prices or mortgage payments, not going to be faced with this additional what we would call tax?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, let's be quite clear. We know where that party stood when they were in government. They decimated the Ministry of the Environment. The number of employees, water inspectors and other environmental inspectors went from 2,300 people to about 1,150. They simply didn't care about the environment. We on this side of the House do.

With respect to the tire program, we are just entering into discussions with WDO with the request for them to develop a tire program as well. It probably will be at least another three to four months before they come back to us with a program.

As he should know, if you look at the Waste Diversion Act, which was passed in 2002, it specifically states that any payments made under that act will not go into the consolidated funds for the province of Ontario but into an extra-special stewardship program to make sure the recycling of those items is handled in a proper way. That's the way to go about it.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It sounds like a Liberal cash grab to me, Speaker.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question again is for the Deputy Premier, and it has to do with the release of

the sunshine list today. Given that Ontario is entering an economic slowdown, and according to some economists is already in recession, Deputy Premier, do you think it's appropriate that your government has been the folks in charge over the past four years or so and that last year we saw a 27% increase in the number of staff getting salaries in excess of \$100,000, and over the life of your government a 110% increase in that number?

Hon. George Smitherman: Indeed, I think many people would find that the steps we took to add transparency were to bring those you had excluded on to the list to eliminate substantially the practice you liked to champion, which was not to hire staff but contractors. We're much more transparent.

What I found most interesting in looking at it is that, if the \$100,000 figure had originally been inflation-protected, two thirds of all of those individuals who are on the list now wouldn't be on the list at all. You do see some growth in the numbers that are reflective of the advance in salaries, but two thirds of those individuals wouldn't be on the list at all. Ontario has the lowest per capita ratios of civil servants of any jurisdiction in the country. I think this reflects on the efficiency overall of the government service we deliver.

In supplementary, I'll be happy to speak more to the points the honourable member might wish to raise.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I appreciate the Deputy Premier's speaking on that issue. We know they frequently boast about the creation of 400,000 new jobs over the life of their government in the past four years. We know from statistics that over 50% of those jobs have been in the public sector. We know that is a challenge in terms of who pays those salaries. We know we're entering into a slowdown in the economy, if not a recession. I ask you again about the justification for that: Given the tenor of the times, if you will, the challenges we're all facing, certainly in the province of Ontario, is this appropriate when we have these kinds of dramatic increases in salaries of public sector employees?

1430

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member likes to use language like "dramatic increases in salaries of public employees," but as he gets an opportunity to better evaluate the data that came out, there's very little evidence of that beyond the pressures of inflation, as I mentioned. Two thirds of all of those who are on the list wouldn't even be on the list if the \$100,000 figure, brought in about 11 or 12 years ago, had had inflation protection. So I think it's important that the honourable member deal fairly with this question.

But we also know—because last week his leader referred to many of these individuals as "exhaust suckers"—that they have a very different view than we do about the necessity of having a public service that's able to build the programming that the people in the province of Ontario expect. We know that the honourable member doesn't support having a chief water inspector on the list; that they wouldn't have any support for a senior nursing consultant or for a director of secondary

school policies and programs. But we understand, associated with our obligations to enhance the performance of the public sector, the necessity of having quality leadership, and we stand to differ from the honourable member on this point. The only place he wants jobs is in Brockville.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: This is the last time I'll speak to the minister, I guess. This is, like Yogi Berra would say, "déjà vu all over again." Those of us who were around during the Peterson years know what approach that government took in terms of taxing and spending and growing the bureaucracy and leading this province into a recession, which the NDP had to deal with—inappropriately, but they did have to deal with a situation created by a Liberal government. This strikes us as an approach going down the same road.

The minister got on his high horse, as he frequently does, but he didn't respond to the specific question that I asked him. I talked about the limited creation of new jobs in this province, which they boast about, but it's very limited—over 50% of them in the public sector; not something to crow about. I said, "Is that appropriate?" Is it appropriate, given the slowdown in the economy and the clear possibility that we're currently in recession, that you're not only bloating the bureaucracy, but you're also increasing salaries at a rate that—

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

Hon. George Smitherman: We know that the honourable member's druthers are clear. He'd like to be cutting \$5 billion from Ontario's investment capacity, which means nurses and police officers. We've seen that play before. We don't want them back, and the people of Ontario don't, either.

He also spoke about private sector employment. Today, the Premier, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Economic Development are in Windsor, where 300 Windsor jobs have been secured through a very strategic investment on the part of our government. We had a letter in response to our budget from Weyerhaeuser, related to their operations in Kenora, where they said, "Along with the accelerated reduction in the business education tax, for northern businesses, it will make a significant contribution to the competitiveness of our sector." And we saw in Guelph, at Collins and Aikman, that 350 jobs have been secured beyond the date where it had been anticipated that people would be laid off.

We do see investment across the province of Ontario, and indeed, hiring more nurses is very much part of our platform. But we're not surprised that the party that called them hula hoop workers and threw them out on the lines are against that.

LOW-INCOME ONTARIANS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. In last week's budget, the McGuinty government shovelled \$6.3 billion of new spending out the door and at the same time

largely forgot about the lowest-income Ontarians. The Premier used to say that clawing back the national child benefit supplement from the lowest-income kids in Ontario was immoral and wrong. The Premier used to say that he was going to end it. So my question is this: While the McGuinty government could find the money to shovel \$6.3 billion in new spending out the door, why is the McGuinty government continuing to claw back \$250 million a year from the lowest-income kids in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I think it's important that everyone here understands that the clawback of the national child benefit supplement will end this July. The Ontario child benefit was announced in last year's budget, as you know. Last year, every family received up to \$250 per child. This year, it'll be up to \$600 per child. It's a big help for those who are struggling to make ends meet with their children.

I think this is a big step forward for children living in poverty in this province. I sure do wish that the leader of the third party would recognize the support provided to children in low-income families.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I want to be very clear with the McGuinty government: New Democrats would never support a government that puts \$6.3 billion out the door in new spending while you continue to take \$250 million a year from the poorest kids in Ontario.

But it's not just the poorest kids in Ontario; it's also the lowest-paid workers in Ontario. The McGuinty government says that the lowest-paid workers in Ontario, who work for incomes below the poverty line, will have to wait another three years before they get to \$10 an hour. New Democrats believe the minimum wage should be \$10 an hour now, rising to \$11 an hour by 2011.

Can the McGuinty government tell us, at a time when you can put \$6.3 billion of new spending out the door, why the lowest-paid Ontarians are going to wait until 2011 to get \$10 an hour?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I refer this—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just like to ask the honourable member—I'm having a very difficult time understanding how the initial question dealt with the child tax benefit and the repeal of that, and now the question has shifted to the minimum wage.

Mr. Howard Hampton: It's all about the lowest-income Ontarians, Speaker. Most of them are children. Many of them are parents who are working. They're not getting a benefit one way or another. It's all about the lowest-income Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Actually, I do appreciate the opportunity today to say to all members of this House that I'm very proud of the fact that, as of midnight tonight, the minimum wage across this province will go up from \$8 an hour to \$8.75 an hour. After zero increases over the last nine years, I'm absolutely proud to say that this government has raised the minimum wage every single

year we've been in office. It's up 28%; by 2010, it'll be up 50%.

We've taken the minimum wage in this province from the bottom of the barrel in Canada to the top. We're leading the country when it comes to the minimum wage, but unlike the NDP's reckless suggestion that we should be doing it all at once, we're giving our business community the time to adjust so we don't hurt the very people—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think we heard the McGuinty government's truth in the last part, that it would hurt people to raise the minimum wage. I think that's the true position of the McGuinty government.

I also want to ask about the other aspect of poverty: It's called housing. In the McGuinty government's Ontario, Ontarians have to wait up to 15 years to have access to affordable housing. It's the New Democrats' position that every penny of the federal government's \$312-million affordable housing fund, as well as the additional \$80 million off-reserve aboriginal affordable housing money, should be spent in the coming fiscal year. Can the McGuinty government tell us, why isn't that going to happen? Why isn't the full \$400 million going to be spent in the coming fiscal year for housing for the people who need it the most?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'd refer this to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me just quote my critic from the NDP. When we announced \$100 million going into affordable housing projects and retrofit in the province of Ontario, the critic for the NDP called it a "meagre \$100 million." Now where I come from, \$100 million is a lot of money. The vichyssoise socialists over there may not think that is a lot of money, but I can tell you it has been extremely well received.

And guess what? When the NDP were out campaigning, they committed that they would allocate from their platform \$30 million a year to begin clearing up this backlog in Toronto. What did the McGuinty government deliver? Thirty-six million dollars to support affordable housing in this city.

1440

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I allowed the minister to finish his question, but one of the things that concerns me are comments that get made in this House that I think from the opposition side can be taken the wrong way. I don't think his comment about a cold product was appropriate, and I would ask that he withdraw that comment, please.

Hon. Jim Watson: Withdrawn.

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

LOW-INCOME ONTARIANS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question again is for the minister for children's services. I think we heard that the federal money available for affordable housing isn't going to go to affordable housing under the McGuinty gov-

ernment. But tomorrow Ontario MPPs are getting their third pay hike in 16 months. That amounts to a 35% pay increase in just over one year. My question is this: How does the McGuinty government justify a 35% pay increase for MPPs over a short time while you continue to claw back the national child benefit from the lowest-income kids in Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again, let me repeat: The clawback of the national child benefit will be finished this July. Starting this July people on social assistance with children will receive their social assistance cheque, the full national child benefit cheque and the new Ontario child benefit cheque. The beauty of the Ontario child benefit is that when someone makes the leap, when they move from social assistance into employment, they continue to receive the full Ontario child benefit until their income reaches such a point that they no longer qualify. It is a much better situation than what we inherited, and I'm very proud of the Ontario child benefit.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government can repeat that response all it wants. It knows that its own tables, which were released last summer, show that the McGuinty government is going to continue to claw back money from the lowest-income kids through the national child benefit supplement for the next three years. Your own tables show that.

But I want to further ask about those lowest-income kids. They're going to continue to see the national child benefit clawed back from them, and their parents are being told to wait a further three years before they can be paid \$10 an hour. On the one hand you're going to claw back, and on the other hand you're going to say to their low-income parents, "You wait to even get a decent wage." Can you tell us, at the same time that you had \$6.3 billion in new spending to shovel out the door, how any of that makes sense for the lowest-income Ontarians?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Labour once again.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I suppose the leader of the third party didn't listen to the original answer to his original question, because I just said that the minimum wage in this province is going up from \$8 to \$8.75 an hour as of midnight today. But listen to this: The minimum wage never went up in this province for the nine years prior to this government taking office. Every year since we've been in office that minimum wage has gone up. By 2010 it will be up 50%. Today it's up 28% since we've taken office.

The NDP want to put those people out of work. We care about low-income workers. We care about the vulnerable. They only care about attempting to get a really good sound bite. That's not what we're about. We're about improving poverty in this province. We're about helping the vulnerable. We're about getting that minimum wage up in a reasonable and balanced way so we protect the jobs of those individuals and at the same time give them a hand up.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The minister might want to check, but in places like Washington, Oregon and in sev-

eral urban jurisdictions in the United States, the minimum wage is over \$10 an hour. The minimum wage in Great Britain is, in equivalent, over \$10 an hour. For the minister to say that raising the minimum wage to \$10 an hour would put people out of work shows, I think, exactly where the McGuinty government is.

But I want to ask this: You had no trouble increasing the wage of the highest-paid civil servant to \$2.2 million. You now have over 42,000 people in the civil service being paid over \$100,000 a year. You have no trouble raising their wages. Why do the lowest-income Ontarians have to wait three more years just to get \$10 an hour under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'll refer this one back to the Deputy Premier.

Hon. George Smitherman: As the Minister of Labour has had the chance to mention, the increase in the minimum wage is an increase this year of nearly 10%, 9.3%. It reflects a commitment; it's the fifth time in a row that our government has done that, and that record stands in sharp contrast and in positive contrast to that of the parties opposite. I had a chance in an earlier question from the honourable Leader of the Opposition to speak about the sunshine list out today. What it shows is that two thirds of the people wouldn't even be on it if it was protected against inflation and that overall growth in the incomes is very, very limited indeed. It's a matter of transparency. People will have an opportunity, and in fact all Ontarians, to look in there and see what the rates of compensation are across the public sector very broadly. We think this is an appropriate mechanism, but we don't support the honourable member's characterization about big, sweeping pay increases; that's not reflected in the data.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Your Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal proudly reannounced today the \$1-billion infrastructure program for communities in the province of Ontario, of which \$400 million is for communities outside the GTA. I quote: "It's for roads and bridges." Now, Deputy Premier, that money isn't really going for roads and bridges, is it? I want to quote the member from Ottawa Centre, again saying this money, \$14.6 million for the city of Ottawa, is for roads and bridges. He's so proud of what it's going to mean for roads and bridges in the city of Ottawa. But then we hear that the city of Ottawa is not obliged to use that \$14.6 million for infrastructure at all. Deputy Premier, why are there no strings attached to this money, and will you put a stop to what we see as another slush fund?

Hon. George Smitherman: I listened very carefully to try and see what the honourable member's point was. I think he was standing up and opposing investments in his own community. Was the honourable member in fact saying that the Madawaska Valley township doesn't need \$5 million in investment for waste water; that Petawawa

doesn't need a \$1.6-million investment to enhance their waste water capacities; that Renfrew county doesn't need \$1 million to repair bridges; that the township of Renfrew doesn't need \$750,000?

The honourable members have demonstrated a very fine ability over the last number of weeks to be on both sides of issues. They send us letters constantly asking us for more spending and then they stand up in the Legislature saying that if they were in office, they would cut \$5 billion immediately. We've seen that play before, and Ontarians don't want to go back to a day when we don't have investments possible for public services and where nurses are being laid off.

Mr. John Yakabuski: This is not about spending; it's about accountability. Let me quote the Auditor General, who said in 2005 that he's concerned about year-end spending on the part of the McGuinty government, repeated in 2006 and repeated in June of 2007, and again in December of 2007, where he says, "In the majority of cases, normal accountability and control provisions were reduced or eliminated." This is about your accounting procedures. Throw money out the door at the last minute without any strings attached—that's not what taxpayers in this province expect. They expect spending, but they expect some controls over it and some real reasons why it's been spent. I would ask today that you ask the Auditor General to look at this entire infrastructure program and how you've accounted for the \$1 billion of taxpayers' money that you're putting out the door at the end of the year because you couldn't plan any better.

Hon. George Smitherman: Here's what Bill Vrebosch, the Conservative candidate in Nipissing and the mayor of East Ferris said about our budget: "The fact that the Ontario government kept their promise ... towards infrastructure renewal, and like this morning, me getting \$233,000 for my small township—I mean, my taxes ... are going to be low this year because of the fact that the government has committed to reducing the impact on my taxpayers through infrastructure renewal and the fact that they uploaded OW and ODSP."

And from the very same member, in a letter to my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs, dated March 18—to make a long story short: support the "proposal submitted to you by Algonquin College in Pembroke, as they seek to build a new campus." Price tag? Thirty-one million dollars.

