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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 7 April 2008

Lundi 7 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 7 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 7 avril 2008

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TARTAN DAY

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who remembered to don something plaid yesterday in celebration of Tartan Day, in honour of the Scottish people and their accomplishments and contributions to sports, science, technology and the economy in North America.

It also brings me great honour to show off my kilt on Tartan Day. This tartan I'm wearing was handmade by Marlene Reid of Scottish Imports in Hamilton. Her dad, James MacNeil, in conjunction with the Scottish studies department at the University of Guelph, designed the official Ontario tartan.

I'd also like to take this moment to thank Lillian Ross, a former MPP from Hamilton, who first brought the idea of Ontario having its own official tartan to this House. It was 17 years ago when I introduced my resolution to name April 6 as Tartan Day in Ontario. As you know, April 6, 1320, was the day when the Declaration of Arbroath was signed and Scotland was declared an independent and sovereign state.

Scotland has had an immense impact on Ontario. In fact, you would be hard pressed to find even one aspect of our culture, laws or government that was not positively impacted by the Scots. This is our heritage.

The tartan is justifiably a representative symbol for all Ontarians, even in our multicultural society. And for all those members who are not of Scottish descent but wish they were, they can rest assured that they now have a real clan to belong to.

BRAMPTON SOCCER CENTRE

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: Last June, the city of Brampton celebrated one of the world's favourite sports with the grand opening of the Brampton Soccer Centre. The event included a community barbecue, a giant soccer cake, tours and an open house featuring the new 156,000-square-foot facility.

The Brampton Soccer Centre, located at the corner of Dixie Road and Sandalwood Parkway, is Brampton's newest recreational facility and includes four indoor soccer fields, four outdoor fields, two overlapping cricket pitches, as well as a spray pad and community meeting

rooms. It's anticipated that 64,000 soccer players will use the facility during an eight-month indoor season. This facility is one of four major capital recreation projects approved by the city of Brampton in 2005, part of its \$120-million Making Great Things Happen initiative.

This summer, the centre will offer summer sports camps, youth development programs, pre-school programs, dance programs and indoor soccer. This fall, the soccer centre offered seniors' programming, pre-school, dance, youth program and indoor soccer.

The Brampton Soccer Centre won a 2008 design excellence award from the Ontario Association of Architects, along with other 14 other projects across Ontario. All that remains is the People's Choice Award. The project with the most votes will win when voting ends on April 11. So I humbly ask my colleagues in the House and people across Ontario to visit the Ontario Association of Architects website and vote for the Brampton Soccer Centre. It's a facility that will promote a healthy lifestyle and embraces the multicultural interests of my community.

SERENA RYDER

Ms. Laurie Scott: It gives me great pleasure to tell you today that the new face and the future of Canadian music comes from none other than the wonderful town of Millbrook, in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. This weekend in Calgary, Ontario singer-songwriter Serena Ryder was recognized as the Juno Awards recipient in the category of best new artist.

Ms. Ryder grew up in the heart of farming country near Millbrook, and she gives credit to that small-town community for much of her inspiration. She began performing there at the age of seven.

Even though she is now only in her mid-20s, she has firmly planted her foot in both the Canadian and international music scene. She has worked with names of other famous Canadians such as Frank Davies and the Guess Who's Randy Bachman. Serena Ryder is recognized for her musical creativity, her incredible and haunting voice, along with the warmth and wisdom of her lyrics. USA Today has stated that Serena Ryder is "an important fixture on the music scene."

There's a saying I've heard a few times: "If this is the first time you've heard Serena Ryder, take note, because it most certainly won't be the last." I certainly agree: This musician, Serena Ryder, has engrained in her the spirit of rural Ontario and a passion for her craft.

As the member of provincial Parliament for the riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, I am pleased to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the pride of Millbrook, Serena Ryder, for winning the 2008 Juno Award for best new artist.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'd like to speak a little bit about what a budget can do. For the last two weeks, I've been hearing from people in Mississauga about the impact of not merely the budget our government has just presented but the budgets it had presented before.

A budget isn't just an exercise in economic theory; it's a living document that describes what a difference it can make in the lives of 13 million people.

In Mississauga, some 700,000 people are already better off. Capital expansion is under way at Trillium and will soon be at Credit Valley Hospital, from some of the initiatives begun by the introduction of the health premium in 2004. We have three new linear accelerators in the regional cancer centre at Credit Valley, all delivered ahead of schedule. Our wait times are down and we have more funded procedures.

The 2005 budget made a difference in our post-secondary system in Mississauga. The University of Toronto at Mississauga has a new medical school and Credit Valley has a new family medicine teaching unit.

Infrastructure made a difference in 2006, with some \$65 million to the Mississauga Transitway and \$95 million to the Brampton AcceleRide. In both cases, the cheque is in the bank.

This year's budget will get both Mississauga and Brampton working in our communities to cut gridlock with Move Ontario and with \$9.5 million for repairs to roads and bridges. It sure beats two cents off on a cup of coffee at Tim Hortons.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Today I introduce a resolution calling on the government to recognize PET scans as a vital diagnostic tool for care and to finally introduce an implementation plan with time lines to achieve the same level of access to PET scanning here as we already have in Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec and Manitoba.

PET scans are still considered an experimental technology in Ontario, despite more than five years of trials and their widespread use throughout the world, and the fact that leading experts in the field acknowledge that this technology will let you know if you are a candidate for surgery, radiation, or if you need chemotherapy.

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In the United States, data have demonstrated that 38% of patients had their treatment changed to a more appropriate therapy as a result of their PET scan findings. Today, since Ontario limits access to PETs, Ontario patients must travel outside of this province, usually to the

United States, and often pay for PETs themselves, this despite the fact that we have the second-largest PET base in Canada.

Indeed, the single PET centre in Manitoba helps more patients each year than the entire PET registry program in Ontario. In Quebec during 2006, for every 30 patients investigated with the PET scan, only one patient was scanned in Ontario. It is unbelievable. I urge the government to make access available for all Ontarians.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Peter Kormos: Back in 2005, when Health Canada approved the drug Avastin, the Canadian colorectal cancer society said, "Canadian colorectal patients will finally have the opportunity to benefit from a treatment that has become part of the standard of care for metastatic colorectal cancer in the United States." Provinces like British Columbia, Newfoundland, Quebec and Saskatchewan have, since the approval by Health Canada, approved payment for that drug for victims of colorectal cancer in those provinces. Ontario hasn't.

What that means is that people like Kevin Bigford—his mom, Mary Bigford, lives down in Port Colborne, a community I'm proud to represent; she's a retired nurse. Her son, an elementary schoolteacher about 35 years old, suffering from colorectal cancer, can't access Avastin unless he pays the costly price out of pocket.

This Liberal government is sustaining, maintaining and building a two-tier privatized health care system. What else do you call it, when the rich can get treated and the poor do without?

I say it's time that this government recognized the authority of Health Canada. When Health Canada, with its stringent standards, approves a drug as part of a treatment program, it's incumbent upon this government, if it has any belief in public health care at all, to fund that drug. It's time for Avastin to be funded.

This government talks a big game about being checked for colorectal cancer, but if you're detected with colorectal cancer, you can't treat it unless you're wealthy in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

EVENTS IN HAMILTON

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell you and the other members of this House about the great things that are happening in Hamilton. On Friday, April 4, the Premier visited my riding of Hamilton Mountain to announce that this summer the Ontario government will help young people in Hamilton enjoy basketball clinics, art classes and leadership training at area schools. I want to thank the principal of Hill Park Secondary School, Mr Rick Hart, and vice-principal Mr. Colin Hazell for their warm reception.

On April 3, I attended the 10th annual Tourism Hamilton Awards, held at Carmen's Banquet Centre, located on Hamilton Mountain. It was a fantastic event, and we were pleased to have the Minister of Tourism,

Mr. Peter Fonseca, attend the event. There were over 540 people in attendance. I'd like to congratulate David Adames, executive director of Tourism Hamilton, and his hard-working team for an outstanding event. The winners were chosen from among over 120 nominees by a nine-member judging panel. There were 20 award categories, covering a range of tourism contributors from businesses to marketing campaigns to individuals. Award winners received a handmade original glass trophy. These were designed by Shirley Elford, an internationally celebrated glass-blower who is a Hamiltonian.

I'd like to congratulate all the winners for their success. These individuals and organizations are vital to the success of Hamilton, and I applaud them for their efforts.

TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: As one of the many members who live in the GTA, I was quite pleased that public transit was one of the key priorities in this year's budget. Many of my constituents rely on public transit get them to work in a timely and reliable manner. And of course, by having more people use transit, we take more cars off the road, and this leads to less congestion and pollution.

In this budget, the government announced its commitment to provide funding for all of Metrolinx's recommended quick-win projects. That's right: every single one of them. This would be a total investment of over \$744 million into a number of important public transit projects.

Not only does this investment represent this government's commitment to the use of public transit, but it also signifies our commitment to creating and maintaining safe and reliable infrastructure for all of Ontario. Infrastructure investments create jobs, improve access to markets and support business investment. Safe and modern infrastructure is a major consideration when businesses are deciding where they are going to set up shop.

Investing in public transit is one of the many ways this government is embracing and promoting the idea of sustainable communities, a clean environment and smart growth in Ontario.

ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Dave Levac: I rise in the House today to address some recent comments made by the travelling leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. It seems the leader of that party has taken his cue from his predecessors and has decided to wage war against Ontario's public service, 6,700 strong, who work to ensure that Ontarians are well educated, safe and healthy.

For some reason, he's been especially sharp and harsh when it comes to policy analysis, saying that they sit around breathing each other's exhaust and reading each other's papers. Aside from the fact that this is completely insulting to those fine, intellectually hard-working people in this province, he fails to understand the importance of

their job. They ensure that this and all governments remain accountable to Ontarians by analyzing policies to ensure that they are indeed accountable.

Does the party across the floor not remember what happened when they did cut services? Does "water inspectors" ring a bell over there? They fired meat inspectors who could have prevented the tainted meat scandals. The nurses were cut and compared to hula hoop workers, putting Ontarians at risk.

It seems that the leader of the opposition chooses to forget what the terrible consequences were when his party made reckless cuts to the public sector. This government will not be repeating their mistakes; indeed, we've made a commitment to improve it. Will the government continue to invest to provide us with responsible government? You bet we will.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR PUPILS WITH DIABETES, 2008

CHARTRE DES DROITS DES ÉLÈVES DIABÉTIQUES DE 2008

Mr. Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 52, An Act to establish a bill of rights for pupils with diabetes / Projet de loi 52, Loi établissant une charte des droits pour les élèves diabétiques.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Dave Levac: This bill, if passed, will provide a bill of rights for children with diabetes and require school officials to assist with the care of the diabetes at school. This bill of rights secures various diabetes treatments, such as blood sugar checks, hypoglycemia treatments, and insulin injections; eating snacks and lunches at the appropriate times; free and unrestricted access to water and washrooms; and full participation in physical education classes, gym classes and other extracurricular activities, including field trips. Unfortunately, this bill is required as some of our kids with diabetes do not have that clear access.

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719226 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2008

Ms. Jaczek moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr8, An Act to revive 719226 Ontario Limited.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

CONSUMER PROTECTION
AMENDMENT ACT (ADVERTISING
FOOD OR DRINK), 2008
LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION
DU CONSOMMATEUR
(PUBLICITÉ SUR LES ALIMENTS
OU BOISSONS)

Mr. Marchese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 53, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 with respect to the advertising of food or drink / Projet de loi 53, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur à l'égard de la publicité visant les aliments ou boissons.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Parents are very worried about the health of their children, and particularly worried about obesity.

We know that marketers spend billions of dollars targeting kids, and so we say, just as the board of health says, that what kids watch on television as it relates to the ads, as it relates to the products, is very rich in calories and very poor in nutrients. What we want to do is give parents another tool to protect their children. Our bill is intended to prohibit commercial advertising for food or drink that is directed at persons under 13 years of age. We believe parents will support it and we hope it will become law.

PAYDAY LOANS ACT, 2008
LOI DE 2008 SUR LES PRÊTS
SUR SALAIRE

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 54, An Act respecting payday loans / Projet de loi 54, Loi traitant des prêts sur salaire.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order, please.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to acknowledge Bob Whitelaw in the members' gallery, a former president of the payday lending association.

Despite the government's do-nothing bill, 1,000% interest is still being charged to our poorest and most

vulnerable Ontarians. Carol Goar said it best: "1,000% Interest 1,000% Wrong."

What my bill does is cap the interest rate at 35%. We are now the last of all the provinces enacting. Let us act. Pass my bill.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Michael Bryant: I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, April 7, 2008, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1355 to 1400.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Members please take their seats.

Mr. Bryant has moved government notice of motion number 36. All those in favour will please stand one at a time to be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Pupatello, Sandra
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Ramal, Khalil
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Ramsay, David
Best, Margaret	Jaczek, Helena	Ruprecht, Tony
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Smith, Monique
Brown, Michael A.	Kular, Kuldip	Smitherman, George
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sousa, Charles
Cansfield, Donna H.	Mangat, Amrit	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Milloy, John	
Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza	

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed will rise one at a time to be recorded by the Clerk.

Nays

Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Runciman, Robert W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Martiniuk, Gerry	Savoline, Joyce
Elliott, Christine	Miller, Norm	Scott, Laurie
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Shurman, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Sterling, Norman W.
Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill	Tabuns, Peter
Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 46; the nays are 24.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the motion carried.

Agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Michael Bryant: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

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

That Mrs. Mangat and Mrs. Jeffrey exchange places in order of precedence such that Mrs. Mangat assumes ballot item 52 and Mrs. Jeffrey assumes ballot item 22; and that Mr. Wilson and Mr. Chudleigh exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Wilson assumes ballot item 55 and Mr. Chudleigh assumes ballot item 11.

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

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Hon. John Wilkinson: I'm proud to rise in the House today to speak about the government's commitment to economic prosperity through innovation. Specifically, I'd like to speak about Ontario's commitment to generating the next generation of skilled jobs in the digital media sector.

The reality is the world is changing, and change is happening at an ever-faster pace. Our government sees the challenges arising from this change but, more importantly, we see the tremendous opportunities it presents for Ontario, not only because of the riches of our land and what we build in our factories but also because of what we can imagine, invent and create.

Innovation and ingenuity are not new to Ontario. They are embedded in this province's shared conscience. They're actually in our DNA. We have built our economy and become the economic engine of this great country through the innovation and ingenuity of our people, from the discovery of insulin and stem cells to creating the landing gear that put Neil Armstrong on the moon, and of course the launch of the BlackBerry.

The reality is that in the 21st century, in our global economy it is inevitable that someone somewhere will always eventually be able to copy a product or technology and produce it at a lower cost. But it is much more difficult to compete against talent and imagination.

Rather than trying to foresee the future, we are giving Ontarians the tools they need to invent it. We're helping young people develop their skills and ignite their imaginations. It's part of our five-point economic plan to ensure that this province achieves its tremendous potential. We're cutting business taxes to ensure innovative businesses can compete and, moreover, we propose to be the first jurisdiction in North America to provide a 10-year

corporate tax holiday for new companies commercializing Canadian intellectual property.

As well, we're making the largest investment ever in Ontario's infrastructure. We're also investing in the skills of people. Ontario is now the home to the greatest concentration of people per capita with a post-secondary education in the G7. We're partnering with businesses in key sectors where Ontario has enormous potential to compete and win in the global marketplace. We're committed to an aggressive innovation agenda, bringing all these pieces together to improve our environment for innovation, so that our province and our people are equipped to continually reinvent ourselves to yet a new level of prosperity.

That's why we're taking a bold, focused approach, targeting sectors where we punch above our weight in research, industry and innovation, where we already are, or can become, global leaders.

Ontario's entertainment and digital media sector is one of these areas. Today I want to outline how Ontario is investing in the next generation of digital media artists, designers, developers and entrepreneurs as part of our concerted effort to ensure the continued growth of the industries that will shape our future and create Ontario's next generation of jobs and prosperity for our children and grandchildren.

Ontario is recognized as a North American leader in these new industries, with some 800 firms in the greater Toronto area alone. The global market for the digital media sector alone is projected to reach \$1.48 trillion by 2009. Ontario's entertainment and creative cluster is already growing twice as fast as the rest of the economy. In fact, over the past decade more than 80,000 new jobs in this sector have been created in Ontario.

That's why the 2008 budget, which outlined our government's plan for skills training, infrastructure investments, lower business costs and supporting innovation, also outlined a new \$9-million investment at the Ontario College of Art and Design that will help create new research and training programs in digital media. OCAD will use the funds for its digital futures initiative, a digital media and interactive design lab that will bring together students and private sector partners from a cross-section of industries.