1450

TUITION

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, last Friday, Judge Lax said it was up to the government to enforce its own rules when it comes to stopping colleges from raising prohibited tuition-related fees. That, I admit, produced a little chuckle, because this is a government that has always been aware that colleges, in particular, and universities were collecting banned fees. In fact, as a backbench MPP, Mr. McGuinty told us in this

assembly that turning a blind eye to tuition-related fee increases is like raising tuition through the back door.

Can the minister tell us, when are he and his Premier going to close the back door and enforce the ban?

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to thank the member for the question and welcome the representatives of various student organizations who are with us today at Queen's Park. I look forward to meeting with a number of them this afternoon and tomorrow.

I'm obviously very aware of the judge's ruling on Friday, but as the honourable member knows, we're now presently in an appeal period, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the substance of that judge's ruling.

But I would like to take the opportunity, since the honourable member raises the issue of support for students, to say how proud I am to be part of a government that, through our \$6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan, put forward \$1.5 billion in support for students. That means that we've doubled our investments in student aid since 2003-04. We're helping 150,000 students per year with financial assistance. We've increased OSAP maximums by 27%—the first time in 12 years.

I find it strange, coming from a party that cut student aid by nearly 50%, cut funding to our post-secondary education institutions and eliminated upfront grants for students.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to say to the minister that retarding the problem does not exist is not an answer. Only the Premier has the power to protect students. The Canadian Federation of Students, who are here today, are looking to McGuinty and to you, Minister, to enforce his government's own rules, which clearly ban these ancillary fees. The minister can either stop colleges and universities from raising these fees and invest the \$50 million a year to implement such a policy without hurting the colleges, or his government can continue to ignore its own rules.

If it's the latter, can the minister then explain to Ontario students, what is the point of having rules that you won't follow?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, the matter is still technically before the court, but I'd like to take this opportunity to talk not only about our Reaching Higher plan but our most recent budget, which contained \$465 million over three years for Ontario students, including a \$385-million textbook and technology grant and a \$27-million distance grant.

One of the groups which I understand is in the lobby today is the College Student Alliance. I'd like to read what they said in their press release on budget day: "The McGuinty government is delivering for Ontario's college and university students in today's budget with improvements to the affordability of post-secondary education, and building a stronger and more prosperous Ontario with a \$1.5 billion skills-to-jobs action plan, says the College Student Alliance.

"College and college/university students welcome the textbook and technology grants that will start to ease the

pressures felt by the growing cost of obtaining a post-secondary education"—

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

CONSERVATION

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Energy. I was pleased to join Canadians in more than 160 municipalities who turned out the lights for Earth Hour on Saturday night. Reports indicate that at least 50 million people participated worldwide; more than 250,000 people and 6,000 businesses signed up online in the lead-up to the event.

Earth Hour raised awareness and highlighted the important role of conservation. It made us look at our daily electricity usage and recognize how small steps can benefit ourselves as consumers, the environment and also our infrastructure.

My family enjoyed a candlelit dinner followed by stargazing from the deck and vowed to repeat the experience frequently in the future. Would the minister responsible for energy conservation tell us if we were able to measure the impact and where we go from here?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I thank the member from Oak Ridges—Markham. I really want to congratulate the people of Ontario who participated in this wonderful event. I was with several members of the Legislature from all three parties—Mr. Prue and others—on Greek Independence Day. The lights were off, the candles were on, and they recognized it.

I think 900 megawatts were saved at that time. What does that mean? Three quarters of a million homes: That's how much electricity three quarters of a million homes would have used. So in terms of dealing with greenhouse gas, it was a great move.

What are the next steps? There are so many things we can all be doing. The government, by the way, has cut its electricity use by 12%. I would urge people to do a home energy audit. There are refunds available, paid for by the taxpayers of Ontario, to help you implement the recommendations of that. That's one next step that I think everybody in this province would like to do.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Minister, I realize there are dozens of ways we can all partake in conservation initiatives. In my community, for instance, PowerStream has installed over 80,000 smart meters and is actively engaging citizens to participate in the many conservation programs through the Ontario Power Authority. Some of these programs available include Every Kilowatt Counts, Peaksaver and the Great Refrigerator Roundup. Would the minister tell us where we are on these initiatives? Are they making a difference, and what are we doing to ensure that we are ahead of the curve on conservation?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I thank what we call the LDCs, the local distribution companies, and our local hydro companies and local power companies, who are doing a great job on the installation of smart meters. This will allow people to measure how much electricity they use

on an hourly basis and allow us to save electricity, because we'll watch the cost of it and shift our use to off-peak times when it's much cheaper to use electricity. So I want to thank all of the local distribution companies helping with the smart meters.

There are a bunch of other things going on. Over a million coupons now—people have switched off the energy-inefficient light bulbs and bought themselves new light bulbs; a great idea. In the budget, we extended the holiday on the PST, the provincial sales tax, on energy-efficient appliances. Finally, for those of you who might have a beer fridge in your basement: Pull the plug—it's costing you \$150 a year—bring the beer upstairs to your other fridge, and that will save an awful lot of electricity and cut greenhouse gases for the people of Ontario. One good idea.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Deputy Premier. This morning, the Premier announced a \$17.1-million aid package for a Ford engine plant in Windsor. Supposedly, the money will contribute to a project that will save one third of the jobs lost when the plant closed last November. I say "supposedly" because, although the money is committed, the details are still far from clear and the jobs are far from saved. I'm happy for those 300 lucky workers who might return to work, but I share the dismay of hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers around the province who did not win the Liberal lottery. Deputy Premier, do you plan to rescue all of Ontario's 200,000 lost manufacturing jobs one plant at a time? At \$17.1 million a pop, how can we afford it?

Hon. George Smitherman: I thank the honourable member for his encouragement of the strategy taken today. It stands quite consistent with the remarks of Mr. Tory, the leader of that party, where he says: "I have said repeatedly ... that I think any Premier of Ontario must keep in his toolbox all the tools necessary to make sure that we maintain and attract automobile investment in the province of Ontario."

Indeed, we're very proud that our government is in partnership with Ford of Canada, the result of which, in the Windsor community—which, as the member knows, has been very hard hit—is that 300 people will regain their employment. We think this is a very substantial step forward.

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The good news is—and I'll have a chance in a moment to remind the honourable member of some of the quotes I spoke of earlier—we're seeing some other investments that are made more stable as a result of strategies in last week's budget. Most certainly we send a message to Ontarians who are in an economically challenging situation that they have in us a government that's willing to fight on their side.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The economic motto of this government seems to be "patronage, patchwork and

partisanship." I was going to put it into verse, but I didn't think it would get through.

Instead of attracting and maintaining economic activity by creating a business-friendly atmosphere, the government provides Band-Aids for wounds that it helped to inflict. Manufacturers in Windsor and the rest of Ontario need more than the odd handout and photo ops for local ministers. They need tax cuts, less red tape, and a government that is at least slightly savvy in economics and less obsessed with controlling the market.

Deputy Premier, if you insist on one-off spending, political grandstanding and unnecessarily high taxes, will you at least spread some of the funds around in non-Liberal-held ridings?

Hon. George Smitherman: There are many places to go in answer to the honourable member, but he makes it seem like that's the only part of the strategy. We have a five-point economic strategy which at the heart of it is about the infrastructure and our people. On a day when we have so many representatives of the college and university sector here—they're talking about investment, enhancing the number of spaces and opportunities—it's good to remind the honourable member: a \$1.5-billion skills-to-jobs action plan; 100,000 more people in colleges and universities; 10,000 more who are graduating from high school; 50,000 more apprentices who are working; a 25% increase in apprentices. This is a reflection that our government understands that the strength of Ontario is its people, and, accordingly, we're pleased to make investments in people, understanding that that's where the best economic opportunities flow from.

LOW-INCOME ONTARIANS

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is for the Deputy Premier. In today's Toronto Star, Carol Goar sets out five choices that this government might have in its war on poverty. To be absolutely clear, the five choices she sets out are: (1) set meaningless targets; (2) stretch out your timelines; (3) forget balancing the budget; (4) raise taxes; (5) admit that the government can't keep its promises. Mr. Deputy Premier, can you tell me which of those five you choose?

Hon. George Smitherman: I don't have to stand in my place and respond to a list that somebody else drew up. I'm part of a government that's very pleased to be in a position to enhance the minimum wage today by a raise of 9.3%, to be part of a government that's bringing forward a dental program, that's added resources for student nutrition, that's put \$100 million into the renewal of public housing stock, and, more than anything else, that has made this enormous, substantive commitment to the lowest-income children in the province of Ontario through the Ontario child benefit, which this year will be increased from \$250 to \$600 per child in eligible households.

This is about more than a million children in the province of Ontario. This is a centrepiece of any poverty reduction strategy, and that's why we're getting on with

the work, because we all know people in Ontario who will benefit from such an initiative.

Mr. Michael Prue: Last week, neither the minister nor his parliamentary assistant would absolutely state what the social assistance base increase has been under this government's watch in the last four years, so perhaps to inform the government, it has been 7%. That's it. Since 2003, this government has eked out a miserly 7% increase for those who are on ODSP and Ontario Works, and that's the base rate.

When will the government increase begin to reflect the actual needs of the poor, start to make up for the drastic cuts the government promised to reverse from the previous government, and restore the rates that people can actually live on?

Hon. George Smitherman: We know that the honourable member in his questioning likes to talk about commitments that have been made by others and put them in a different context, but across the landscape of government investment is a recognition about the government's commitment to people who are struggling with low income: a well-functioning education system, a well-functioning health care system, investments to infrastructure, increases in the minimum wage, the introduction and subsequent increase of the Ontario child benefit, a \$100-million investment in the renewal of public housing stock, increases in student nutrition programs, the introduction of a substantial increase in resources for a benefit related to dental care—all companions to increases to social assistance rates.

We recognize our obligations across the broad landscape of government, and people who are in low-income circumstances have higher call and higher need for good public services. That's why we're proud to make investments in that area.

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's a privilege for me to address for the first time a question to the Minister of Culture, the Honourable Aileen Carroll. The Royal Ontario Museum has recently had a very elegant and remarkable major expansion as well as a number of gallery openings in the new Michael Lee-Chin Crystal.

Minister, can you please tell this House what the ROM, as an Ontario landmark, has been doing to inspire visitors, engage the public in its programming and foster culture?

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I would like to thank the honourable member for Etobicoke North, who is a great supporter of the culture industry.

The ROM, an agency of the Ministry of Culture, continues its tradition of showcasing world-class exhibits for Ontarians and visitors from around the world to enjoy. Two recent exhibits have generated a great deal of interest. The unique Age of Dinosaurs and Darwin: the Evolution Revolution are attracting a record number of visitors through its doors. In fact, this March break there

was a 76% increase in visitor attendance over the previous year.

I am also delighted that the ROM will unveil a new gallery this week on Africa, the Americas and Asia-Pacific. The new gallery will be prominently showcased in the Lee-Chin Crystal. And it's very important that you all know the crystal was named one of the new seven wonders of the world by the internationally recognized Condé Nast Traveller magazine. I encourage you all to look at that great double-page spread in—

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

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I would like to thank, on behalf of all members of this chamber, the Minister of Culture for her stewardship of this cultural renaissance that is taking place in Toronto and across the province.

Of course, a cultural development of this magnitude would no doubt have an extremely positive impact on tourism for the city of Toronto and Ontario. So, to the Minister of Tourism, the Honourable Peter Fonseca, I'd like to ask the question: How will the recent designation of the Royal Ontario Museum's Michael Lee-Chin Crystal as one of the new seven wonders of the world impact tourism and the economy in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Culture.

Hon. M. Aileen Carroll: I'd like to refer the question to the Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: Thank you to the member for the question. The inclusion of the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal in Condé Nast Traveller's new seven wonders of the world is a coup for tourism in this city and in this province.

This magazine is so highly regarded and influential among international travellers. The monthly readership is over two million potential travellers globally. A feature piece in this magazine puts the Royal Ontario Museum and the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal on a global context with immediate and increased media coverage. This type of international media attention and cultural recognition builds on the efforts our government has already embarked on to increase international tourists to Ontario.

This year, we're expanding our popular multimedia There's No Place Like This campaign and reaching out to key US markets like Boston, Chicago and New York.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Deputy Premier. In the recent budget, the McGuinty government crowed about \$5 billion in "unexpected revenue." "Unexpected revenue"—they speak as if they found five bucks in their jeans while doing the laundry.

We're talking about \$5 billion here. Let's drop the McGuinty code talk and call it what it really is: \$5 billion in overtaxation, \$5 billion that, when divided between Ontario's 12.8 million people, works out to overtaxation of \$390 for every man, woman and child.

Is the Deputy Premier prepared today to call upon the Auditor General to thoroughly investigate the govern-

ment's accounting practices to ensure in the future that the wallets of the people of Ontario are not hit with any more supposed surprises?

1510

Hon. George Smitherman: I recognize that the honourable member is new, but someone here, a member in the front row perhaps, might explain to him that that is the function of the Auditor General. In fact, we get a lot of advice and direction about the way that the government must account for resources, which was described in part of the questioning last week.

But what's really surprising is that at the beginning of question period today the irony was that the Conservatives were complaining about not being part of announcements, and now we have a member standing up and saying there shouldn't have been any in the first place. This is what we're seeing on a regular basis. On the one hand, they stand up—incoherence—and they ask for a substantial tax reduction. In the next breath and by way of letter, they hammer government ministers with expectations of substantial increases. There is no better example of this than the member from Thornhill, who has fond expectations of multi-hundred-million-dollar investment from the government.

Mr. Peter Shurman: The government talks about this money as if it's theirs. It's not theirs; it belongs to the people of Ontario, and the people of Ontario deserve to know how each and every one of them was hit with an extra \$390 in taxes by the inept accounting of this government.

The people of Ontario could have put this money towards their retirement, or education funds, or perhaps towards some household repairs, or maybe it could have bought a child's first bike or some hockey equipment. This \$5 billion in overtaxation is further evidence that the \$2.8-billion health tax has never been required.

Will the Deputy Premier stand in this chamber today and apologize to the people of Ontario for taking money they need more than him and tell Ontarians when they can expect the Minister of Finance to be mailing out the refund cheques for \$390?

Hon. George Smitherman: If there's an apology owed to the people of the province of Ontario, it's two-fold. Firstly, it's on the part of a previous government that hasn't yet fessed up for the circumstances it left behind of a \$5.6-billion deficit. But even worse is on the part of this member, who in one breath asks for more money—in one breath he stands, as he did last week, and asks for more money; he wants to build a new hospital in his community—and on the other he stands up and says that the health premium is pointless for the purposes of advancing expenditure in health care.

It's interesting that the member from Woodstock said recently about the hospice, "I'm elated with the amount. We're now looking forward to fundraising and getting the hospice open. It's a significant achievement and it will allow them to move forward and get construction under way." That's from another member, another voice—more incoherence from the party opposite.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Deputy Premier. This past Friday, for the first time in the history of Ontario, I understand, I actually had to go to a jail to meet with an Ontario First Nation leader. Chief Donny Morris of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation is in jail because the McGuinty government granted a permit to a mining exploration company without first consulting and accommodating the First Nation, as required by the Supreme Court of Canada. Chief Morris wants to know the answer to one elementary question: Why did the McGuinty government give a mining exploration permit to a mining company without first consulting and accommodating the rights and interests of the First Nation, as you're required to do by the Supreme Court of Canada?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I appreciate the question from the leader of the third party. We are obviously very disappointed and saddened by the outcome of the dispute between Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug and Platinex, but I do want to say to the leader of the third party that we take our duty to consult very seriously. Indeed, we have met that duty to consult. That was confirmed by Justice Patrick Smith in his May 2007 decision. But we also understand that our duty to consult is an ongoing one, and it's one that will require us to continue our efforts as we move forward. May I say, as everybody in the Legislature knows, my colleague, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, has made many attempts—three visits up to the community—to try to help find a resolution, and we appreciate those efforts. But even before that was the case, we had visited the community on a number of occasions. Perhaps in the supplementary I'll get an opportunity to explain how indeed we have worked so hard to meet that duty to consult.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government has made visits to the community, but that is not consultation as required by the Supreme Court of Canada. The fact is, the McGuinty government gave a mining permit without consulting and accommodating. That has resulted in the incarceration of Chief Morris and five other members of the community.

An appeal is now going to be filed with respect to this matter, an appeal asking that the sentencing of the First Nation leaders be overturned. The McGuinty government says that they want to work with First Nations. My question is this: Is the McGuinty government prepared to stand today and commit to unconditionally supporting this appeal and the release of the KI and Ardoch leadership pending their appeals?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I will refer this to the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: As a former Attorney General, the leader of the third party would know it would be inappropriate to comment in this place about matters which are before the court and about which the

present state and the disposition are still unclear. What we can say, supporting the comments the minister had made before and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has said on many occasions is that it's the determination of this government to develop the new relationship with our First Nations, to work things through in as co-operative a fashion as possible. I look forward to the results of the discussions by both the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Hopefully, we will have a very productive future for this region of the province.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, there's been a lot of discussion about the investments that you're making in health care. My constituents have seen significant improvements in health care, but there is always more work to do. You were in Thunder Bay on Friday to tour the angioplasty cath lab at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre and you also made an announcement about the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre. Can you please tell my constituents how this announcement will improve health care for the residents of Sioux Lookout, the local aboriginal communities and surrounding communities?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank and congratulate the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan. We had a chance to meet with representatives that live in northwestern Ontario who, as a result of the investments our government has made, can now receive those services in Thunder Bay rather than having to be sent to places like Ottawa.

We're really, really pleased that we're able to move to tender the next stage for the Meno Ya Win Health Centre. This is a very impressive and exciting 140,000-square-foot facility. It brings together the federal and provincial health systems under one umbrella in Sioux Lookout, a community that plays a crucial role in supporting 28 aboriginal fly-in communities in that area. It's been designated as a First Nations centre of health excellence, and some new investments in the Meno Ya Win will be a five-bed withdrawal management, a dedicated palliative care unit, an expanded chronic kidney disease program, and screening and diagnostic mammography, all substantial evidence of necessary investments to benefit especially the health of our First Nations population.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm sure that people in Sioux Lookout and the surrounding areas will benefit from this new investment. I know that delivering accessible and culturally appropriate health care is very important to First Nations communities across the province. On Friday, while you were in Thunder Bay, you delivered a speech to a LHIN-sponsored aboriginal forum. Could you tell me what you discussed and how you're improving health care for aboriginals in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: I was very pleased to have a chance to participate at the Victoria Inn with near-

ly 200 leaders and individuals who work on health matters from the aboriginal communities of northwestern Ontario. This was sponsored by the local health integration network and stands as a good bit of progress.

One of the concerns the chiefs have raised was that the AHWS, aboriginal healing and wellness strategy, might at some point come under the umbrella of the local health integration networks. I told them that wasn't something we were proponents of and, further, that the capacity building associated with the local planning tables was the firm commitment that we had to enhance the capacity of First Nations communities to participate in dialogue with local health integration networks, to see that the investments we're making in health care have a positive effect for the health status of our First Nations populations. We were very pleased to see nearly 200 people participating in that forum.

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MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Bill Murdoch: My question is to the minister of—Mr. Caplan over there. As you know, we talked today about the list of projects that were going to be out—the secret list that no one else got over here. I would ask the minister today to stand up and promise today in this House that we will get that list within half an hour of leaving this House. The list must be there somewhere; it came out of his office. He bragged about it today. That's the \$400 million that you're giving out to municipalities other than Toronto. You've given them \$400-some million. Would the minister commit today to giving us that list as we leave this House?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I have in front of me the website of Infrastructure Ontario. If you go there, it says “List of Successful Applicants.” If the member took the time, a few clicks of a button on a mouse, to go to that website, he would find out that in the town of Hanover in the great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—in fact, I had a chance to meet Mayor Maskell at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. She talked to me about their waste water project. In fact, they received funding. I note that the city of Owen Sound—and I spoke with Mayor Lovell—they too, for their water project: \$1,169,563,000.

All the member need do, all that any member of this Legislature need do, is go to the Infrastructure Ontario website and click the link that says “List of Successful Applicants.” I'm sure that the member will be able to find the information he needs.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Minister, it's too bad you weren't on the right side as to what's going on over here. That's the fund. We have that fund. That's the MIII. We all understand that one, although we didn't get it until Monday. We didn't get it on Friday, when all the ministers and all the members of the Liberal Party were out there announcing these great details. We did not get it until Monday. But we want the secret slush fund. This is the \$400 million.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: There; he's going to get it right now. I'm glad that somebody in your office has finally woken up and given you the right one.

We don't have this. This is the one that was announced for Huron–Bruce: \$18 million last week. We have not got that one.

Applause.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: They may clap over there for that, and that's fine, but what about the rest of Ontario, the Conservative ridings and those NDP ridings that you forgot about? Let's see if you can answer that question, Minister.

Hon. David Caplan: I always ask myself how my good friend from Pembroke would have asked the question. I know he would have done a much better job. I can tell you, sir, that, in addition to the Infrastructure Ontario website—very easy for any member of this Legislature to access—letters went out to all cities, all towns, all municipalities. All MPPs in this Legislature were copied on those letters. I can assure the member that they were mailed out, that they will go out, that he too will receive the information, as all members of this Legislature do. But it's a rather simple matter. I know, for example, that the member would want to know that the long-term-care home in Grey county received funding under MIII, that Chatsworth township also received some funding to be able to do their roads, that the municipality of West Grey received \$350,000 to fix up their recreation centre. These are the kinds of—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The time for question period has ended.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We'll have to have a late show, unfortunately, because the minister hasn't figured out what list he's talking about. He's on the wrong list. So I'll request a late show tonight.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The honourable member knows the procedure. There's a form that's to be filled out at the table, and I would ask him to proceed to the table and fill out the appropriate forms.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Norm Miller: I've received a number of petitions to do with maintaining the Lord's Prayer here in the Legislature. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the 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 we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena of conflict; and

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

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

I support this petition and affix my signature.

HOME CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: I have a petition today to present to the Legislature from the SEIU and the people of Sarnia.

“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 I hereby sign my name to it.

WYE MARSH WILDLIFE CENTRE

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm pleased to join with my colleague from Simcoe North in this petition regarding the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre. I'd especially like to thank Megan Francis from Orillia—and a number of other people from Orillia, Lefroy, Barrie, Washago and Midland—for having signed it. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, located in the township of Tay, manages approximately 3,000 acres

of environmentally sensitive land which is owned by the province of Ontario; and

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

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

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

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

I'm pleased to add my voice of support and to ask page Christopher to carry it for me.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly from the 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'm pleased to sign this and present it to Natalie to present to the table.

1530

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU and the people of North Bay and Nipissing area:

“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 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.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Petitions? The member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: Congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker. You're doing a great job in the chair.

I have a petition by a group of teenagers from the riding of Peterborough. It's a petition on children and smoke-free cars, supporting 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 support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mrs. Julia Munro: “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 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.”

As I am in agreement, I have affixed my signature. I’m pleased to be able to give it to page Ramandeep to deliver to the table.

NON-PROFIT HOUSING

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I have a petition here signed by many who live in the Toronto Community Housing company. They submit this petition, and it reads:

“Whereas every citizen of Ontario should have a safe, healthy and decent home; and

“Whereas thousands of individuals and families are denied this basic right when the province of Ontario downloaded affordable housing to the city of Toronto but refused to pay for the hundreds of millions of dollars in deferred capital repairs; and

“Whereas poor living conditions undermine the safety and security of communities, harming children, youth and families living in affordable homes; and

“Whereas failure to invest in good repair undermines the values of the province’s affordable housing as the condition of the housing stock deteriorates; and

“Whereas poor living conditions have a damaging impact on the health of communities, costing Ontarians millions in health costs; and

“Whereas investment in housing pays off in better residences and in stronger, safer, healthier communities; and

“Whereas residents of Toronto Community Housing have waited five years for the province to pay its bills and bring affordable housing to a state of good repair;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Accept its responsibility and invest \$300 million to ensure that all residents of Toronto Community Housing have a safe, decent and healthy home.”

I support the petition, and I’ll be signing it.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: This petition is for children in smoke-free cars, in support of 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 support this petition and affix my signature.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. John O’Toole: It’s my pleasure to read a petition on behalf of my constituents of the riding of Durham. By the way, congratulations, Deputy Chair, on your appointment. I look forward to being recognized more frequently. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many vehicles on Highway 12 are continuing to travel at speeds exceeding the speed limit through the village of Greenbank;

“Whereas residents in the community are deeply concerned over the safety of pedestrians along this provincial highway in Greenbank because of the high speeds and volume of traffic;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request that the Ministry of Transportation proceed immediately with the following safety improvements:

“—repainting the crosswalk;

“—a new overhead flashing light crosswalk sign;

“—the installation of flashing lights at the entrance and exit to the village of Greenbank to the north and to the south alerting drivers to the reduced speed;

“—consideration for this area to be designated a community safety zone.”

I’m pleased to sign this on behalf of my constituents from Greenbank.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU and the people of Sault Ste. Marie, Echo Bay and Bruce Mines.

“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 will affix my name to it.

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DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY

Mr. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, I present to you today about 625 signatures, which were presented to me during the rally held at Queen’s Park on January 16 on a petition 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 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” occupies “an incredibly unique and beautiful 180 acres of green space, the largest such space in the town of Richmond Hill, with trees, birds, animals, plants, insects and butterflies in” the middle of “a rapidly urbanized area;

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPLY ACT, 2008

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2008

Mr. Gravelle, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 45, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008 / Projet de loi 45, Loi autorisant l’utilisation de certaines sommes pour l’exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2008.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Do we have agreement that the member for Pickering–Scarborough East can lead off the debate for the Liberals? Agreed. The member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I’m pleased to rise in the Legislature today to speak to Bill 45, the Supply Act, 2008. The Supply Act is one of the cornerstone acts in the Legislature and is proposed by the government. If passed, this bill would give the government the necessary authority to implement the program it set out, fulfill its commitments and put the vision that the government has into practice. I’m going to urge all members of the Legislature, when the debate concludes, to support Bill 45 because, without this necessary spending authority, no government would be able to meet its obligations to the people of Ontario.

The government’s spending authority for the current fiscal year is provided through the Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act, 2007, a special warrant issued on October 25, 2007, and a motion for interim supply. The interim appropriation act, 2007, was required because the previous Legislature had to be dissolved before it could complete the voting of supply.

Since the government’s spending authority is intended to arise only under the Supply Act and any special warrants that are required, the proposed Supply Act includes a spending authority provided by the interim appropriation act and repeals that particular statute. Without this authority, the government would be unable to make most scheduled and unscheduled payments and implement the initiatives in its budget.

As you know, the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Dwight Duncan, introduced the budget of the McGuinty government’s second mandate in this House on March 25, 2008. During the first mandate, the government managed to eliminate the previous government’s deficit while investing heavily in health care, education and the province’s infrastructure.

I’d like to share with the members of the Legislature the highlights of the government’s plans to grow an even stronger Ontario. In a speech from the throne last year,

this government outlined a five-point economic plan. In the first budget of our second mandate, we're strengthening this five-point economic plan and implementing additional measures of interest of importance to the people of Ontario. Our plan calls for investing in skills and knowledge, investing in provincial infrastructure, lowering the cost of business, strengthening the environment for innovation and forming key partnerships to strengthen Ontario. Our plan strikes the right balance and enhances those public services that make Ontario the best place in Canada to live, to work and to invest.

Our plan undertakes initiatives for those sectors, communities and families that continue to face additional external challenges that have been well spoken of in this Legislature. Premier McGuinty is very fond of saying that for the economy to truly succeed, for Ontario to succeed, we need every Ontarian at their very best. Prudent planning is allowing us to invest in people while paying down debt and cutting the cost of doing business.

The fall economic statement of last year began to implement that plan, and our 2008 budget builds on those initiatives. Our five-point plan for the economy will strengthen the long-term economic productivity, stimulating investment and job growth today, and move us to a greener, more sustainable future here in the province of Ontario. The plan is as sweeping in its scope as it is balanced in its approach. In addition, the budget proposed a number of tax cuts and regulatory reforms to reduce the cost for business and enhance the quality of life for all Ontarians.

With the passage of this bill, we'll continue working together to build an even better future, a future that is as prosperous as it is inclusive, as sustainable as it is inclusive, and as full of hope and pride as the people of Ontario themselves. The resilience of Ontario's economy will continue in the future because of the ingenuity, perseverance and compassion of Ontarians. In 2007, stronger-than-expected economic growth of 2.1% occurred, despite a significantly more challenging external environment.

The government is investing in people so that Ontario can continue to compete. We're investing in skills and education so they have real opportunities for success. We've been getting great results during these past five years. Today, more than 90,000 more young people are going to college or university than just five years ago. Over 10,000 more young people are graduating from high school each and every year.

This government's \$1.5-billion, three-year skills-to-jobs action plan will train unemployed workers for new careers, expand apprenticeships, build more spaces in colleges and universities, and help students with their educational costs. Some 20,000 unemployed workers will get long-term training that launches them into new, well-paying careers through our new \$355-million Second Career strategy. The government will also expand apprenticeship programs, targeting 32,500 new registrants and apprenticeships—a 25% increase in just four short years.

This fall, we'll also provide a textbook and technology grant for about 550,000 full-time college and university students. Students from rural and remote areas will benefit from a new distance education grant to assist with their travel costs. And we'll help to build new and improved post-secondary and skill-training classrooms throughout this province through a \$970-million investment in new capital funding.

Skills are one component of investments in people. To ensure that Ontarians have an opportunity to be at their very best, particularly our children, a new cabinet committee on poverty reduction is working on a strategy that will see real results. As a start, to improve dental care services and make a difference in the health and well-being of thousands of low-income families, the government is committing to \$135 million over three years. To ensure that no child has to start the school day hungry, we'll provide nutritious food to thousands more children by doubling our investment in the student nutrition program over a three-year period. To help some 690,000 Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program recipients, our government will increase social assistance by another 2% in 2008 and 2009. This is in addition to the Ontario child benefit we initiated last year.