The lab will graduate students who have business and computer science knowledge as well as skills in industrial design and artistic content creation. Working closely with industry leaders like Xerox, IBM, Microsoft, Philips and Astral Media, OCAD is a driving force in training Ontario's brightest workers for tomorrow's jobs in highly specialized sectors like interactive gaming, animation and advertising, to list just a few.

This strategic investment builds on another recently announced budget initiative: \$10 million to help the University of Waterloo create a new Stratford campus and research and innovation centre focused on the convergence of global business and global digital media. There is no other place in the world that has that aspiration. This project will have the support of Canada's largest software

company, Open Text, whose pioneering innovations formed the basis for the Internet's first search engine technology.

The new campus will generate the next generation of digital media researchers, entrepreneurs, products and services by bringing together Stratford's globally renowned strengths in arts and culture and the University of Waterloo's globally recognized strengths in technology. Areas of digital media research and development at the new campus will include mobile, wireless, sound, video, gaming, Web design and animation.

The goal of Ontario's investments in digital media is to ensure that Ontario remains at the cutting edge of what many, including OCAD's president Sara Diamond, call "a blisteringly hot" emerging global market, so when the next Google or iPhone is developed, jobs will be created here in Ontario.

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By focusing and investing in our strengths, we're supporting more Ontarians and creating more Ontario firsts like IMAX, Open Text and Canadarm, innovative Ontario-made products and services that are improving the lives of millions of people around the world while creating a stronger economy and good jobs at home.

Investing in research and innovation is a priority for our government because we believe it is the best way to capitalize on Ontario's greatest competitive advantage: our people and their ingenuity. Coupled with our government's \$1.15-billion Next Generation of Jobs Fund, which has a stated area of focus in digital media, I believe our government is now moving to seize a global opportunity.

In fact, there is an old Chinese proverb that says, "If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people." We recognize that if Ontario is to succeed in the 21st century, we need everyone at their best, working together for the good of all.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses?

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to respond today on behalf of the official opposition to the statement made by the Minister of Research and Innovation. I want to acknowledge that we agree it is vital that we not only be part of research and innovative technologies available, but that we work to ensure that we are ahead of the curve when it comes to this type of forward thinking.

I must say it's interesting to hear the Minister of Research and Innovation making public statements now; it was a Liberal promise back in 2003. The Premier had the portfolio previously; he kind of tucked it under his wing for perusal later. So now we have the minister rolling out a number of announcements suggesting that it's time for Ontario to get on board. With all due respect, Ontario has been on board; to suggest otherwise would be unfair.

We know our innovation sector is rife with talent and creativity, and we certainly have the potential not just to be a leader in Canada but a global leader. In that respect, I think it's time that we provided those people with the type of economic climate that will allow them to flourish and not force them to move to another part of Canada to fulfill their ambitions and their dreams. As opposed to simply suggesting, as the Premier has, that we steel ourselves for the challenging times ahead, this government needs to pull itself out of the head-in-the-sand focus of high taxing and high spending. Ontario needs to be given an opportunity for those outside of the province to look favourably and say, "I think I'd like to invest there"—"there," as in Ontario.

This just isn't happening at this point. The untrustworthiness of the broken promises and the hidden tax increases behind the title of "user fees" is an old story. Investors know better.

The minister mentioned factories in his statement. Investors know that this province has lost over 190,000 manufacturing jobs under your government's watch. The minister also mentioned he feels he is responsible for making Ontario an economic engine. What he didn't say is that major banks have put Ontario ninth out of 10 in economic growth for the entire country.

This is an investment. Is it too late? We hope not, but you, the McGuinty Liberals, have to be leaders in the government to attract research and innovation to the province of Ontario. The jury is still out on that.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Michael Prue: In response to the minister, there is nothing wrong, I would say, with the announcement that is being made today—nothing wrong at all. I would like to commend the minister for what he has had to say. But what is wrong is that it is limited to the digital media sector.

I think everyone in this room, everyone in Ontario, would agree with new media. In fact, it was my honour as the mayor of East York some 15 years ago to establish a new media sector and to start spending money within the borough of East York. We were trying to attract the very same industries that this money is going to be spent on today. We believed 15 years ago that it was the way of the future, and I have never once changed my mind that it is the way of the future and that money should be spent there.

But I have to ask the members opposite, the minister opposite, the government and everyone involved, what about the 200,000 people who have lost their jobs in the past couple of years in Ontario? What about those lost jobs, with manufacturers struggling to compete, struggling to keep their doors open, struggling to keep their employees as a whole combination of factors bears down upon them?

What about the government coming forward with something novel and unique, if you can do this today for one sector, like a manufacturing investment tax credit?

Other provinces that have used that have found much benefit. In the province of Manitoba, there have been virtually no jobs lost in the manufacturing sector over the last couple of years. In only the last couple of weeks, Quebec has put together a similar platform to give a manufacturing investment tax credit. It expands and grows in areas where there are large levels of unemployment, and it seems to me that theirs is working very well as well.

There is a second troubling aspect to what the minister has said today, and that is that he is including in this expenditure monies for the gaming industry. There are many who would question whether or not that is a wise expenditure without on the other side at least seeing some monies made available for those who might become addicted. We know that video gambling is one of the most addictive features of that product. We know that when it is developed and goes online, many people can't keep their eyes off it. I note here that money is being given particularly for video gaming. As the expertise in Ontario grows, as the young people particularly who get in this field are able to sharpen their expertise and take government money to produce the finest video gaming probably in the world, we are going to have many more people addicted.

So if the government is going to spend money in this particular field, then they ought to look very carefully at video gaming and how much money they want to put in that video gaming and how they want to control how the money is spent. I certainly do not advocate getting people addicted to it, and I think the minister and all of his caucus ought to be looking very carefully if you're going to be spending the money in that area.

Just to conclude: We welcome monies in new media. We welcome anything that is going to help create jobs and prosperity in Ontario. But what we want for this group we want for everyone, and this government has an obligation to treat the 200,000 people who have lost jobs in manufacturing with the same compassion and to give the same amounts of money so that we can redevelop the skills and abilities that have made Ontario great for these last numbers of years.

In conclusion, I ask the minister to also look at the whole issue of addiction when money is being spent on video gaming. Although I recognize that it is likely to continue and that if the expertise does not come from this province it may come from elsewhere, it still is troubling that money is being spent in this way when there is so little money being spent to wean people from that addiction.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the members to welcome today in the Speaker's gallery Dr. Malcolm Jack. Dr. Jack is the Clerk of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom Parliament. Welcome to Ontario today, Dr. Jack.

The following pages have made us aware that they have guests in the galleries today. In the west gallery is

Prakash Pandya's father, Kamlesh. We welcome you today, sir. As well, Rheanna Kendrick's father, John Kendrick, is here in the west gallery. In the west members' gallery, page Sarah Palmeter would like to welcome Margo Palmeter, her mother; Timothy Palmeter, her father; and Cameron Palmeter, her brother. Welcome today to the families of the pages.

On behalf of all members, I want to congratulate Christine Miller, the wife of the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. This past Friday, Christine Miller graduated from the Ontario Police College and is now an Ontario Provincial Police officer. Congratulations.

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On behalf of the member for Parkdale–High Park: Mr. Robert Whitelaw, president and CEO of the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus, former member of the Ontario press gallery and the founding president of the Canadian Payday Loan Association. Welcome today, sir.

On behalf of the member for Nipissing, we would like to welcome Linda and Barry McConomy of Mattawa in the east members' gallery. They've been involved in a fundraising project with the Mattawa General Hospital. They've enjoyed a tour at Queen's Park today. As well, joining them earlier today was Jeff Hutcheson, a familiar face on the Canada AM show. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

On behalf of the member for Beaches–East York, we'd like to take this opportunity to welcome students from Notre Dame High School. Welcome to Queen's Park today, students.

On behalf of the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, a grade 10 civics class will be joining us this afternoon from the Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School. They will be in the east visitors' gallery later. We welcome them as well.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On Thursday, April 3, 2008, the member for Nepean–Carleton raised a point of privilege. While the member did file notice with me as required by standing order 21(c), it did not go into sufficient detail about the nature of the point of privilege. Notwithstanding that, I did allow the member to state her point. I should mention now, only by way of reminder, that the written notice should provide more fulsome detail from any member in the future.

The member's point is related to events that occurred during a meeting of the standing committee on government agencies last Wednesday. The member will know that while committees are an arm of the House, they are masters of their own proceedings and equipped to deal with any controversy that may arise within the framework of the standing orders or any special order of the House. It is well established that Speakers will not rule on or become involved with proceedings of a committee of the House. Such matters can only come before the

House by way of a report from the committee itself and not directly to the Speaker by an individual member.

Marleau and Montpetit's House of Commons Procedure and Practice summarizes this on page 128:

"Speakers have consistently ruled that, except in the most extreme situations, they will only hear questions of privilege arising from committee proceedings upon presentation of a report from the committee which directly deals with the matter and not as a question of privilege raised by an individual member."

Examples of numerous decisions of my predecessors on identical grounds can be found in the Journals for March 21, 1990, pages 285 to 286; October 24, page 316; in the Hansard for June 9, 1993, pages 396 to 397; and May 4, 1987, page 485.

If the member has a complaint with respect to the proceedings of the committee, it should be resolved there.

In closing, while every member of any committee or the Chair on behalf of a committee is perfectly entitled to direct its staff, I would like to take this opportunity to remind all members of the Legislative Assembly that members are entitled to ask research staff to provide assistance to them on an individual basis.

I thank the member for Nepean-Carleton for bringing the matter to my attention.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. Once again, it's about the state of the economy: continuing job losses and plant closures, what some see as the Premier's complacency over the situation and what I think could also be interpreted as resignation. He has given up. Premier, is that what's happening here, when you tell people over the weekend to steel themselves against the slowing economy? Do you believe the situation is inevitable; it's something you can't fix? Are you waving a white flag?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm delighted to take the question. It is true, according to all the private sector advice that we've been receiving, that it will be some time before the Canadian dollar drops, it will be some time before the value of the price of oil drops, if at all, and it will be some time before the US economy grows stronger. Perhaps the leader of the official opposition has some access to magic solutions which we on this side of the House do not. But I can tell you that we will continue to work long and hard with and on behalf of Ontarians.

That's why in our most recent budget, for example, we put in place a new \$1.5-billion skills-to-jobs strategy. The member opposite believes that we should be cutting taxes on profitable corporations. We have a different approach. We think we should be working with Ontario families. The member opposite would cut health care, he'd cut education, and he'd cut supports for our vul-

nerable. We have a different approach. It may be that the economy is struggling, it may be that some of our families are struggling, but we will continue to work alongside our families, protect their public services, and invest in new jobs and new skills for them.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: The Premier likes to say that the opposition is talking Ontario down, but the reality is, the Liberals have taken Ontario down and don't have the intestinal fortitude to admit they are wrong and do something about it.

Last week, the Weetabix plant in Cobourg laid off 27 workers; 42 workers left the Kraft plant in Northumberland; 124 people were laid off at Gencor Foods in Kitchener. Close to 200,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost since July 2004.

The Premier's response is, "This too shall pass." Premier, do you know what else passes? Kidney stones pass. Tornadoes pass. One is extremely painful and the other is quite devastating. Which of these two experiences is the Premier asking Ontarians to steel themselves for?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I think it's important to understand something about the challenging economic environment. The strengthening of the Canadian dollar since 2002 cost the Ontario economy \$65 billion in 2007. In 2007, costs for Ontario businesses were \$11 billion higher than in 2002 as a result of higher oil prices. Weakening US economic growth in 2007 and 2008 will cost the Ontario economy an estimated \$6 billion in 2008. If you put it all together—higher oil prices, a strengthening Canadian dollar, a weakening US economy—we're talking about \$82 billion in additional costs for the Ontario economy.

The opposition solution to this would be to cut our public services, close hospitals, fire nurses and make cuts to our educational opportunities for kids. We're not going that way. We'll continue to invest—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: When the Premier said last week, I guess it was, "This too shall pass," in another part of that quote from the Toronto Star, he also said, "Trust me, folks." I guess he doesn't appreciate the irony of those words. An editorial last Friday in the Sudbury Star speaks of the Premier's "disturbing air of complacency" regarding the state of the economy, and that was before he made his comments for people to steel themselves.

The Premier has apparently given up. His budget continued to punish growth and job creation. He's thrown up his hands and said, "Let's batten down the hatches, boys. It's going to be a rough one." Ontario expects their Premier to be a good steward of the province's economy. The Premier has failed to meet that standard. I ask him if he is now prepared to take on another responsibility: responsibility for the coming recession, the McGuinty recession.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I can understand where the official opposition is coming from. They would like Ontarians to believe that we somehow have control over

the price of oil, but they don't believe that. They think that we influence the value of the dollar, but Ontarians don't believe that. They would like Ontarians to believe that somehow we influence the vigour of the US economy. Ontarians don't believe that either. I think what they're looking for is to ensure that we are investing in the kinds of things that are helpful to them—that, at a minimum, we will do them no harm; we will not cut their valuable public services—and they want to know if we're prepared to invest in new skills and training opportunities for them.

A great deal of our last budget was devoted to that. We're investing \$1.5 billion in a new skills-to-jobs strategy which includes long-term training, the first of its kind in Canada, for 20,000 Ontarians who have lost their job. Ontarians want us to continue to look for ways to invest in them without cutting their public services. That's exactly what we will do.

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EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Back to the Premier: Since the fall of 2005, the official opposition has been drawing your attention to the growing job crisis in the manufacturing sector. Your responses have sometimes been callous and uncaring. For example, your own parliamentary assistant described communities concerned about job losses as “crying babies”; do you remember that? Or the Premier's own seeming insensitivity to layoffs at General Motors—“a little bit of contraction.”

You ignored the warnings, continued your tax-and-spend agenda, and now, with close to 200,000 manufacturing jobs lost, almost 72,000 of our sons, daughters, grandkids and husbands are forced to leave the province to find work. Is that all you can say: “Steel yourself. This too will pass”? How about an apology?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Speaker, 455,000 net new jobs since 2003. I know that the leader of the official opposition, again, is filled with gloom and doom, but I think Ontarians should understand the continuing strength we have in Ontario.

Listen to this partial list. Ontario is first when it comes to creating wealth for Canada. In fact, the next-biggest provincial economy is less than one half of Ontario's. We are first at creating new jobs. Over one third of all new Canadian jobs since 2003 were created in Ontario. We are first when it comes to head offices: 39% of Canada's head offices are here. We are first when it comes to attracting venture capital investment in new companies, and we are first when it comes to attracting venture capital from outside the country. We are first when it comes to the size of our financial services sector, first when it comes to the size of our ICT, first in business services, first in the chemical sector. That's a heck of a foundation on which to continue to build.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think Ontarians are becoming increasingly aware of this rosy-scenario broken record the Premier and his colleagues keep reciting. On

November 21, 2005, in response to a question about job losses in manufacturing, the then Minister of Economic Development responded by suggesting the challenges were being worked through; in essence, no big deal, something like your response here today.

This government refused to heed the warnings and now, two and a half years later, they have been proven dead wrong. Countless communities and families are paying the price.

Premier, your predictions were wrong. You're on the wrong track. Instead of telling people to steel themselves, will you put some steel in your spine and bring in immediate measures to address the job loss crisis?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It is at least interesting to hear the leader of the official opposition stand up and say that we should be doing more for families that have been affected by job losses. They voted against the budget, which invested \$1.5 billion in a new skills-to-jobs strategy. They voted against our support for vulnerable families, including a new student nutrition program and investments in affordable housing.

Their solution would be to take \$5 billion out of government expenditures. They would let go nurses, water inspectors, meat inspectors and teachers the way they have in the past. That's their solution. That's their support. That's the extension of help that they offer to Ontario families.

We will continue to invest in Ontarians. We will continue to support the public services that they've got to be able to count on. Most importantly, we'll continue to invest in jobs and skills for Ontario families.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It would be unparliamentary to respond to those allegations the way they should be responded to.

Let's go back to something the current finance minister said. On November 2, 2005, in response to a question about manufacturing job losses, he defended your government's policies, saying, “What should be up is up and what should be down is down.”

Guess what? Unemployment is up. The number of personal bankruptcies is up. The number of people leaving Ontario looking for work is up. Economic growth is down. Private sector job creation is down. Everything that should be down is now up, and everything that should be up is now down.

Premier, will you now admit that you got it wrong, and will you bring in meaningful tax relief for families and businesses to get Ontario back on the right track?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It's taken six questions, but now we know what this is all about. Under the guise of lending support to families affected by job losses, the leader of the official opposition now reveals himself once again. What the Conservative Party stands for is making cuts to taxes for profitable corporations. That necessarily means cuts to health care, cuts to education, cuts to those kind of things that vulnerable people in the province of Ontario have got to be able to count on.