Our strong health care system is one of our key competitive advantages. It helps make the province an attractive place for business to invest and a place to create jobs. This government is building on the success of the last four years by continuing to invest in and improve universal public health care in Ontario. The government is committed to improving access to health care for all Ontarians.

1550

We'll increase access by providing 50 more family health teams, particularly in rural and underserved communities, and we'll expand nurse-practitioner-led clinics by providing an additional \$38 million over three years for that purpose. Our plan calls for an increase in cancer screening—particularly something this House has called on for some time: to cover the costs of PSA testing—as well as extending the HPV vaccination program.

This government will continue to make record investments in education. Continued prosperity in a competitive global economy is absolutely essentially dependent upon a well-educated workforce. By making investments in schools and school boards, we've built a strong foundation for student achievement. In 2008-09, school-year grants for student needs funding, the cornerstone of education funding, will rise to an unprecedented \$18.8 billion. Since 2003, we've hired 9,000 additional teachers to ensure our children are doing better at school. Our investments and the hard work of teachers and students have resulted in remarkable progress. Test scores are higher throughout the province. More students are graduating, and more students are going on, whether it be college, university or apprenticeship training, than ever before in Ontario.

At the other end of the spectrum are our seniors. They've contributed so much to our success, but many of them are facing new challenges. This government is proposing a property tax grant to help low- and moderate-income seniors stay in their homes by assisting them with their property taxes.

The McGuinty government is already making the largest investment in Ontario's infrastructure in a generation, and we plan to do much more. The government has modernized schools, social housing, hospitals, roads, bridges, public transit, community facilities and our water systems. The 2008 budget includes an additional \$1 billion in investments in municipal infrastructure, \$400 million of that for much-needed improvements to our roads and bridge structure here in the province, all of that outside of the heart of the province for the economy in Toronto—\$497 million for public transit projects in the greater Toronto area and Hamilton and \$100 million for improvements to our social housing stock.

Perhaps our most important infrastructure undertaking is a new border crossing in Windsor. As part of the environmental assessment, the Detroit River International Crossing Study is expected to provide recommendations very soon on a new crossing and new access road. Ontario will fund its share of the cost of the proposed road link between Highway 401 and this new border crossing. Business and union leaders and others from right across the province want to get on with this project and so do we.

To compete in the global economy, we have to build on Ontario's creativity and innovation, and as a result, the government has committed nearly \$300 million for new innovative initiatives. The McGuinty government will provide \$250 million over the next five years to the Ontario research fund for investment in research infrastructure. To help launch the next wave of Ontario innovators, the Minister of Finance proposed a new, bold, 10-year corporate income tax exemption. This is unique in Canada, and we're extremely proud of this particular initiative. It's a new tax incentive for new corporations that commercialize research from Canadian universities, Canadian colleges and/or Canadian research institutes.

To help create more jobs and strengthen our northern communities, our investment in the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. will rise to \$100 million annually over the next four years. The government also recently launched the Next Generation of Jobs Fund to help innovative business grow and create new jobs. The fund is a \$1.15-billion investment to support companies and privately led groups whose products may, for example, reduce pollution, save energy, make transportation more efficient or cure diseases.

Surely this House would agree that Ontario is a great place to invest, and a great place in which to create jobs. We've made significant progress in reducing costs for Ontario businesses. As an example, just three months ago in his fall statement, the Minister of Finance proposed a package of business tax relief worth \$1.1 billion over three years. And to help encourage economic growth, the

minister is proposing in his budget a further \$750 million over four years in new business tax relief.

To help our manufacturers now—today—we're proposing a further retroactive capital tax cut for manufacturers and resource industries going back to January 1, 2007. This would entitle companies to up to \$190 million in rebates, which they can choose to put back into the economy. We're also proposing to enhance the capital cost allowance, saving Ontario businesses \$433 million over three years, and encouraging Ontario manufacturers and forest companies to invest in new equipment. In the 2008-09 budget, we're accelerating the business education tax cuts by four years so that northern business property tax rates will be at the maximum 1.6% by 2010.

This government is committed to strengthening our competitiveness in key economic sectors, including the mining sector. Mining has been one of Ontario's great recent success stories. So to encourage future growth, the government will invest \$20 million for geological mapping, and close to \$7 million to implement the Ontario mineral development strategy.

Ontario's forest products sector is the mainstay of many northern Ontario communities. Since 2005, our government has provided over \$1 billion in support to the forestry sector. To help address the challenges this particular sector is facing, the government proposed to reduce the stumpage rate for poplar hardwood, to encourage new investment and support our producers.

Despite a drop in visitors from the United States due to a strong Canadian dollar, Ontario's tourism sector has been resilient and tourism employment continues to grow here in the province. To help encourage further growth, the government is investing over \$110 million to strengthen and expand tourism here in Ontario.

We believe a competitive and healthy economy is a green economy, so we're increasing funding to fight climate change and provide funding for an environmental curriculum.

This supply bill is so very important to us to ensure that these programs, the initiatives announced in the budget, are carried out, and to ensure that we have the capacity so that we can manage to pay the folks that do the job here in this Legislature and for the people of Ontario. These are all critically important matters that we have to address.

There's much more that I would like to add if time permitted. I know that there are other members of this Legislature on all sides of the House who want to speak positively to this particular initiative in this particular bill.

So in conclusion, the Supply Act is one of the most important acts that can be proposed by the government in this Legislature. On behalf of the Minister of Finance, I'm going to urge all members of the House when the debate concludes to support the act—because without it, and without the necessary spending authority, no government would be able to meet our obligations to the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: It is with great pride and honour that I rise today to make my inaugural speech in this chamber. I want to thank the people of Thornhill for the support and trust they've placed in me by electing me as their member of provincial Parliament. It is my intention to serve their needs to the best of my ability.

C'est un honneur et un privilège d'avoir l'occasion de vous adresser la parole aujourd'hui afin d'exprimer ma gratitude aux électeurs et électrices de la circonscription de Thornhill.

I also want to thank my predecessor, Mr. Mario Racco, for his service to Thornhill. On behalf of the people of Thornhill, I pay tribute to him for his service, and I wish Mario and Sandra all the very best for the future.

I would like to thank the Clerk of the Legislature and her staff, as well as my own staff, for their kind assistance and guidance in acquainting me with the Legislature and its procedures. This can be a daunting place when one first enters it—and, if I may be permitted an observation, a curious one, after several weeks of involvement in its daily workings.

I further congratulate Steve Peters on his election as Speaker of this Legislature. Though that took place in the initial and curtailed fall period, it is important for me to both pay tribute to him and to note that his role is fundamental in the protection of the spirit of democracy that drives us in this House. I wish the Speaker the very best as we go forward in this term.

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I offer my congratulations as well to all members of this great assembly on their personal victories back in October. One of the things I'm most cognizant of is the fact that although the three parties represented have significantly different views on how to improve our Ontario, no one could ever convince me that our wish to do so isn't always a common objective for all 107 members.

The people to whom I'm most indebted are my wife, Carole, my sons, Mike and Brian, and my broader family. I thank all of them. Their love and support provide me with great strength, and I am grateful that my wife is here with me today along with my sisters-in-law Morlyn Shurman and Marcy Tarder. I am honoured as well to have Eli Yufest, Peter Kent, Randy Spiegel, Yirmi Cohen, Rabbi Yisroel Janowski, with his wife, Chana, and his young son, Josh Cooper, and Marlene Gally and Richard Ciano here with me today, all important allies who became friends in the great journey to this place. I am also honoured to have Mr. Bob Bak and Mr. Ian Woo here, representing Thornhill's dynamic and growing Korean community.

Thornhill is a vibrant and integral component of the greater Toronto area. It is richly diverse in its population, and that provides the community with a remarkable resource and with exceptional power to achieve. We enjoy an excellent quality of life in Thornhill. However, if we are to continue enjoying the same standard of living in the future, vigilance is required. I'm proud to be here in

the Legislature to provide that vigilance on behalf of all the people of Thornhill.

Thornhill residents speak over 100 languages, and over 50% of the residences are owned or occupied by people whose country of birth was not Canada. If one could ever call any part of Canada the crucible in a grand experiment, Thornhill would be that place.

I ran for public office because I believe in a better Ontario. Je crois en un Ontario amélioré. I believe in an Ontario that respects our seniors, allows them to live with dignity and affords them a better quality of life. Je crois en un système de transport efficace. Je crois en un système de santé de qualité et accessible à tous les Ontariens. I believe in safe communities, in government that puts the rights of victims ahead of criminals and one that invests in safety and security as well as crime prevention. As Evelyn Scott once said, "A belief which does not spring from a conviction in emotions is no belief at all."

I assure this House and the residents of Thornhill that I have the courage of my convictions. As the member from Thornhill, I would like to take some time to talk about the concerns of my constituents. These are concerns I heard at their front doors and concerns that I am continuing to hear now. The residents in my riding are loyal to their community and they know its needs. They are looking for a government that is willing to act to enhance their quality of life. I believe, as do my constituents, that government must be concerned with the quality of life of the people it serves. Quality of life is what attracts people to a community and makes them want to stay and to call it home. It is about economic prosperity, cultural and recreational opportunities, community safety, timely access to quality health care and time spent with family and friends.

I am honoured to have Randy Spiegel from Zareinu in the gallery today. Zareinu is a day treatment centre and school for children with special needs in my riding. I have spoken about them in this House previously. Zareinu's mission is to improve the quality of life for each child and her or his family by providing the most effective and up-to-date therapies and learning strategies and, in that way, help each child to reach his or her maximum potential.

In 1999, the then-Conservative governmental allocated \$14.5 million for special-needs kids in private schools. It was an annual allocation and remains a budget line item today. I am told that due to an unduly narrow and technical interpretation of regulations by the ensuing Liberal government, only \$4.5 million of the \$14 million is being spent. I say, "Shame," and I commit to Randy this day that I will be your champion and fight for the rights of the special-needs children not only of Zareinu, but in my riding of Thornhill and all across Ontario.

Kids with special needs are not any less loved nor any less important nor any less deserving of what our Education Act guarantees to not some, but all, Ontario children. I was saddened that in the throne speech and in the recent budget, not only were the needs of the people

in Thornhill not met, but all Ontarians seem to be left out in the cold awaiting improvements we can make and programs we can fund. And I will work with all of my colleagues to deliver.

Ontario's economic challenges are not being taken seriously. We have gone from an Ontario that was once the engine of Canada's economy to, for the first time in 30 years, an Ontario whose unemployment rate exceeds the national average. Staying the course is steering in the wrong direction, for it leads to rocky shoals and treacherous waters. Disposable incomes in Ontario are growing but at a rate that is among the slowest in the country, and Ontario's business tax structure is the least competitive in all of Canada at a time when Ontario should be leading the way. Ontarians deserve better.

In my riding, the plight of our citizens in receiving equitable dollars for health care is significant, with the per capita gap down about \$200 from other Ontarians. We are in a high-growth area, and we are much too late already in addressing something that isn't being predicted; it's already here.

Infrastructure is desperately lacking: roads, a hospital, extended mass transit—not political promises to build these things, but legal commitments and shovels in the ground. And the funding must be predictable and must be ongoing.

Community safety, another issue of concern for the residents in my riding, is not even on the McGuinty radar. Might I remind the members opposite that finger pointing is no solution. Empty words and finger pointing are not appropriate forms of government action, any more than blaming a past over which your government has had the final say for what is now going on five years.

Health care is front and centre in Thornhill. While deliberating on what I wanted to say today, I was reminded of a Liberal government that promised a revolution—a revolution—in health care. The Oxford Dictionary defines the word “revolution” as “any fundamental change or reversal of conditions.” Another definition for the word is “a drastic and far-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving.” Four and a half years later, while Ontarians are still waiting for the promised fundamental changes and far-reaching policies, we are hearing reports of queue-jumping, longer wait-lists for long-term care, and perhaps the most disturbing fact, that Ontario doesn't measure up to other Canadian provinces with respect to quality of care. In fact, you are more likely to die in an Ontario hospital than you are in Saskatchewan, British Columbia or New Brunswick. Recently, there were reports of people waiting in emergency rooms just to be seen, with several deaths recorded in what was dubbed the hall of shame.

I have spent many hours in my initial period as a member meeting with senior officials in hospitals, LHINs, medical agencies and with physicians themselves. I have heard an amazing and repeated statement: They say that if we were to show leadership and rebuild our health care system, the \$40-billion annual budget

could provide every Ontarian with the best health care money could buy anywhere in the world.

So again I say, “Shame.” Ontarians deserve better, and it is our job in this Legislature to ensure that all Ontarians receive the care they need when they need it.

Locally, the Liberal government has been dangling a carrot to the residents of my riding. That carrot is a new hospital. The residents in my community deserve more than a possibility; we need a plan to address their very real health care needs. With a full-blown study now completed, a letter of recommendation now submitted to the minister by the LHIN, and an endorsement letter from the Vaughan group driving this process in the minister's hands, we need immediate action. My constituents expect an announcement pertaining to a Vaughan hospital, and they expect it imminently.

In an EKOS poll conducted by the Liberal government, 97% of Vaughan residents indicated that building a hospital is exceptionally important for their continued well-being. In fact, according to my predecessor, 56% of Vaughan residents seeking in-patient acute care services travel to Toronto. Clearly, this is an issue of great significance to them and to me, and I intend to continue alongside my community, which has united in working to ensure that they are afforded the health care that they not only need, but deserve. They are Ontarians and they've earned it.

1610

Like many areas across the greater Golden Horseshoe, my riding and its neighbouring communities are expected to experience significant increases in population over the next 25 years. According to government estimates, the population of York region is set to grow to 1.5 million people by 2031, from 760,000 in 2001. During that same time period, the government predicts, as indicated in the 2006 Places to Grow plan, that the population of the greater Golden Horseshoe as a whole will increase by over three million people. In other words, Ontario's population is growing by leaps and bounds—a result of immigration. The individualism and determination of these new Canadians to succeed in their new lives here with us demonstrates how consistent their values are with our own. Their values are certainly representative of those of our PC Party and caucus. We believe that hard work should be rewarded, that good-quality jobs should not be beyond reach, and that quality of life is paramount. Individual risk and hard work are implicit in the experience of every new Canadian. Our job is to ensure there is a strong opportunity infrastructure to reward that risk and hard work.

I am sure this House will agree that quality of life does not include sitting in gridlock. Mr. Speaker, as you know, we are already experiencing tremendous gridlock on the streets and highways of the GTA. The fact is that there is really no good time to drive along any of this region's highways. Gridlock means lost money in our just-in-time economy. It also means lost productivity due to people arriving late for work—and this is unacceptable at any time, much less when our economy can ill afford pro-

ductivity losses. The 401 and the QEW are vital links between the GTA and the United States. The health of our provincial economy depends upon the efficient functioning of these corridors. Due to gridlock, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce estimates that \$5 billion is being lost from our economy every year—\$5 billion. That translates into lost jobs—the feeding of families—and tax revenues that we just don't get. Gridlock also means more air pollution due to idling traffic, and more stress on drivers. Perhaps most important of all, gridlock also means less time with our loved ones.