We're not going there. We've had that experience in the past. They closed our hospitals, they fired our nurses,

they fired our water inspectors, and they declared war on our public education. We're not going there again.

We will continue to invest in our public services. At the same time, we will continue to cut taxes in an affordable and strategic way while we invest in innovation, we invest in infrastructure, and we invest in jobs and skills training for the people of Ontario.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier. On Friday, the Premier said there are no magic solutions to address Ontario's economic downturn. My question is this: Does the McGuinty government require a magic wand to introduce a refundable manufacturing tax credit, as Manitoba and Quebec have done?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The leader of the NDP is nothing if not consistent. He's raised this very same issue a number of times over. He believes in this refundable tax credit. We've gone beyond that. In our budget, we provide \$190 million of immediate relief for manufacturers and others working in the resource sector. We think that, in combination with the cuts to capital taxes, the improvement of the capital cost allowance treatment—those kinds of things will provide immediate relief to people working in the manufacturing sector.

Again, I understand where the leader of the NDP is coming from on this score, but we've put forward something which has been well received, by the manufacturing sector in particular, and I think it'll do exactly what is needed, which is to provide them with immediate financial relief.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier may believe that a one-time tax cut constitutes a job strategy. I can tell him that just the evidence of last week, 1,000 more jobs lost immediately after the budget, tells us all that that is not a response.

Ontario lost 25,000 full-time jobs in March, over 200,000 full-time jobs over the last three years. The unemployment rate has jumped from 6.1% to 6.4%.

My question again: Does the McGuinty government require a magic wand to establish an industrial hydro rate to help manufacturers, as Manitoba and Quebec have done?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, the leader of the NDP knows that we have in fact been working with our industries when it comes to managing their electricity costs. For example, we are helping northern Ontario pulp and paper mills achieve energy efficiency and sustainability by offering rebates that reduce the electricity costs of participating companies. We also have a \$140-million dollar program to reduce electricity costs by 15% over three years to allow companies to transition to a more competitive and sustainable platform.

I just think it's really important to be honest with the people of Ontario. We're into some choppy waters. It will take time before the dollar returns to some state of normalcy. It will take some time, if ever, before the price of oil drops. And it will take time before the US econ-

omy, our greatest trading partner, removes itself from its sluggish state and becomes stronger. That's going to take some time. In the meantime, we will continue to invest in public services so families can count on that, and we will continue to work with our businesses to help them grow stronger.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier says he's helping the forest sector in northern Ontario. The only thing McGuinty has done is shut down six pulp and paper mills, downsized five others and shut down almost every sawmill in northern Ontario.

The reality is that governments in Manitoba and Quebec are taking action to sustain good manufacturing jobs and to address the economic downturn. Their Premiers are offering solutions, solutions like an industrial hydro rate, solutions like a manufacturing investment tax, solutions like adopting the Buy America policy of 50%, at least, manufacture of transit vehicles.

Can the Premier tell people across Ontario why he muses about magic wands while the Premiers in Quebec and Manitoba take real action to sustain manufacturing jobs?

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Hon. Dalton McGuinty: It could be understandable that folks watching this might be confused as to who's right and who's wrong, but I think we should look at an independent authority on this. We received a letter from Peter Grant, Jr., president of Grant Forest Products Inc. This is what he writes: "Your additional budget measures, including accelerating business education tax rate cuts in northern Ontario and eliminating capital tax from manufacturing and resource-based companies, will also assist in making Ontario a more competitive jurisdiction. I have to say that it's quite refreshing to see your approach of making things happen and enabling positive change. It is long overdue."

The leader of the NDP can stand up and express his opinion, but I continue to have confidence in Ontario entrepreneurs and Ontario businesses as we work together to help them grow still stronger.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton: This wouldn't be the same Peter Grant who shut down an OSB mill in Timmins? Oh, it is the same Peter Grant.

To the Premier again: In the United States, the Bush government believes in a laissez-faire approach to the economic downturn, and as a result thousands of jobs are being lost. In Ottawa, the Harper government believes in simply more corporate tax cuts. The only real response from the McGuinty government so far has been out of the Bush-Harper textbook: to cut the capital tax.

My next question: Can the Premier tell us why he has chosen the Bush-Harper textbook as his only measure, rather than adopting the activist path which both Quebec and Manitoba have taken in terms of policies that will really help the manufacturing sector?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just don't see it that way. I think we've got a good, solid plan in place to help grow this economy and build on the incredibly strong foundation that we've been privileged to inherit, a strong economy that has developed over 100 years now.

When it comes to helping our manufacturing sector, we think it really is important to help struggling manufacturers by dealing with their capital cost issues. We think it's really important to deal with the capital cost allowance to reduce the capital taxes. We think it's important to deal with the business education taxes in northern Ontario. Those are all part and parcel of a comprehensive, thoughtful approach to growing the economy.

We can't be all about tax cuts, as the Conservative Party would have us be; we can't be all about new expenditures, as the NDP would have us be. We think we've found the right place to be. We are in fact cutting taxes. At the same time, we're investing in supports for our vulnerable families. We're also investing in new ways to help grow this economy. We think we've found a balance that's going to help Ontarians go to where exactly they want to go.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The difference is this: The McGuinty government says to manufacturers in northern Ontario, "Oh, we might cut your business education tax." In Quebec, the manufacturing tax credit for hard-hit parts of Quebec is going to be a 40% tax credit. Manufacturers in Quebec are saying that this will help them reinvest in their plants and facilities, some of which are shut down. The Premier says, "Oh, the capital cost allowance." The capital cost allowance only goes to profitable corporations. Manufacturers across Ontario aren't making any profit now, so they will not get any benefit from the capital cost allowance. That's the issue, Premier. Other provinces have developed thoughtful, practical strategies to help sustain manufacturing jobs. So far you've lectured people, you've mused about magic wands, but your only real plan is to adopt something out of the Harper-Bush textbook and simply cut one tax. When are we going to see a real jobs plan, or are we going to continue to see the loss of thousands of manufacturing—

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

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, the leader of the NDP is still not familiar with our five-point plan to grow this economy. I'll review that with him once again.

We're investing in our workforce; we're investing in their skills and education. In this recent budget, we put in place a new \$1.5-billion investment. We have the highest rate of post-secondary education among our workers in the western world. We're proud of that and we're going to continue to build on that. We're investing in infrastructure. We've got a 10-year, \$60-billion plan that's going to create hundreds of thousands of jobs right now, and it's going to enhance our productivity in the long term. We're investing in innovation. We want to do more to help Ontarians turn their creative ideas into new jobs and services for sale to the world. We're also investing in

tax cuts to make our manufacturers in particular more competitive. Last but not least, we're investing in partnerships. We want to enter into stronger partnerships with the business community to help them grow stronger and create more jobs. It's a comprehensive five-point plan. It may not be something the leader of the NDP likes, but I think it's exactly what Ontario needs.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The Premier talks about new job creation. Premier, 25,000 good, full-time jobs were lost between February and March. Every economic predictor, forecaster, is saying more jobs are going to be lost. You say that somewhere down the road, sometime, maybe, perhaps, there may be infrastructure investments. But the reality is, people are losing their jobs now, today, not just in northern Ontario, but in communities like Windsor, Hamilton, London, St. Thomas, St. Marys, and the list goes on.

Other provinces are taking real action. They recognize that an industrial hydro rate will help manufacturers stay in the province. They recognize that a refundable manufacturing investment tax will attract new investment.

Premier, your budget had none of these things. I ask again, what you've offered up isn't working. When are we going to see a real jobs plan to sustain manufacturing jobs in Ontario from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I do think it's important for us to take a look at experience in other jurisdictions, and most notably what they're doing in other provinces, but then we've got to make a decision as to what's best for our province. We have different economic characteristics than other provinces. We can't rely on stuff you pump out of the ground. We can't rely on oil and gas. Those provinces that are blessed with those attributes are seeing their economies grow at a very healthy clip.

I think what we can and must continue to do is to help our people get new and better jobs. That's why this budget devoted \$1.5 billion to a new skills-to-jobs strategy, the first of its kind in Canada. I have some sense that in other provinces, in other question periods, there will be other leaders of the official opposition asking those Premiers in those provinces, "Why don't you have the kind of job program that the McGuinty government has in Ontario?"