We need sound transportation planning, and we need it now, to address the problems that will accompany this inevitable growth. We need the province to ensure that the Greater Toronto Transit Authority, or Metrolinx, is given adequate power to guarantee effective coordination among transit providers to facilitate the movement of customers between jurisdictions, just like our counterpart major urban cities around the world. What we currently have in the GTA is a disjointed system of public transit, comprised of 12 fixed-route and specialized transit operators, including GO Transit. Too often, potential customers are turned off using transit because of bottlenecks at interregional transfer points. Public transit needs to be an attractive and affordable alternative to private automobiles, and we aren't there yet—not by a long shot. We continually tout the GTA as a world-class destination; well, we need a transit system befitting of that claim.

People want a quality of life. They do not want to be stuck in traffic or uncomfortably herded into subway cars or buses. They want to get to their jobs at a reasonable time and get home to their families at a reasonable time. I am reminded daily of the burdens that a long commute poses to my constituents. As an example, Elliott Silverstein leaves his Thornhill home at 6:30 every morning, he gets on the 404 and he drives south to Toronto. On a perfect day, he is stuck in gridlock traffic for an hour and a half. That is three to four hours a day away from his family. Again I say shame—shame that the government of this House has done nothing more than hand out platitudes and trumpet a transportation plan that may or may not be realized after the next election. I commit to Elliott and to all of the residents of my riding that I will fight alongside you to ensure that this government takes this issue of gridlock seriously and addresses this problem now, and not in 2011.

People also not only want but deserve to be treated with dignity. We want to feel that we are contributing positively to society. We want to be valued regardless of our age or ability. Across this province and across this country we are, in a word, greying. Unfortunately, all too often society's response to the concerns of the elderly has been to treat them with indifference, on some occasions, even disdain; and, worse still, as an inconvenience.

Every one of us, like it or not, will get old. Every one of us will experience age-related health and lifestyle concerns. I believe it is incumbent upon us in this chamber and for members of society to treat all seniors with the

same care and respect we want for ourselves and for our own loved ones. We are blessed with the privilege of living in a country that provides tremendous freedom and opportunity to its citizens. That privilege, however, came at a dear cost—a cost that was paid by generations that preceded us. We are but harvesters of the bounty they sowed.

Recently I lost my mother, who resided in a nursing home. She, like so many others, needed more than the standard of care provided. Our family was fortunate that we could provide that extra care and the resulting dignity. Not all families can.

This is my Ontario, it's your Ontario, and we can make it better. Becoming old in Ontario should not mean that you surrender your dignity as a human being. Quite the contrary: It should be a source of pride, born of the respect reserved for builders.

Issues such as transportation planning and long-term health care are central to the type of Ontario we want to have. Quality-of-life issues are extremely important to me and are the cornerstone of my decision to run for office. In fact, these issues become more central to my being in this place by the day. I believe that in deliberating the business of this House, we must ask ourselves if a particular policy or bill will actually improve the lives of our fellow Ontarians. That question needs to be answered with a resounding yes, and if that yes is not clear and strong, it means the policy needs to be reconsidered and reworked. It is our obligation to ensure what we do in this House is for the benefit of all Ontarians, regardless of party affiliation.

I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to working together with you and with my fellow members for the citizens of the great riding of Thornhill and of this wonderful province. It is both an honour and a duty I'll address with passion and conviction. To quote Helen Keller, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Let me close by assuring the remarkable and incredibly diverse residents of Thornhill that I will be your voice in caucus and in this Legislature. I will represent your concerns and I will never forget that the good people of Thornhill sent me here and have legitimate expectations of me. I will not betray that trust.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's certainly my pleasure to make a few remarks on the debate today, which is, I guess, technically an interim supply motion, which gives the government its opportunity to continue to pay its bills. Of course, like anyone else around here, I would expect that the government would be paying its bills. It's not paying its bills in the way that we would like to see it pay its bills; the bills that they are paying are ones that we don't necessarily think are the biggest priority. That's how I'm going to focus my remarks this afternoon: in regard to the priority that the government has chosen to delineate versus some of the areas that I as a New Democrat, and my colleagues as New Democrats, think that they should have been putting more of their emphasis.

Mr. Speaker, you'll have to bear with me because I do have a bit of a cold today. For some reason I'm a little scratchy in the throat. If I start to lose my voice, I'll be turning things over to my friend Rosario Marchese from the riding of Trinity-Spadina.

I want to start off by saying that it was extremely disappointing to hear the leadoff speech from my colleague Michael Prue from Beaches-East York, who was on the finance committee during the consultation process on the budget. Of course, after that consultation process, after dozens and dozens of people and organizations had the opportunity to meet with the committee and talk about what they thought the priorities of the province of Ontario should be, highlighting for the government initiatives that could be undertaken to make life better for more people in the province of Ontario—it was a very diligent effort. Many, many people take hours and hours and hours of time to diligently prepare their briefs and to really do some heavy-duty analysis on the kinds of changes that can be implemented by government to make things better for the people of Ontario. And what happens? They go through that process, they have hours upon hours of public hearings across the province, and at the end of the day—you know, it would be sad if all that effort by all these community-based people ended up with some kind of short shrift by the government, where perhaps 25% or 30% of the recommendations were actually implemented or where they could pick and choose at least a few of the recommendations that came forward. We would be disappointed by that. I think that would be disappointing not only for those people who are watching that consultation process occur, but for those very people who were involved in it. But not a single recommendation from those people who were consulted by the government was implemented—not a single thing that anybody had to say, after hours and hours of input and discussion.

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I guess the governing Liberals figure that they've just got to get elected and then they have a free ride for four years. They have no obligation to listen to or hear or take input from the people of Ontario. They have no desire to have an ongoing dialogue with the people of Ontario to create the province that we all feel good about and feel proud of. They don't feel they have any obligation whatsoever to take that consultation and turn it into a living reality in terms of what people would like to see as incremental change in the province of Ontario. Instead, in their utter arrogance, they make no attempts whatsoever to even pretend that they're going to be implementing any of the recommendations.

In fact, what happens at the end of the day is that not only do they not take any single recommendation, not a one, but at the committee in terms of the report back to the Legislature—after the committee has done its work, it reports back to the Legislature and the report had a couple of recommendations from the committee. Of course, contextually, everyone must recognize—I know you know this very well, Mr. Speaker—that because it's

a majority government, the committee also has the majority of Liberal members on it. So at the end of the day, the Liberal members on this committee get to decide what recommendations go forward. None of the recommendations—from the people who came and consulted with the government and with the other members of committee over time—got approved.

But some of the opposition parties thought, "We can bring forward some of those recommendations. If the government hasn't really included them in their vision, then maybe we will amplify some of those issues and we will put recommendations for the committee to consider to bring back in terms of the budget." It's interesting, because there were—I can't even remember how many, but there were several recommendations brought forward by New Democrats and several recommendations brought forward by Tories. Of course, the Liberal majority voted down almost every single one of those recommendations, and the committee ended up only bringing four recommendations—and anyone on this committee can correct me if I have my figures wrong—that simply patted the government on its own back about having gone through the consultation, having put together a document that was pretty much ignoring everything they had been told or been consulted about.

It seems to me that it's a sad day in the province of Ontario when you raise people's expectations, when you invite them in for a dialogue and say, "Talk to us about what you think. Let us know what you think is a good thing for us to be doing. Let us know where you think we can make some improvements. Let us know how you, from your perspective as an Ontarian in this sector or that sector, would like to see things move forward, would like to see improvements in terms of the way we do things in Ontario. Whether you're from children's services, industry, social services, municipalities or wherever it is you're from, come in and talk to us." When at the end of the day it's all talk and no action—I don't think there was a rider on any of those invitations that said, in fine print, "Oh, by the way, we're not going to do anything you say anyway. We don't really want to implement any of your suggestions. We just want to play this game that we're pretending that we're consulting with you, that we're pretending that we give a darn about what you even have to say." I have to say: That is very, very poor in terms of a process, and it's very cynical. It's a very politically cynical move, that you actually raise people's expectations and raise their hopes and pretend that you're engaging them in a real dialogue, only to turn around and slam the door in their face and pretty much say, "Well, that was nice; it was fun. Glad you could attend. Here's your hat. What's your hurry? Off you go. We're really not going to do anything to bring any kind of change based on any of the comments you've made."

You've just spent hours and hours, and probably days and weeks, getting reports approved by boards of directors, if you're from the not-for-profit sector, after taking time away from whatever you're doing, in whatever sector you happen to be coming from, whether it's the

private sector or the not-for-profit sector; taking hours and hours away from your main mission, your main goal, your main work so that you can get your voice in there on behalf of the people that you work for or work with or provide services to. And you're going to have this big, huge impact because you're putting all these hours in; you're having to pull back from all of your other important work to get engaged in this process. And, lo and behold, the process yields nothing but a "thank you very much; not interested now" kind of response from the government.

We, as the NDP, actually had some ideas that we thought it was time for the government to turn its eye to. I'm going to raise some of them today because in the context of an interim supply motion, I think it's important to talk about where government should be putting some of its resources.

Coming from a city like Hamilton, it wouldn't surprise you that one of the big issues facing my community and facing many communities in this province is the loss of manufacturing jobs. I'm talking about 200,000 manufacturing jobs down the drain in the province of Ontario. I think it's really one of the most significant issues facing this province, and it has been facing this province for a couple of years. It's been facing this province, but there has been little to no attention whatsoever to that issue here in Ontario. It's absolutely poor that that has not in any way been resolved by this government, that this government refuses to implement some very tangible, very specific, very proven strategies to stem the bleeding of manufacturing jobs from communities like Hamilton, like Windsor, like many, many other industrial-type cities in Ontario.

Of course, we've heard as well and we've watched as well as forestry sector jobs have also left this province up in the north, so we see the devastation of communities that are manufacturing-based communities and we see the devastation of resource-based communities that's also been happening simultaneously in this province. We have seen some 18% of manufacturing jobs leave this province—18% of manufacturing jobs. That's \$6.6 billion of wages out of Ontario's economy, \$6.6 billion that's no longer circling in Ontario's economy.

It's interesting, because that has a significant effect on those communities. Imagine; any one of the communities that are losing these jobs in great numbers is losing that economic power that's going on; they're losing that trickle-down, if you want to call it that. They're losing that spending that then helps other sectors of the economy to thrive and do well. Coming from a city, again, like the one that I come from, that's always struggling, or has been recently—maybe "recently" is a bit generous; it has been for some time now—suffering in terms of its economic initiatives, particularly in the commercial area in our downtown, removing high-paid jobs in the community is simply just another challenge that our community cannot sustain for much longer.

When we look at the number of jobs overall in Ontario, we're looking at a figure of about 18%, as I

mentioned already. But in Hamilton—when you think of manufacturing as being the major employer for a city like Hamilton, that sector being the major employer—it's some 30%. Some 30% of the decently paid jobs in my city have been lost to a government's inaction. They've been lost because the government refuses to undertake specific initiatives to be able to stem these job losses.

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Those initiatives exist. In fact, my leader, Howard Hampton, and New Democrats have been putting those initiatives on the table for some time. We have been in the vacuum of inaction that the McGuinty Liberals seem to be content with. We have been bringing forward suggestions, recommendations. We have been showing the way. We have been guiding the government to look at other provinces that have undertaken some of these very initiatives and have been successful in them. And all we get back from the government are cynical snickers, finger-pointing and blaming of other levels of government, particularly the federal government, and then, "Woe is us. It's all the global economy."

That's not what they say in other provinces. In fact, in other provinces the provincial governments believe that they do have a role in job retention, in job creation and in saving important sectors like manufacturing and forestry—unfortunately, not so here in Ontario.

I already mentioned the 18% of jobs in terms of manufacturing. We've also had tens of thousands of jobs lost in the forestry sector. We've seen significant decreases in people's ability to earn once those jobs are gone. We know that the jobs that are replacing the jobs being lost in the manufacturing sector are not at the same wage level. They are not being replaced at the same benefit level—not at all.

I have actually had the opportunity to visit some of our unemployment adjustment centres in Hamilton that are there to help in the adjustment of workers once their plant is closed. I have to tell you, when you look at the job boards in those centres, there are no \$25-an-hour jobs; there are no \$18-an-hour jobs. There are maybe one or two \$15-an-hour jobs, and there are a heck of a lot of \$12-an-hour jobs, but people are being forced to take pay cuts because there simply are not the kinds of jobs available—of course, those \$12-, \$14- and even \$18-an-hour jobs don't come with the same kinds of benefits, don't come with the same kinds of pensions, don't come with the same kinds of dental and health care and all those other kinds of things that actually enable a person to have a decent quality of life and take care of their family. Those jobs don't come with that kind of security. It's shameful, shameful, shameful that our government is allowing the decimation of so many good, paying jobs in this province and is not prepared to do anything about it.

What can we do? We can do what other provinces have done. We can undertake initiatives like a manufacturing investment tax credit. This is a tax credit targeted specifically to the manufacturing sector.

My friend from Timmins—James Bay has already put on the table a private member's bill requiring a 50%

investment in Ontario contracts so that, for example, when any big Ontario project like buses or subway cars or anything like that is being undertaken, 50% of the value of those contracts needs to be kept here in Ontario. That is a tangible solution that has been undertaken in other jurisdictions and can be undertaken here. It should be undertaken here. Why should we be paying for these big-ticket items and not making sure that some of our people actually benefit from them? It seems like something so simple, and yet the government has not agreed to, or is not supporting, the idea of the 50% contract value staying in Ontario. A Buy Ontario program is simply not in the cards, unfortunately.

Similarly, there has been a lack of investment in other adjustment funds that come from other levels of government, particularly the federal level of government, to make sure those workers are retrained. I know the government is saying, "We've got a great training program, it's over the next several years, and it's got all these bells and whistles," but the bottom line is that for many years now there has been little to no reinvestment in training. The reality is, all of that time has gone by and all of those workers have suffered and very few of them have been able to get new jobs.

The list goes on and on in terms of the things we would have liked to see. I've spent a heck of a lot of my time talking about the job issues because they are so important to my community.

One of the other issues we felt very strongly about, and still do, is the whole area of dignity for our seniors in their most vulnerable years, as they age and go into long-term care. New Democrats have been calling for some time for a minimum of 3.5 hours of hands-on care for every person living in long-term care. The government's response, unfortunately, was a pittance; the government's response in their budget was six minutes. So right now it's about two and a half hours. We're saying we need 60 more minutes; we're saying we need three and a half hours per day. The government says that six minutes is fine. We think it should be 10 times the amount that the government's putting forward. We don't think it's acceptable that people are sitting for hours and hours in incontinence products with that lack of dignity, with that physically horrible situation. We don't think that's all right. In fact, we think it's all wrong and that it needs to be addressed by this government. Unfortunately, they didn't see their way to helping out our most vulnerable seniors in the province of Ontario. Instead, we had a minister who made light of the subject and who joked about it. We don't think that's funny; we don't think that's funny at all. In fact, it's an embarrassment to this government that that could have happened—to see someone make light of a situation like that.

In Hamilton, I actually had an opportunity to attend a long-term-care centre myself during the campaign. There was a gentleman there who took me aside, and he was practically in tears talking about the indignity of his life. This was a guy who had worked all his life in the steel mills, who had worked very, very hard. He provided for

his family, and now he's in long-term care. He's fairly immobile. All his faculties are with him, but he's not in a good physical state. Here is this guy brought to tears over the lack of care in a long-term-care centre. This minister and this government not only think it's something that's worthy of a joke, but also something that's only worthy of six minutes more of care? There's something wrong with the government with that kind of a priority, I would submit.

The other issue we are really concerned about, of course, is the issue that continues to be on the front pages of the paper today, and that's the issue of making sure that we have people who are being paid a decent wage in this province. We believe that there needs to be an immediate increase to the minimum wage in Ontario. We don't think waiting for another three years for it to get to \$10 an hour or a little bit more is good enough. In fact, on this very day, if you're making \$10.25 an hour—which is what the government wants us to get to at some point in the future—you're at the poverty line or you're just below the poverty line. What kind of a solution is it to poverty? This government talks about setting up a task force and targets for poverty reduction. Well, heck, poverty reduction is about income, but you're not prepared to set a minimum wage that keeps people out of poverty? Somebody could be working a full-time job at minimum wage and still be living in poverty? A lot of those workers are women, and they're working in retail. In some cases they're working more than one job, sometimes two or three jobs, just to try to make ends meet. That is unacceptable in a province of such wealth as the province of Ontario.

There are many other things that we would have liked to see but we still don't see. One is a commitment to more affordable housing, because everyone knows that if this government wants to continue to have people living in poverty by not ending the national child benefit clawback or by keeping the minimum wage very, very low, then at the very least your biggest expense should be something that you are able to afford. The biggest expense, of course, for everyone—generally speaking, anyway—is your shelter cost. Does this government have a wholesale plan to build more affordable housing so that people can actually afford their housing costs, so that if their housing cost is tied to their income, then you will know that they're paying a certain amount, maybe 30%, maybe 35% of their income on housing, but that gives them the ability to buy food and to do other kinds of things, to give their kids a decent pair of shoes or a winter coat? No. There's no affordable housing. There is not a single dime for new, affordable housing in this budget.

That brings me to another issue where there is not a single new dime—and it will be the last one I speak to, because I know I have to leave some time for my friend from Trinity-Spadina—and that's the issue of child care. This budget does not have a single line in it for new child care investment. In 2003, the McGuinty Liberals were going to be investing in child care; they were going to

invest \$300 million of provincial money into child care. They haven't invested a dime of provincial money into child care. Yes, they're flowing through some federal dollars. Is it going far enough? No. A couple of months ago, we saw huge exposés in the Toronto papers about the quality of child care that families are forced to rely on in this province because there are not enough licensed, quality child care spaces out there. So parents are forced to rely on all kinds of types of cobbled-together care. They're going to unlicensed facilities and they're going to casual relationships to try to get the child care that they need. That's not a way to deal with making sure that our children get the best start that they can in life.

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They like to talk a good talk. They have good rhetoric around early child learning; lots of good rhetoric. But when it comes to actually putting the dollars in place, when it comes to putting a system in place for child care—you know what? In Quebec, they've had a system of child care for quite some time. In Quebec, \$7 a day is what parents pay for child care. In Quebec, up to about \$2,000 is the maximum annually that a family pays for child care for one child. You know what those numbers are in Ontario? In Ontario, \$16,000 to \$18,000 per child is what families are paying for child care. That's what families are paying for child care in Ontario if they're lucky enough to actually get a child care space. Waiting lists are sometimes two and three years long to get their child into child care. In some places, you're lucky if you can even get your child into child care before they're already in school.

Don't talk a good talk about child care and early learning and how this is going to prepare our children to succeed in school. Don't bring up the statistics about health care, jobs, economy and all of these flowery words and then not invest in early learning and care. How can you make sense of anything like that?

There are many, many more issues that I can raise, but I really think it's time that I take my seat and leave the rest of the time to my friend Rosario Marchese, who's going to be bringing up some other issues. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Mr. Reza Moridi: It's a great privilege as a newly elected member of the Legislature to stand here, where so many distinguished Ontarians have stood before. I feel honoured and humbled to be able to serve the residents of Richmond Hill, who have shown their confidence in me and in our vision of Ontario. With that trust comes a duty to serve not only Richmond Hill but all Ontarians. I am here to reassure you that I will fulfill that duty every day as a member of this Parliament.

Richmond Hill is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Canada, where many industries and businesses are helping to build and expand its economy.

Richmond Hill is a multicultural and diverse community. Its ethnic population is growing and evolving. Over 50% of its population was born outside of Canada.

Richmond Hill is a beautiful town that has hundreds of acres of green space. Oak Ridges moraine and the green-belt form part of the town of Richmond Hill.

Richmond Hill has been home to the David Dunlap Observatory, which was established in 1935 on a 200-acre parkland located at the heart of the town. The observatory is home to the largest telescope on Canadian soil.

I was born and raised in the ancient city of Urmieh in Iran. I was the first in my family to finish high school and then graduate with a bachelor, two master's degrees and a doctorate. I went on to conduct research in nuclear physics, electronics and materials science, and later won awards and was elected to the fellowship of prestigious scientific and engineering institutions. I published numerous scientific and technical papers and reports and spoke at over 40 international conferences held around the world.

I taught at colleges and universities. As an administrator, I worked in the capacity of chief scientist, vice-president, department chair, dean of the school and chief librarian. As a business executive, I travelled internationally and conducted numerous business negotiations with senior executives of the world's leading manufacturers in the electrical field.

In my life, I have also experienced a revolution and a war. My family and I survived the Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, though hundreds of thousands did not. My family and I fled Iran in 1987. On midnight of February 9, 1990, when we landed at Pearson airport, we found peace, security and dignity in this wonderful land. Since then, my family celebrates both July 1 and February 9 as our Canada Days. This is why I ran for office: I wanted to give back to the country that welcomed me as well as over 150,000 Iranians over the past 30 years.

Albert Einstein once said, "Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile." So as the first Iranian Canadian ever elected to an office in Canada—

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: And in America.

Mr. Reza Moridi: —and in America, it is with pride that I stand here before my fellow members of this Legislature today, the product of struggle, immigration, hard work, endeavours, vision and imagination. Once again, Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

My wife, Pari, and my son, Mike, are sitting in the members' gallery. They, with my daughter, Michelle, and her husband, Frank, and their daughters, Sabrina and Sara, my mother and late father, have all been sources of inspiration and support in my life.

As a parent and grandparent, I believe that the preservation of the environment we share and the universal health care system we rely upon are the keys to a better future. As a business executive, I know how important it is to ensure that the tools are there for our entrepreneurs to succeed, not only in Ontario, but internationally. I understand the importance of an efficient infrastructure, sound government policies and knowledgeable and

skilled civil servants and workforce in enhancing the international competitiveness of Ontario.

I believe that the vitality of our society and its economy is dependent on the continuous flow of electric power in our power systems. It is imperative to assure investors that Ontario will have a reliable and dependable electricity supply and infrastructure at all times. I am pleased to see that ensuring a sustainable supply of electricity to our homes, businesses and industries is one of the top priorities of the McGuinty government. I am also pleased to see that our government has a comprehensive energy plan where electricity generation from burning coal will be phased out and coal will be replaced by sources such as hydro, wind and nuclear.

Jonathan Swift once said, "Vision is the art of seeing things invisible." As an academic and educator, I believe that children shape the future of our community. Our children's future is created by the quality of education that they receive. I understand the importance of early childhood, elementary, secondary and tertiary education in enhancing the international competitiveness of Ontario. William Yeats once said, "Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire."

As a scientist and engineer, I believe that the economic prosperity of a society is a direct product of its scientific innovations. The growth and increase of Ontario's scientific innovations will empower us to become one of the most economically vibrant regions of the world. Ontario, through its diversity of talents, in all areas of science and technology, has tremendous potential for scientific innovations. I believe in creating an environment in Ontario that will put it in the forefront of scientific innovations in the world.

My riding of Richmond Hill mirrors the diverse and dynamic population of our beautiful province of Ontario. We are on a road of sustainable economic development. We are facing different kinds of challenges, especially under the environment of a globalized economy, a stronger Canadian dollar, higher oil prices and the slowing US economy.

Ontarians are hard-working people. We strive to remain competitive with our strengths in mind, our strengths being our diverse, skilful and knowledgeable workforce and our capability to adapt and to innovate. Our large pool of immigrants from different countries is a great asset to our competitiveness in the global market. The McGuinty government has been active in creating significant investments towards enhancing our competitiveness, adjusting to global restructuring, creating high-value, next-generation jobs, and ensuring long-term success for different sectors of our industry.

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I believe the McGuinty government's positive thinking and forward-looking strategy will continue to move Ontario forward under the global economy. I am certain that with the great leadership of our Premier, the Honourable Dalton McGuinty, we can each do our part to make sure that the province of Ontario continues forward to even greater levels of prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to share with you and this Legislature my dream for Richmond Hill and York region. As you know, the population of York region is close to one million and is rapidly growing. The population of York region is more than the population of each of the Maritime provinces, and almost equal to the population of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Yet York region does not have a university. York region students are forced to travel a long way to Toronto or other cities to attend university. York region deserves to have a university of its own, and Richmond Hill is the ideal town to host this university.

I am very proud and privileged to represent such a vibrant and diversified riding as Richmond Hill.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I find it interesting that we are speaking today on the interim Supply Act. As you know, the motion will essentially give the government the right to send out the money that we have promised to their partners—hospitals, municipalities, colleges and universities. How appropriate, then, today that our Progressive Conservative caucus raised a number of concerns about how the McGuinty government distributes funds to their partners during question period.

I use the word "partners" carefully, because it is the McGuinty government who likes to say that they are partners with their funding agencies. For most of us, a partner make us think of fairness and equity—respect, even. From listening to some of our partners, I'm left with the impression that it is, in fact, not a partnership at all, but rather a relationship where funding agencies are kowtowed into submission under the threat of funding being pulled, and concerns ignored.

I raise, as one example, the now infamous surplus announcement one week before the announcement of the budget. I'm sure you all remember it: If the budget had a surplus of more than \$800 million, then municipalities would be able to receive a portion of the surplus to use on infrastructure projects throughout Ontario. The problem is, seven days later, the McGuinty budget gets announced and—surprise, surprise—the anticipated surplus will be \$600 million for the next year and zero for the following two years. So there will be no money for municipalities' infrastructure. And after getting municipal mayors and councillors cheering the initial promise, they are once again holding an empty bag filled with empty Liberal promises. Some partnership.

And don't take my word for it. Let me quote from Mark Ostrowski, vice-president of the Dufferin Federation of Agriculture. Mark said, "Farmers are facing challenging times, lots of problems."

The list is long. Take livestock—cattle and hogs. Ethanol uptake has increased the value of crops, which has made feed more expensive. At the same time, the Canadian dollar's strength is devastating industries that rely overwhelmingly on exports to the United States. Then there's BSE—mad-cow disease. The US closes its border to our beef for a while, as did Pacific Rim importers, and the effects are still being felt. Crops might not be in as tenuous a position were it not for last year's

drought. There is also the fact that urban sprawl is reaching north, driving up land costs for any young farmers wanting to start out. Then there is the pressure of imported goods from countries with lower labour costs and less stringent regulations on things like pesticides.

Ostrowski says that agriculture has relied on government income stability programs in the past, but those have been changing under this government and aren't working well. He says that taxes are up, labour prices are climbing, and the bureaucratic burden has only increased. I couldn't say it better myself.

And what is this government doing for their agricultural partners? Let me tell you: not much. During the ROMA conference in January, I had an opportunity to sit in on a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture and the warden of Dufferin county and a number of rural mayors from Dufferin. They were meeting with the Minister of Agriculture to brief her on an innovative new proposal they are putting together for a parcel of land in North Dufferin. It will tap into some of the emerging technologies related to our energy demands. The proposed Eco-Energy Park would see the county develop a 200-acre parcel that they already own to develop an eco-energy park that would include composting, thermal treatment energy from waste, anaerobic digestion, an eco-energy development facility, greenhouses and other agricultural uses. Very exciting and forward thinking on behalf of the county, I'd say.

I don't think there was any doubt that we have a demand for energy that isn't going to be eliminated any time soon in Ontario. We have heard empty promises coming from the other side of the House to eliminate coal-fired plants, but the shutdown date has changed three times now.

This brings us back to the meeting at ROMA. The Minister of Agriculture was being briefed by the good people of Dufferin county when she interrupted the briefing and asked what they were there for. Well, as you can imagine, that threw the mayor of Shelburne off. We know you don't get a meeting with these ministers until the staff know exactly what the meeting is about. Regardless, when Mayor Crewson explained that they were planning to submit a proposal for funding under the rural economic development fund, because the proposal would involve additional jobs for rural Ontario, the response back was, and I'm quoting here, "Well, that's a bit rich, don't you think?"

I don't know what constitutes jobs in the minds of the McGuinty ministers, but I can tell you that jobs in rural Ontario are shrinking because of the policies of this government, and any incentive where our municipal partners can tap into emerging technologies that bring jobs and stability to rural Ontario is a good thing. What was most disturbing about the meeting was the complete dismissal that any municipal government could possibly come forward with a creative idea to help their community and build energy for Ontario. It was impossible for them to imagine—shameful, really. I know the municipal leaders in Dufferin and Caledon well enough to realize that one

meeting with an uninterested Minister of Agriculture will not discourage them from moving forward with their plans. I look forward to encouraging them, and ultimately inviting the Minister of Agriculture to the official opening so she can see for herself a bit of Dufferin ingenuity. As a side note to this story, the technology has begun to be used in Ottawa, but perhaps the city of Ottawa is considered a partner in McGuinty's Ontario and Dufferin-Caledon is not.

The other area on which we have heard many announcements is of course health care. The doctor shortage has hit us all, in every part of the Ontario, and nowhere more acutely than in rural and northern Ontario. According to the latest information from the Ontario Medical Association, Ontario is short in excess of 2,000 doctors, leaving approximately one million adults and 130,000 children in Ontario without access to a family doctor. In Shelburne, Dr. Vanderburgh announced his retirement this month, after serving our community so well for many years.

Once again our municipal partners have had to step in and try to solve the problem by building turnkey clinics and spending municipal and fundraised dollars to recruit and retain family doctors. Does the McGuinty government acknowledge this? No. Instead, they announce family health networks where nurse practitioners are supposed to play an active role as one of a number of health care professionals. Great idea, to be sure. It is why our previous Progressive Conservative government introduced the use of nurse practitioners. But now the Minister of Health is announcing them so fast that there is a shortage of nurse practitioners. In the Dufferin family health network, there is an opportunity for four full-time positions. Not one of those positions is filled—not one. Why? Certainly not because Dufferin or Caledon isn't a great place to live, work and raise a family. Why? Because you can make all the announcements you want, but if you don't have the professionals to fill the roles, they are going to remain empty, and once again your announcements mean nothing.

If I can leave your partners with a fair warning, under Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, announcements don't always translate into action.

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Again, I'd like to quote from the new president of the Greater Dufferin Area Chamber of Commerce on last week's budget. The president, Ron Munro, stated in the Friday edition of the Orangeville Banner that he sees nothing to help the area's many small businesses.