I think it's really important that we look at our economy and do what we think is appropriate for our workers and our families. Our plan, in short: We will not cut public services for our families, but we will invest in new job opportunities.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Premier. On Friday, StatsCan released the national job numbers based on its monthly labour force survey. The numbers looked good at first, with thousands of new jobs being created in March across Canada. However, upon closer reading, the numbers were not so uplifting in Ontario. The positive results are due to significant gains in the Canadian west and are offset by losses at home. Ontario

lost 2,000 net jobs in March, and it gets worse. Ignoring gains in part-time work, Ontario lost 24,000 full-time jobs in one month. That means the Liberal retraining program for 20,000 Ontario workers won't even cover losses for the month of March.

Premier, your patchwork programs and high-tax strategies aren't working. Unfortunately, the grim predictions of this opposition are coming true. Will you commit now to a new direction for Ontario and create a more competitive atmosphere for businesses?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: Thanks very much for the question. We do appreciate the opportunity to talk about our plan for the economic development of this province.

Our expectation is that the member for Halton, who represents a terrific manufacturing base as part of the GTA, will support the budget initiatives that were tabled in this House and are now in debate and votes. We expect to see support from this member in particular, who understands that the manufacturing sector in particular wants the elimination of capital tax retroactive to last January, that it helps them right now, that it actually produces cash in hand, a position to be able to have the government refund these manufacturing companies. We want to see \$1.5 billion being driven into a job skills action plan to take our workers and understand how we can add training for the new jobs that exist and are being created here in Ontario. We hope to have this member in particular support our budget initiatives.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The minister's optimism is endearing but inappropriate. Your government is engaged in a classic example of Peter Pan economics. That's where you sit around in a circle holding hands and wishing with all your might until things magically change for the better. Unfortunately, no amount of happy thoughts or pixie dust will fix the broken reality of Ontario's economy. Ontario just shed 24,000 jobs in 31 days. Ontario unemployment is up again, straying further from the national average. The public sector is bloated. The sunshine list is longer than ever. Ontarians are fleeing in record numbers. The manufacturing sector is in shambles. US consumers are bracing for a recession. The Premier smiles and gives us a pat on our collective head.

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Everything is not fine, Minister. Corporate handouts and retraining may save a few jobs, but what do you say to the hundreds of thousands of workers who remain unemployed because of your stubborn refusal to get on the right track? If you can't acknowledge the realities of the present, how can Ontarians trust you with their future?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm really surprised at this question in particular because programs that our government has developed have benefited the people of Halton. I want to be able to tell them that their own local member supports the great initiative at Roxul, the insulation company in Halton which was able to access advanced manufacturing investment strategy funding to grow the

number of jobs in Halton. I want to be able to tell the people there who live in Halton and work in Oakville at Ford that they made an historic investment to build the Oakville Ford plant that benefits all of us across Ontario, and that their own local member would support the initiative with our auto strategy. Better yet, when we come out with yet another largest-of-its-kind investment program, the Next Generation of Jobs, I want to tell people of Halton that their own member supports that initiative for jobs for the people of Halton.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Howard Hampton: A question to the Premier: Yesterday, I visited Cecilia Begg, a 58-year-old great-grandmother from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation, who is in jail because the McGuinty government favours mining interests over aboriginal and treaty rights. Can the Premier tell us what public interest in Ontario is served by jailing, for six months, a 58-year-old great-grandmother?

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: You know that's not true, Howie.

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

Hon. Michael Bryant: With all due respect to the court, I'd say there's no public interest that is in fact met by incarceration under these circumstances. That's why the crown took the position that incarceration should not take place, and that's why the attorney has indicated support for any appeal upcoming, which we do anticipate. We think it's important that these matters are resolved at the negotiating table and not through litigation and certainly not through contempt incarceration orders.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The minister should know that the message that has been received by First Nations is that if they oppose mining exploration or mining development, then what very well may happen to them is that they may go to jail. It's happened to Cecilia Begg. It's happened to five other leaders from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug. It's happened to the leadership of Ardoch First Nation. That's the message that's being received by First Nations. It seems to me that if the McGuinty government is serious about changing that message, then it's necessary for the McGuinty government to commit today to the immediate and unconditional release of Cecilia Begg and the other First Nation leaders who have been jailed because they oppose mining development in their territory. Is the McGuinty government prepared to do that—yes or no?

Hon. Michael Bryant: As one former Attorney General to another, you know very well that that can't be done. If it could be done, obviously I'd just pick up that key and I'd put it in the cell and open it up. But he knows very well that that's not how it works. I wish he would stop trying to tell the public otherwise because in fact, that former Attorney General knows very well that the

crown opposed incarceration, that the crown supports the appeal and that the government of Ontario does not support the incarceration of First Nations leaders, period. Stop telling people otherwise.

YOUTH SERVICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, on Friday I had the pleasure of hosting the Premier in my riding to announce the expansion of our government's focus on youth program. I understand that Hamilton will receive \$765,000 under this initiative, with additional funding also being provided to high-needs neighbourhoods in Toronto and Ottawa. Would the minister kindly elaborate on what this program will mean to students and families in my community of Hamilton?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member for her question, and for her advocacy for her community in Hamilton and for the Greek community across Ontario.

The focus on youth program is a perfect example of how our government is working with school boards and community agencies to provide programming for kids in high-needs neighbourhoods. The focus on youth program allows school boards to open up schools in high-needs areas to provide programming for young kids in the schools during the summer, but also to provide jobs for youth in those communities.

We launched this program last year in Toronto. About 11,000 young people participated and some 380 students were hired as coaches, counsellors and staff. So we've expanded the program by 50% to \$6 million. Ottawa, Hamilton and Toronto are now all involved.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: Thank you, Minister, for the information. However, as you know, not every child gets to go to summer camp, so this is certainly great news for the people of Hamilton, that we're able to assist in bringing these opportunities to children. I firmly believe that all our kids deserve to enjoy safe educational opportunities in the summer and during the school year.

The minister mentioned focus on youth as an example of working in partnership with our communities. I would like the minister to tell the House what other collaborative programs this government has introduced.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We know that, on average, Canadian kids between the ages of 10 and 16 spend about six hours a day in front of the TV, playing video games or using the computer. So what we want to do is find ways to help kids stay active and engaged. Programs like focus on youth, but also the youth opportunities strategy, summer jobs for youth and apprenticeship training, are all programs that provide opportunities for young people.

As well, we are tripling the amount of money that we are putting into school boards for community use of schools. We are going to be increasing that amount to \$66 million over the next few years, and that will allow community organizations to provide the kind of programming that kids need throughout the year, not just in

the summer. That's the kind of initiative—fostering collaboration among boards and community agencies—that the government needs to continue.

SMOKING CESSATION

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. Back in 2004, the government promised to raise taxes on tobacco products and "use increased tobacco tax revenue to make smoking cessation medication available to all smokers trying to quit."

The McGuinty government did raise the taxes—they're really good at that—but expensive smoking cessation products only had the PST removed last year; and by special application only, implemented a program through community health centres and aboriginal health centres which is now fully subscribed, at approximately 38,000 persons receiving cessation products.

The government claims success. It says smoking is down 18.7% in its time in office. The estimate is not realistic when 30% of cigarettes are bought or sold illegally in Ontario. Will the minister tell the people of Ontario when this government's promise to cover the costs of smoking cessation products for all will be introduced?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for his question. As we all know, smoking kills 13,000 Ontarians and costs our health care system \$1.7 billion every year. It is also the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario. When it comes to helping Ontarians break the cycle of tobacco addiction, our government's message is very simple: You can quit and we can help you.

That is why our 2008 budget proposed a permanent retail sales tax exemption for qualifying non-prescription nicotine replacement therapy products to help Ontarians quit smoking. Our government has committed close to \$15 million to cessation programs, including providing 53,000 Ontarians with access to counselling and nicotine replacement therapy, increased funding to the Canadian Cancer Society's smokers' helpline program—

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

1500

Mr. Peter Shurman: Unequal enforcement of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act penalizes law-abiding businesses. Government lets them pay and it does nothing to punish those who defy the law. My Korean constituents, for example, many of whom are convenience store owners, complain legitimately of compliance costs while business dries up for them. Customers go to smoke shacks and First Nations vendors around Ontario, who appear to be immune from prosecution. A strategy on smoking reduction needs measurable results and that means a level playing field. Either the government lets convenience stores display and sell cigarettes and eliminates taxes, or it acts now to eliminate—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member how his supplementary is relating to the question on smoking cessation taxation and now convenience stores.