"'Incentives and so on ... don't find their way down to our level,' he says, speaking as a small business owner....

"'It hasn't been a pretty picture in Dufferin,' he says of the area's economic picture, particularly in the manufacturing sector. 'Any reduction of tax or no increase ... is a good thing.'"

There are so many other quotes, from the local mayors to the hospital to others from the chamber, but the consistent theme is that more information and more detail is needed. If you truly want to partner with your transfer

agencies and, more importantly, the people of Ontario, what they're looking for is planning and vision, neither of which we are getting from this second-term government.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'm happy to speak to this particular issue today because there are so many issues to talk about. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I'm going to try. It's 5 o'clock and we have 17 short minutes, but we'll try to pack it in, because this government is so, so pleased with itself as it talks about all the great things they do.

I want to start talking about post-secondary education for a few minutes. In my view, we have a big problem in this particular area, where the government and the corporate sector together are saying that we need to have an educated workforce. The government says, "Great God, look at all the students we've got in the university sector. They're coming by the thousands. Every year there are more and more. We can barely accommodate them. And even though we don't put in the money, we're so proud of the fact that so many more are coming to the university sector. We believe this is going to make us competitive in the world, because an educated workforce is not only good to the individual but to society." And I agree. But let's look at the investments of the Liberal government.

We are number 10 in terms of per capita funding in Canada when it comes to provincial funding. We were number 10 under you guys, under the former Conservative regime, and we're still number 10 today. How could that be, you say, when the government claims they're giving \$6 billion, which they announced a couple of years ago, over a four-year period? If they're giving \$6 billion away, surely all of our educational problems at the post-secondary level would be gone, yet we are still number 10 in per capita funding. Eastern provinces give more to their students than Ontario, which still remains one of the wealthiest provinces in Canada. How can it be, you say?

Mr. Mike Colle: It's our money.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Because it's our money.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Right. The pecunia. The Liberals say, "The reason why all the provinces can now do it is because they're taking our money." It's a legitimate argument, and it's a good argument. Is it enough for the Liberals to say that, because of that, therefore we're not getting enough? No, obviously not. Because the Liberals then counter, "But no, we're giving six big billion dollars to the post-secondary education level."

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: But you argue that that's a law.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Member for Eglinton–Lawrence, you're not even in your seat. I think you know better.

The member from Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Speaker, it's okay. You have to be flexible in the chair. Don't be so rigid. This is a family issue here. We're all in the same boat, so to speak, as it were, from time to time.

They say, "Even though we're giving all of our money so the eastern provinces can give more to their students, we're still giving so much away." If that is true, how come we're still number 10, numero dieci, numéro 10, at the bottom of that funding barrel? It must mean that maybe the money isn't as real as it appears. Maybe the money is simply announced as big, big bucks. Because when somebody says "\$6 billion," you say, "Holy cow; \$6 billion." That allows the Tories to salivate, thinking, "My God, we can attack them because they're spending so much money." But the real fact is, it's just an amount that's thrown out: "We're giving billions away." So all the journalists say, "Oh, they're giving \$6 billion away. It's pretty good." But nobody says, "Why is it that we're at the bottom of the barrel in terms of funding?"

We are in last place, and we have the largest class sizes in the country in our university system—the largest. But the Liberals never talk about that. No, they talk about their \$6-billion investment. We also have the largest professor-student ratio in the country: 26 to 1 versus an average of 20 across the country. Liberals never talk about that. Does it affect quality? I believe it does. If you've got 19 or 20 students in another university where they're taught by one professor, presumably the professor has more time to be with that student. The more students you've got, the less time the professor has. Moreover—

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: A higher professor-to-student ratio is good because it's more professors to students.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My good colleague the doctor says that you've got more professors per students. No, mon ami; that is not the case. What is the case—I'm not sure I know. When it comes around to your turn, you can just clarify, of course.

We have fewer professors than are required, and the reason why we have fewer professors in the system is because we are not hiring to the extent that we should. We are short of professors and we're not hiring. When we are short of professors, what we do in order to fill in the void is we hire part-time professors, as we do now and we've been doing for quite some time. Half of our college instructors are part-time. How can that be? Half of our professors at the college level are part-time, yet some of them carry the load of a full-time professor. But they're not available to students, because they have to teach in different colleges, and therefore it affects the quality of that education for that student. It means that that professor isn't as well paid as he or she should be because they are part-time. The reason why colleges and universities hire part-time professors is because they want to save money, because if they are full-time professors they need to be paid benefits, you understand.

We've got a poor university system that has been whacked by successive governments, including this Liberal regime, which claims that it's doing better.

We now have a student body that's paying more for tuition than ever in the history of this province. Why is that? Why—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Don't you think it's normal, Rosie?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Do I think it's normal? No, it's not normal.

In Quebec, the highest tuition fee that is paid is \$2,200. There are no deregulated programs in the province of—

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: "Because we're paying them." Yeah, right. Yeah, we're carrying everyone now.

The sensible excuse for Liberals is, "We're carrying the rest of Canada." They provide these programs. Remember, Quebec has been providing child care—and I will get to that in a little bit—for quite some time at \$7 an hour. I'll get to that in a minute.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Seven dollars a day.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Seven dollars a day. What did I say?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: "Hour."

Mr. Rosario Marchese: An hour. Seven dollars a day.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: That's their minimum wage.
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Mr. Rosario Marchese: I'll get to that in a minute.

In Quebec, there are no deregulated programs. That means if there is a student who wants to become a lawyer, the highest fee is \$2,200. Do you know, mes amis les libéraux, what we have to pay here in Toronto to get into law school? How much?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It's \$3,300.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: No. It's \$17,000, \$18,000, \$19,000 and rising. How do you feel about that?

Of course, once these lawyers get out, they have huge debts. So they're all getting into corporate law, I suspect, because that's where the big bucks are. No one's going to go into some nice little social organization and make \$70,000, because when it's time to pay their debt, which is close to \$100,000, they won't be able to do it. They won't be able to get married and have children, they can't do it, so they get into corporate law.

Do you know how much doctors are paid? To become a doctor, how much is it a year, mon ami le docteur, monsieur le médecin? How much?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: About the same: 200 grand.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: About the same, right? Can you believe that: \$17,000, give or take? This is just tuition, because you've got to buy your own books. By the way, the Liberals just said, "We've got a treat for the students now. They're going to get a \$150 allowance for books." Yeah, man, this is good stuff. This is big. This was supposed to be a big announcement by the Liberal government. Monsieur le docteur, ils coûtent combien, leurs livres, plus ou moins?

M. Shafiq Qadri: Presque 150 \$.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Exactly. More or less, give or take a couple of cents, about \$150. So for someone

going to law school or medicine or business school, the big allowance is \$150. And the Liberals presented it as if this is really, really great.

It's funny, but it's so hard to keep it up, right? I mean, how much can I laugh at this, day in and day out? I can't: \$150.

I've got seven minutes left and I've just talked about post-secondary education. We could still go on, on this issue alone. Every year we're falling further and further behind.

On the housing front: Monsieur le ministre of Housing today, as indeed the Premier the other day, keeps saying we're giving \$100 million for housing, and makes it appear like this is going to build housing. It's not.

Toronto Community Housing is getting, of that \$100 million, \$35 million. It will not build one unit of housing. It's all about repairing the housing stock. Understand, mes amis les libéraux, that some of that public housing is 40, 50 years old. It needs to be repaired. The cities are broke. Now they're charging user fees, and they have to tax this and that in order to make ends meet. They are broke.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Why are they broke?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Why are they broke? Because, mon amie la ministre, the money isn't flowing from the provincial government as much as it used to.

The fact of the matter is that \$35 million is going to go for housing, and all it does is a repair job. Many of the people living in Toronto Community Housing are saying, "We need \$300 million as a minimum to do essential repair"—\$300 million, and they got \$35 million. But to hear the Minister of Housing and the Premier, they're giving millions for housing, meaning that they are going to actually construct housing. You can't do it. That money they're giving is not about building housing; it's about repairing the existing housing stock, which is totally inadequate.

On the housing front, I know the Liberals will get up and say, "Oh, we're doing so much. I know it's hard but we're giving," and then the Liberals say, "But we could do more and we will. We will."

Mind you, there could be another recession coming. Nobody wants it, of course. There may be a slowdown, but if there is, "We will do our best," because that is what Liberals do. "We'll do our best. We've given a few bucks, and of course we could do more. If there's a slowdown, we'll deal with it, and then when we recover we'll open the doors again"—that kind of stuff. It's just exhausting. Do you hear my voice? It's exhausting; I get tired.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: You know the feeling, eh, Rosie?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I do know that feeling.

We were talking about child care the other day because this is a very important issue for many of our friends. The member from Hamilton Centre introduced Bill 26, which would restrict new child care licences to not-for-profit operators while renewing licences for existing for-profit operators, meaning that the existing for-

profit operators would be grandfathered, but we would not allow the big monopolies, the one that's coming from Australia, to come in and make money on children. We will not allow that, so says Bill 26, introduced by my friend and colleague from Hamilton Centre. We think this is a good idea.

Further, the Liberals in 2003 said, "We're going to spend \$300 million on child care." When you hear that number, you say, "That's a lot." For the Tories, they're going to say, "My God, they're wasting so much money." But for some others, they will say, "It's \$300 million; that's a lot." People like me and people like my friend from Hamilton Centre wait for that announcement to unfold. That \$300 million is a fair chunk of change, and so we say, "When is it coming?" and it never comes.

At the end of the four-year Liberal term, the Liberals, just before an election, announce that they're going to put in 25 million bucks, which is what they put in. It has been reannounced in this budget, and that's all they've done on child care—25 million bucks. But to hear the Liberals, they're spending millions and millions on child care. Those numbers mean nothing; that money is not real. It's just an announcement: \$300 million.

So we expose that problem but, other than doing our best, what can we do? People still elect the Liberals; that must mean they like them. It must mean they like their child care plan that doesn't do anything; it must mean that they like nothing. It must mean that they like just a little bit, but maybe not too much. It must mean that they probably believe the Liberals when they say, "We'll do more. We've got a couple more years—just wait."

If Quebec can offer seven-dollar-a-day child care to the non-profit sector to provide child care, which provides care for two thirds of all children in Quebec, why can't we do it? Quebec has been able to do it all these years—a province that's not that far away. We can get there easily by train, by bus, even by plane, if we had to. What do we have? Only 12% of our children are in licensed, non-profit child care. That's it. How could we be proud of that? Oh, I see: We're giving all of our money to Quebec. I get it; I understand.

Tuition fees: Quebec is able to keep its tuition fees down at \$2,000. I see: We're giving all of our money to Quebec. So they do all of these progressive things and all we can say is, "Yeah, but we're giving them all of our money." It's just not good enough.

My time has run out. I just don't get it; it's as if I just began a couple of minutes ago. There's so much to say. I wanted to talk about the Buy Ontario policy that we believe is a powerful tool to keep jobs in Ontario. We were saying to the Liberals, "Buy Ontario as it relates to transit is a good thing. Keep jobs in Ontario." We can't convince Liberals, though. I don't know what we have to do to convince Liberals.

I urge people watching: Keep tuned. There's so much to learn. We will reveal as much as we can as we go.

Mr. Dave Levac: The segue is beautiful because I wanted to remind people about the very impassioned speeches from both the members from the third party

who talked about child care can with so much passion. I don't question their desire to make sure that kids get child care; I understand that. It's not just the child; it's about the parents, the families and the pressures of day-to-day living. I want to start by acknowledging their genuine concern for the issue.

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But let's set the record straight. We offered and did create 22,000 new, affordable child care spaces across Ontario. What was the NDP voting record on that particular initiative? They voted no.

Interjections.

Mr. Dave Levac: They voted no. We built 4,276 new spaces in Toronto. What did they vote? No. On 1,232 new spaces in Hamilton, how did they vote? No. Over 3,000 new spaces in northern Ontario—how did they vote? No. On 389 new spaces in London, how did they vote? No. On 780 new spaces in Ottawa, how did they vote? No. On 722 spaces in Windsor, how did they vote? No. A massive investment of affordable child care for Ontario, housing, and for our kids—and let's go back to their record when they were actually on this side making decisions about child care. They cut 6,000 new subsidies when they were in power. I rest my case.

What are we talking about? We're talking about the NDP. They're supposed to say what they're supposed to say, what it always is for the 10 people sitting over there. It's the government on this side—and we can interchange it; PC, Liberal, it doesn't matter. They say we're not doing enough over here or we're not doing anything. That's what they're supposed to say; they've done a good job.

What about those guys over there? What are the Tories over there supposed to say? "We need to cut—cut taxes, cut taxes, cut civil servants, cut civil servants." But very importantly, what do they say next? "But give my riding \$300 million; but give my riding \$30 million; but give my riding this."

What do we now learn by what we've just heard from the speeches over there? We've learned a really simple lesson, a very simple lesson. If we've got both those parties on the left and the right saying that we're not doing a good job, we must be doing pretty good. Why? Because we've offered a balance. We've seen the record of eight years of cut, cut, cut; slash and burn; scorched earth process and policy; belittle all the civil service. And what did we get? We ended up having to recover from it and doing all the things we need to do in order to bring balance to this place. That's exactly what's happening.

But what are we really talking about? What are we really, really talking about? We're talking about the Supply Act. Every single government of all political stripes on this side has to offer a bill called the Supply Act in order for us to do the business of the government. That's what we're debating right now. If we want to move that, we urge the members to support the bill. You know what? I'm guessing that all the members on that side are going to vote for the bill. Why? Because they know it's a government process that we have to go through in order to take that budget money and do the

business of the government. So what do they see this as? It's an opportunity to whack—what's the gopher whack game?

Interjection: Whack-a-mole.

Mr. Dave Levac: All right.

Let me tell you some things that have happened in my riding that I'm happy that the budget covered. Roads and bridges—a \$400-million share. In Brant we got \$2.95 million to help with roads and bridges downloaded by the previous government. The previous government downloaded all those bridges and roads. In rural Ontario, by gosh, what happened? We found out that there are a lot of bridges in rural Ontario. There are a lot of roads in northern Ontario. There are a lot of roads in southern Ontario. But it's rural Ontario, and now we've put in \$3.95 million. In Brantford we got \$1.24 million. That's a pretty good budget.

Affordable housing rehabilitation: Contrary to what my friend said—at least he gave us credit for saying that we had to fix the infrastructure that was left behind. You've got to fix those buildings. It's useless to have extra stock and continue to build more when you let the old stuff fall apart. So what did we get? In Brantford we got \$884,000 to help reconstruct those old houses.

One of the things that doesn't get covered very much, and I'm going to say it nice and loud and proud: We're going to cover prostate inspections. I think that's a great thing. The PSA tests are going to get covered. Those things cost up to 80 bucks a pop now. That's expensive. We're going to cover that for men over 40. That's great. I love it.

The MIII, the municipal infrastructure investment initiative: Brant, \$3.48 million for Highway 54, the downloaded road that the Tories did; Brantford, \$3.5 million for Henry Street upgrade improvements; assistance for seniors to stay in their own homes, \$250, up to \$500 to get a tax credit; child dental benefit; Ontario child benefit, \$250 up to \$600, soon to be \$1,000. It's endless.

There's good stuff happening here. It's balanced, it's measured, and it's done without trying to sit back and say that we've done nothing. It's done without saying, "On the one hand we want you to cut taxes and get rid of the civil service, but in my riding we want you to give us lots of money." That's not going to happen either. What we're trying to do is find a balanced way to present the budget of Ontario, and I think we've done that.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I'm glad to have a little bit of time to talk about the budget and how this government likes to get its good news out. I did finally get a copy of the list after six days of asking this government for it. Earlier in the day, I did make a mistake, and I'll admit it. I went after Mr. Caplan. It is Mr. Bradley who should have been giving us this; it came out of his office. But you would think they would know in their own cabinet what they're doing, but obviously the infrastructure minister doesn't know that the MTO is giving out infrastructure money; you could tell by his answer. I guess they don't get

together too much in caucus and tell them what they're doing.

I'm pleased to be able to brag now, six days later, after the member for Huron—Bruce bragged of \$18 million. Boy, lo and behold, we got over \$18 million in Grey and Bruce too. So isn't that pretty good—a good-news story that you guys messed up. But why would the Liberals mess up a good story like that? Because they didn't want us to know about it. They couldn't get something right. You would think that the Liberals would know by now that when they have a good story they should get it out there. But no, they had to keep it secret right till the very last day, because this is the last day they could put this money into the other accounts. This is the end of the budget and they have to get their slush money out there.

I'd like to mention that Arran-Elderslie, which is a municipality in my riding, got \$786,235. In your riding, Minister, Blue Mountain got \$771,000, plus another \$2 million for a connecting link. They are good-news stories that they don't want out in the media. Bruce county got over \$3 million. Chatsworth, a little municipality, got \$1,620,000; Georgian Bluffs, \$1,154,000. Grey county got over \$4 million, Grey Highlands almost \$2 million; Hanover, \$112,000, and then they also got an MIII grant, which is all the minister of infrastructure seemed to know about. Meaford got over \$1 million; Northern Bruce Peninsula, over \$1 million. Owen Sound—they won't be as happy as everybody else—only got \$332,000, but it is on roads and they may get some connecting link money. South Bruce Peninsula got almost \$1 million; Southgate, \$1.5 million; and West Grey, almost \$2 million.

I'm pleased that they finally got the list out that we've been trying to get from this government since last Wednesday, when the announcement was made that they were going to put all this slush fund money out there. It's disappointing. You try to work with the government but when it comes to some good news they don't want anybody else to share with it. They can go over there and brag about the great budget they have, but they want to keep it to themselves. They don't want anybody else to know about it.

Our privileges have been taken away from us in this House, and I'm glad that the Speaker who was sitting this afternoon raised that point and told them and actually gave them a bit of a scolding about it, which they should have. Our municipalities can use this money for roads and bridges, and when this kind of news goes out, everybody in this House should have a chance. The NDP, the Conservatives and the Liberals all should have been able to have a chance to bring the good news. Unfortunately, the Liberals in this case took a good-news story and made it negative in not allowing the rest of us to know about it until six days later. That is sad, and I'm ashamed of that government over there. They should do better, and hopefully they've learned their lesson, although they've been here for four years; you'd think they would have known that.

As I said, it should have been the Minister of Transportation we talked to today. Maybe he would have told us at the time, but I doubt it.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: With reference to the supply bill regarding the budget, I come to praise the budget, not to hurry it. I would say, first of all, that our extraordinary commitment to health care in this province is something that not only the McGuinty government and the McGuinty vision and the Liberal brand should be proud of, but something I think that can be a leadership to North American jurisdictions such as Massachusetts and New Jersey, who are slowly but surely trying to implement some aspects of the universal health care coverage system. You'll know that our budget, with regard to health care alone for 2008-09, is something in the order of about \$11 billion more than when we initially took office. Of course, that kind of resourcing, that kind of equipping of the health care system, is diffuse with regard to things like cataract surgeries and angiography, which is a way of visualizing your heart arteries, knee replacements, angioplasty or heart-type surgeries, cancer surgeries and so on.

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But first of all, I just wanted to recognize a very important aspect of this which perhaps might get buried and not receive its due attention. That is the approximately \$150 million to be spent over the next three years with reference to the treatment, detection and facilitated treatment of breast, cervical and colorectal cancers, and, in particular, something that I think has been very well-addressed in this budget, the fact that we will now be paying for annual screening for men for prostate cancer, the PSA test. This, as you'll know, is the most common cancer affecting older men in Canada today. It actually has a mortality rate only second to lung cancer. I think it's extremely important that individuals who are hearing this particular message—of course, in consultation with their family doctor—avail themselves on an annual basis of this particular test. You'll know, for example, that the honourable Allan Rock, at the time one of Canada's federal ministers, was diagnosed, essentially because of this simple PSA annual blood test, with prostate cancer at the age of 54.

I think that's why we, as a government, as citizens and sometimes as patients, should support runs—for example, Harry's Spring Run-Off, which is to take place this Saturday in support of prostate cancer and prostate cancer research. I'll quote from some of the individuals who are involved with that particular run, because I think they've said it well: "Sadly, many people don't realize that prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men and the second most deadly, after lung cancer. With this run, we hope to change that. Our goal is not only to get the message out about the disease and the need for early testing in men, but to raise as much money as possible for research, so we can find a cure and save lives."

This government has heard that kind of messaging. This government has responded on a broad framework, a broad matrix of resourcing and equipping the health care

industry. I'm particularly proud, as you might appreciate, not only in my capacity as the MPP for the great riding of Etobicoke North but also as a medical doctor, to be part of this McGuinty vision.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon on the supply debate. I too, like Mr. Murdoch, wanted to put on the record, because I'm just today getting the clarification of the announcements—I'm pleased to see these announcements, but on the other hand, I also know that the taxpayers of the province of Ontario are paying another 41% more towards this government's spending. They've increased spending 41% in five years. When you think that we took from Confederation to 2003 to get to \$67 billion, and now we're at \$95 billion, it's unbelievable. Where are we going with the way they're spending? It's out of control.

So it is nice when we are enabled to get some of the money back that our taxpayers are paying in. We have to remember that this money is not the money of the Liberal Party of Ontario. The money they're giving out is the money that's going back to the residents of the province of Ontario. They've already paid for it—the businesses, etc.

But I wanted to say that under the municipal infrastructure investment initiative, the town of Midland is getting \$3.57 million for a library addition; the city of Orillia, \$900,000 for roads; the town of Penetanguishene, \$1.5 million for Church Street; the township of Ramara, \$600,000; and the township of Tiny, \$196,000 for some water treatment work in LaFontaine. I'll lump the county of Simcoe in that as well. The county of Simcoe is getting, for county road 44 in Ramara township, which is an extension beyond the casino—and of course the casino provides a lot of money back to the province of Ontario, so it is nice to see that that road will be fixed up; I forget how many million dollars a year the province is taking out of the casino—\$1,250,000.

Under the transportation announcements today, which were actually announced on the 25th, last week, the town of Midland will receive \$329,000; the city of Orillia, \$517,000; the township of Oro-Medonte, \$1,622,775—that's a huge township with hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of roads; the town of Penetanguishene, \$214,000; the township of Ramara, \$674,000; the township of Severn—that's the township I live in—\$1,222,000; the township of Tay, almost \$494,000; the township of Tiny, \$1,619,000; and the county of Simcoe—which I'll also take credit for, Mr. Speaker, since you're in the chair—\$2,730,000 towards the county roads.

The county has already increased their spending. Believe me, they know how to increase spending in the county of Simcoe.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: What do you mean by that?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Their budget is now at \$460 million this year.

Interjections.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I believe that the county's running some of their departments properly. There are other areas I believe they're not doing quite so well.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Can we quote you on that?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Yes, you most certainly can. I think a lot of people would look at the way their taxes have gone up in the county and would agree with me. Anyhow, we're working on all those things.

What I really wanted to say today, not strictly on the budget, but I had an announcement here in the House last week. I had a group of people down from the west end of my riding, the Penetanguishene and township of Tiny area. They're excellent people. What we're doing is we're trying to get a really good jump start in this part of the province on the 400th anniversary of the coming of Samuel de Champlain to the province of Ontario. That event will take place in the year 2015. Already, this particular year, in the city of Quebec and the province of Quebec, they're having their 400th anniversary. They're spending literally tens of millions of dollars on that anniversary.

There are a number of things I wanted to put on the record that I want the province to follow through on, and I'm trying to do this in a non-partisan manner. I'm trying to do it with the federal government and the province of Quebec as well. We have a long way to go. It is seven years away, but I want this to happen, and I really hope all members of this House would be supportive of provincial investments in the 400th anniversary of Champlain coming to Ontario.

I want the House to:

—recognize that the year 2015 will mark the 400th anniversary of the coming of the French explorer, founder and father of Canada, Samuel de Champlain, to Ontario;

—recognize that the site of Champlain's arrival on August 1, 1615, at the Huron village of Toanche in what is now the township of Tiny near the town of Penetanguishene, was marked by a cross and that cross still exists to this day, although it's in a poor state of affairs;

—recognize that Samuel de Champlain made numerous recorded visits to other aboriginal communities throughout the region, including what is now the city of Orillia, and it is marked by an historic monument;

—recognize that the coming of Champlain to what is now Ontario represents the forging of a very rich and historic cultural heritage that belongs to all Ontarians;

—recognize that the government of Quebec, in conjunction with the government of Canada, following earlier and similar celebrations in the Maritime provinces, is commemorating Champlain's arrival in that province this year and has designated substantial sums of money towards a year-long observance of the event. The investment is resulting in a very positive impact on the tourism industry and cultural interest in Quebec;

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—recognize that the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Culture—and I'm glad to see that the minister is here

today; I've already chatted with her about this—the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and the minister of franco-phone affairs, in conjunction with the government of Canada, should undertake immediate plans to celebrate the fast-approaching 400th anniversary on August 1, 2015, of the coming of Champlain to Ontario, on a very large, historically and culturally significant scale;

—recognize that the government of Ontario should undertake to contact the government of Quebec to begin a close collaboration with respect to the observance of this event;

—recognize that the government of Ontario and the ministries should consult widely with various relevant historical and cultural associations to strive to keep the heritage of Samuel de Champlain alive;

—recognize that the government of Ontario should consider the site of Champlain's arrival as a prominent landmark. I have to also recognize that the first mass west of Quebec was held in the community of Toanche on August 12, 1615.

I also think we should try to recognize a Samuel de Champlain month federally and a Champlain day provincially as we approach that day.

I know I'm speaking on the supply bill, but I really wanted to put this on the record today because I think this is an important date that we really have to support financially. I think we've got some strong opportunities here for economic and cultural growth in our province as a result of this. This is going back to the very beginning of exploration in Ontario, and there are some real opportunities here.

I wanted to thank, in particular, my assistant in my office, Gaggan Gill. She has put a tremendous amount of time into the coordination of this. Gaggan has worked with my office and Alex Roman from Frank Klees's office and talked with all the folks in my riding, sending resolutions back and forth. I really do appreciate the fact that she's put a lot of work into it.

I just want to sum up by saying that this is an opportunity I don't think we can miss out on. I hope that, as we proceed over the next couple of years, there will be some strategic planning and some really good money set aside to celebrate this very special day as we move forward in the history of our great province.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to rise today, and I will be supporting the supply vote that's coming very shortly.

Let's set the record straight. This budget represents three back-to-back balanced budgets, which has not been done since 1908. That is 100 years. We talk about transparency, we talk about investments in our communities, but we've done it by balancing the budget.

Did we go to Magna? No. Did we have a fulsome discussion on the budget? Yes, we did. Not only did the finance committee go out and consult with the good people of Ontario; the Minister of Finance also did. He had numerous meetings throughout the province; he wanted to hear from everyone. It was such an opportunity, and they appreciated it so much. From all of those

recommendations, we see a budget that not only is balanced, but it reflects what the people of Ontario want today.

One of the things I want to talk about—there's so much to say, so little time. One of the things I want to be heard on the record is that the comments made from that side of the House about agriculture—my goodness, have they not read any of their papers? They need to hear what the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture—I encourage you to read your farming magazines. There are numerous ones. Better Farming: I encourage you to pull out a copy and give it a read.

Geri Kamenz: "The McGuinty government has proven its willingness to address agricultural crises through contingency funding in recent years and we believe the government will continue to be there for Ontario's farmers."

There's more. I encourage you. Come on, read those agriculture magazines. Get those farm magazines out.

One of the things I would be remiss in not telling the House and reporting on: How did this budget affect Huron–Bruce? Let's talk about that for just one minute. One of the things that is important to my riding—and you won't remember this, but this is connecting links. I still have three roads left that you didn't download when you were in government. Yes, download—didn't even ask; just did it. Never even consulted. That's how they treated their partners.

Mr. Jeff Leal: That was the who-got-done-in committee.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Yes, the "Who does what?" It was terrible for rural communities: never consulted, never asked; just downloaded.

But what did this represent for our connecting links? Some \$1.6 million to the municipality of Saugeen Shores; \$200,000 to the town of Goderich. That's our connecting link. But now let's talk about the \$400 million that was committed for roads and bridges. What did that dollar figure represent to the riding of Huron–Bruce, the most rural riding in Ontario? Some \$18.5 million. I tell you, the constituents of Huron–Bruce were very pleased when they heard the news. Contrary to what the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound says, since we represent similar ridings and share a county, I can tell you that in my meeting with the Bruce county councillors, they were very pleased with the dollar figure. Unfortunately, he wanted to get out there and share the good news. Who wouldn't want to share the good news on a wonderful budget like this?

But there's more: MIII—we love our little acronyms. What does this represent? Sometimes I think we lose sight of what infrastructure means. We bandy that word around, but do you know what infrastructure means to my riding? Infrastructure means new water mains in the town of Walkerton. That's what that means to my riding of Huron–Bruce. When I think of the commitment that was made through MIII, \$10.5 million, that means \$29 million—sorry, \$31 million. I forgot my connecting links. Thirty-one million dollars came into the riding of

Huron–Bruce. So I say to you that we didn't get here overnight, did we, Rosario? Did we get here overnight? No, we didn't—10 long years with the previous government. They weren't in the pothole business. That's what our federal counterparts will tell us today. Well, who is? I tell you, we've got to look after our roads. I've had phone calls from my farmers. Do you know what my farmers tell me? My farmers tell me that if that bridge isn't fixed, they can't get their product to the mill. What happens then? We understand. We get it. We delivered.

I just want to congratulate the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, because one of the things I heard repeatedly in my riding was about PSA testing. Two private members' bills and this member's hard work: He delivered. When I was out campaigning, people would say, "Why do you test the women but you don't test the men? Why should that be?" Do you know what? They're right, we're right, we're all right. Good budget, solid budget. We look forward to many more years in government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for Huron–Bruce for her contribution to the debate. The time for debate has expired.

Mr. Gravelle has moved second reading of Bill 45, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 63, this bill is ordered for third reading.

SUPPLY ACT, 2008

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2008

Mr. Gravelle, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 45, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008 /
Projet de loi 45, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2008.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried. Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Orders of the day.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House is now adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, April 1, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1750.

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