Mr. Peter Shurman: Let me put the question, Mr. Speaker. When can Ontarians expect the Minister of Health Promotion to announce a genuine smoking cessation program based on a uniform and enforced tobacco sales policy?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I would refer the member opposite to page 64 of the 2008 Ontario budget. If he would listen—it's very important. I've been a new member and I observe that the members opposite don't listen very carefully. So please listen. We're "proposing a permanent retail sales tax exemption for qualifying non-prescription nicotine replacement therapies" in our efforts to continue to help Ontarians quit smoking.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a second. I just remind all members that we should try and use language in this chamber that isn't going to cause uproar. Making reference to opposition members isn't always conducive to trying to have good relationships in the chamber.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is for the Premier. Premier, why are you sending your Minister of Economic Development and Trade on a trade junket to China today while relatives of Tibetan Ontarians are being murdered by that Chinese government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I appreciate this opportunity to speak about much of the work that our ministry is doing related to economic development. I will say that we have opened 10 offices—international marketing centres—around the world. One of those, of course, has already opened in Shanghai, and we are opening our second office in Beijing. The purpose of this upcoming trip is to officially open this office and engage with those companies that do business with China.

Our purpose is economic development. We have a huge continent there that we want to engage in. Ontario's purpose is to do just that. We are very aware of other political issues that go on, and to that end we engage with our federal minister who is responsible for foreign affairs to be certain of what their role is in all of this. I can assure the member opposite that our purpose is economic development and the opportunity that exists for Ontario business.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is again for the Premier. Why did you keep this trip a secret, not only from every Ontarian but from every member of this House? We were not informed of this trip. Why do you continue to run roughshod over human rights—Ontarians' right to know and Tibetans' right to live?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I can tell you that there's nothing that goes on in our ministries that would be secret, in particular to members opposite. Any of you may know what our schedule would be for the balance of the year in terms of where we engage. If you look at the

map of the world you will see that we've opened 10 offices around the world. The very latest that we are adding is, in fact, in Beijing. It's a very important position for us to be in.

We are very aware of world events and world political events. That's why we take the time to speak with our federal minister, who is responsible for this. We are all part of this as the nation of Canada. We all have concerns for people who may be experiencing any kind of difficulty because of political behaviour. We're very concerned about that. I will tell you that our focus is economic development and we are certain that that will be the discussions we'll be having, in Shanghai as well as in Beijing.

LOW-INCOME ONTARIANS

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. The city of Mississauga is a vibrant community that continues to grow each day. Yet, like other cities across Ontario, Mississauga residents are facing similar day-to-day challenges, whether it's working for a fair wage, providing for their families or ensuring that their children go to school well fed. Mississauga residents work hard to ensure their families can enjoy a good quality of life.

However, Minister, there has been some attention in recent weeks on the status of low-income citizens in our province and in my region. Social services funding is a concern, especially when it comes to improving the lives of the most vulnerable in our province. What has the government done to address these important issues, and what can we see in the near future in regard to improving the lives of all Ontarians?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First, let me congratulate the citizens of Mississauga South, who have chosen such a passionate member and dedicated representative to work on their behalf.

Over the past four years in office, our government has made several important steps to improve the lives of all Ontarians. We've raised the minimum wage to \$8.75, and it's on its way up to \$10.25 by the year 2010. We have also raised social assistance four times, for a total of 9% since 2003. We've introduced a historic Ontario child benefit that will help more than 600,000 families and over 1.3 million children in Ontario when the program reaches its maturity in 2010.

It's not just the members on this side who are supportive. I just received a letter from a member from the other side who is very thankful about what we have done with—

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

Mr. Charles Sousa: Minister, according to both PC leader John Tory and NDP leader Howard Hampton, this year's budget will do little to help the most vulnerable in Ontario. In fact, Mr. Tory suggests: "There are many, many low-income Ontarians today who will be receiving

nothing from this budget.” Minister, can you please respond to these concerns from the opposition leaders?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This party is not going to take any advice from the two opposite parties. They have nothing to be proud of when they were in power.

This is a government that is fully committed to assisting every family in our province. That’s why the McGuinty government’s third straight balanced budget includes a \$135-million investment over three years to provide free dental care to low-income families, \$32 million over three years to expand the student nutrition program, \$100 million in one-time funding to revitalize the province’s aging social housing and a new \$10-million pilot program to help low-income Ontarians save for an education or start a business.

Human capital is Ontario’s most valuable asset. Whenever this government has the opportunity to do so, we will always invest in the people of Ontario.

TEACHERS’ PENSIONS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: My question is to the Minister of Education. What is this government’s strategy to deal with the \$12.7-billion shortfall in the Ontario teachers’ pension?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The McGuinty government has demonstrated over the last four and a half years, over and over again, our support for the teachers of Ontario. We value teachers; we know they’re essential to making Ontario’s publicly funded education system the envy of the world. That’s why we’ve invested more than \$4 billion into our schools, which is a 33% increase in per pupil funding. That’s why we were elected for a second term on a platform that continues to strengthen and improve our publicly funded schools.

I’ve been listening to my colleagues, including the leader of the opposition, who last week agreed with us that the teachers’ pension fund is a very well run organization. We agree with that. We take the security of the plan and its costs very seriously. We have full confidence in the ability of the partners to address the valuation, as has been done in the past. The government’s support for this plan and our teachers will continue.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: My question is specifically about the \$12.7-billion shortfall. We know that the government is a partner in the plan. My question is, what will this bailout cost Ontario taxpayers?

1510

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have already said, we have full confidence in the partners around the table to be able to deal with this valuation. Every time there’s a valuation of the fund, there have to be issues that are resolved, and we are fully confident that the partners are going to be able to resolve this fund. That has been my position since this question was asked. It’s the position of the government and we, unlike the party opposite, have confidence in teachers. We value work that teachers do. We believe that teachers are critical to the education

system, and we’ll continue to work in partnership with them.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Labour. The labour minister stood up in this House and said clearly that the WSIB system is “in need of reform.” Where has this government been for the last five years? Why hasn’t this government stopped rewarding companies that are responsible for workers injured or killed on their watch?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Actually, I’ve never made that comment in this House, but did I make it on the weekend and I’m pleased to repeat it. Clearly, the experience rating system is in need of reform, and clearly, the WSIB agrees; that’s why they’re in the process right now of conducting a review on that system. They’ve made some immediate changes so that when there is a fatality in the workplace, that particular employer will not be entitled to a rebate. I think they’re on the right track.

The fact is, our priority is making workplaces safer across this province. That’s why we’ve invested heavily in enforcement: 200 additional health and safety inspectors are now out in workplaces across this province making workplaces healthier and safer. The result is very close to a 20% decrease in injuries. We’re making progress when it comes to ensuring that we’re reducing the amount of injuries in workplaces, and we’ll continue to work on that basis.

Mr. Paul Miller: The workplace insurance agency has given tens of millions of dollars in rebates to companies that have been prosecuted by this government and found guilty of safety violations leading to deaths, amputations and other gruesome injuries. Experience rating is wrong. That is just one of the many things in the WSIB that needs to be fixed, including deeming and other situations, which the minister hasn’t addressed. When did the minister first know about this, and why hasn’t he done anything about it?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The WSIB announced earlier this month that they would be moving forward with this review. That’s not news to anybody here in this Legislature. I’m confident that the WSIB will ensure that the incentive program for employers will be improved. I’m looking forward to seeing what their recommendations are.

We’re out to try to change human behaviour and that takes an enforcement approach, which we’re working very, very vigorously on with 200 additional health and safety inspectors. We’re bringing down workplace injuries by close to 20%. By anybody’s standards that’s a dramatic decrease, but it also requires incentives, so we want to make sure that that incentive system works. That’s why we’re looking forward to seeing this review take place, and we’re looking forward to seeing the results of the review so that we can have a full response to try to bring down workplace injuries. We’re confident that we’re going to get there.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is to the Attorney General. The city of Toronto council has just this afternoon passed a resolution calling for a ban on handguns. We in this city and those of us who represent this city understand the importance of the call that they've made. My question to you, Attorney General, is, what is our position? Is our government going to support the city of Toronto in this important call?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: I know that for four years Premier McGuinty, my colleague Mike Bryant, when he was Attorney General, and this government have called on the federal government to bring in a national ban on handguns.

We welcome all to this cause. I know that for four years Mayor Miller, in particular, has spoken on a number of occasions on this very issue, and I welcome the motion of today.

A ban on handguns is an essential part of our strategy to reduce gun violence everywhere: increased border security; the right laws, such as mandatory minimums and reverse-onus bail; more police officers on the street; and community investment.

The people of Ontario support this. It is now time for the federal government to listen to the people of Ontario and support a national ban on handguns.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I know that people right across the city will be proud and pleased to hear that two levels of government are willing to work together, because the fact of the matter remains that our communities and our families simply want to be safe. They really don't care what level of government is taking action, but they want to see a unified front and they want to understand that those who represent them, whether they're at the federal, the provincial or the municipal level, are working to make their communities safer.

What I would ask the Attorney General to do is to provide details with respect to other steps that our government is willing to take in looking for partners to work with as we work to continue to make the city of Toronto a safer place.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci: I thank the member for the question. Listen, we have to do everything possible to ensure that we get rid of handguns on the streets of Ontario. We call, as the city of Toronto has called, on the federal government to ban handguns. It's time the federal government understands that the will of Ontarians is to ban handguns. So we ask the federal government to support the city of Toronto's motion and get these handguns off the streets of Ontario.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, and it's a follow-up to an earlier question, with a bit of a different

slant, about her upcoming travels. I gather today that she's departing for China to officially open a trade office. I wonder if she could tell us the number of people who will be travelling with her, the cost to the taxpayers and if any family members will be joining her.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'd be happy to provide you with that information. I do have one person from my office travelling; I also have one of my assistant deputy ministers travelling with me. The balance of the list I will provide for you. I don't have it at this moment, but I'll send it over to you.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess the point being made here is that the House did not sit for three months—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Mr. Speaker, that member is not in his seat and he's heckling. I hope you'll bring him to order.

The point is, the House was not sitting for an extended period of time. We know the job situation in Ontario can be described as a crisis situation. We have this minister now saying that she's going to leave the country on an expensive jaunt, and who knows what purpose or what end can be accomplished by her travelling the world.

I again ask her what she hopes to accomplish by being in Beijing to cut a ribbon. Why couldn't Mr. Kwinter be doing that on behalf of the government of Ontario?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I appreciate your comments about the chair of the Ontario's Investment and Trade Advisory Council, because you are right on the money: Our new chair of this council is doing some tremendous work, not just for you and me, representing us around the globe, but also for the people of Ontario, where it actually matters. They want to see outcomes from this kind of travel.

For my own part, I'm very happy to report to the House, and always have, what the details of the expense may be. I remember very well sitting on that bench and having to ferret out mounds and mounds of paper just because we would ask a question about expenses. I'd be happy to pass it over to you and save you the trouble of having to go fishing, because I'm very open about what it is that we do. It certainly does relate to business for Ontario companies. We have businesses in Ontario that want to do business in China. Many of the companies there are state-run companies, and that's why our involvement is so essential.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Ontarians are frustrated by the government's secretive, behind-the-scenes review of home care competitive bidding and the lack of public input. Led by CUPE, a coalition of people interested in home care have been holding rallies across the province asking for public consultation on the new home care model. Does the minister agree to hold public consultations on home care?

1520

Hon. George Smitherman: I appreciate very much that the member actually acknowledged that a reasonably select number of people from CUPE have been showing up at offices and expressing this. For my part, I've had the privilege so far of having between six and eight meetings in my office, speaking to representatives of the various organizations with an interest in the delivery of home care. On this point, our interest is very clear: We wish to enhance the capacity of the health care system in Ontario to deliver more home care, and to do so in a fashion which sustains as well as possible the relationship between the provider and the client receiving the care in their own home.

To that end, I will acknowledge that we have some policy work under way. As I've had the opportunity to complete that and to offer that as advice to my government, I'll be in a much better position to share that with the members in this Legislature and throughout Ontario.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm glad the minister has had opportunities to hold eight meetings with groups of his choosing, but those are not public meetings. Studies have shown that since competition was introduced a decade ago, the quality of home care has suffered, working conditions have diminished and costs have increased as for-profit providers have taken over a majority of home care, and that's province-wide.

Regular Ontarians are asking you to consult with them before you introduce the new home care model so that they have a say into how home care services are going to be delivered to them and their loved ones in their community. Minister, will you agree to hold public consultations so that regular Ontarians can be heard?

Hon. George Smitherman: It does seem that the honourable member and I have some disagreement about what a regular Ontarian is. She did say in her first answer that to her, a regular Ontarian is the real leader of her party, Sid Ryan. For me, my obligation is different. It is to maximize the opportunity to be aware of information that comes from a variety of groups. I want to encourage anyone tuning in that, if they have a strong desire of letting me or other members of the Legislature know about their views with respect to the way home care should be delivered, we would welcome that.

I do think it's noteworthy that there are a variety of different organizations that represent the providers, those on the for-profit side and those on the not-for-profit side, and I've taken the opportunity to meet with all of them and be engaged in regular dialogue with them. I'll continue that as I go down the path towards finding the absolute, best solutions.

Our commitment to health care can't be questioned. Almost half of every dollar that we spend is on the delivery of this important public service, and the dedication was very well reflected in our last budget as well.

DURHAM REGIONAL COUNCIL

Mr. Joe Dickson: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I've been involved in

municipal politics in Ajax for over 30 years before being elected to this office last October. I have seen Ajax grow from a smaller community into a hub of activity in Durham region. From the thriving business community to the old neighbourhoods, Ajax is a place I've called home most of my life.

With the growth of Ajax comes the need to reform Durham regional council. Ajax has only three representatives for 100,000 people. In comparison, Oshawa has fewer than 150,000 people but has eight representatives on Durham council. Minister, I want to tell you that I support Mayor Parish's call for a reform representation on regional council. Would the minister please tell me what he can do to help.

Hon. Jim Watson: I want to thank the member from Ajax-Pickering for his service at the municipal level. He understands some of the important work they're doing at both Ajax council and Durham regional council. I can confirm that Mayor Parish has sent me a letter, and I will be responding to tell him that the best solution is a local solution. If regional council brings forward a resolution from their council calling for a different makeup of the number of members of council from Ajax or other communities, I'll certainly take a very serious look at that.

Premier McGuinty has instilled in me and all of us in our government to make sure that we try, as best as possible, to find local solutions at the local level. I know the honourable member is dedicated to ensuring that Ajax has its fair share. I look forward to any resolution from the town of Ajax. I thank the honourable member because, together with Wayne Arthurs and Joe Dickson, Durham region is finally well represented right here in Queen's Park.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario provided to me by Temple Baptist Church and St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church.

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

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

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

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

As I agree with the petition, I affix my name thereto.

HIGHWAY 144

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition here from the people of my riding that is over 125 pages long and represents over 1,200 people from my riding.

“Whereas the section of Highway 144 North in the city of greater Sudbury, also known as Levack Hill, has become extremely dangerous due to large potholes, cracked pavement and more patchwork than pavement. The potholes are regularly filled but, due to the heavy volume of traffic, the patching does not stay intact. This section of the highway has a lot of traffic due to the mining industry operations of Xstrata, Vale Inco and FNX. This part of the highway has three lanes of deteriorated pavement; that constitutes a public safety hazard.

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

“To have this part of Highway 144 repaired and resurfaced.”

There aren't that many people who live in Cartier Levack and Onaping. Every single driver has signed this petition. I support it and I affix my name to it.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition entitled “Fairness for Ontario Workers: Employment Insurance,” addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

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

“Whereas over 75% of Ontario's unemployed are not eligible for employment insurance because of Ottawa's unfair eligibility rules; and

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

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

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

I support this and affix my signature, brought to the table by Bethany.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Bill Murdoch: I have a petition sent to me by Dorothy Meek from Markdale, who's very concerned. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

I have signed this.

HOME CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm presenting a petition today from the SEIU union and the people of Chatham-Blenheim-Kent county.

“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

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“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 hereby sign my name to it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Kuldip Kular: “Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

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

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

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

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

I agree with the petitioners and I have put my signature on it as well.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. John O’Toole: I am pleased to present a petition from the congregation at the Trulls Road Free Methodist Church in my riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I am pleased to sign this on their behalf and present it to one of the new pages, Rheanna.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU, from the people of Thunder Bay and Terrace Bay.

“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 will affix my name to it.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I’m pleased to support my colleagues from Parry Sound–Muskoka and Newmarket–Aurora with this petition to the Parliament of Ontario, and I thank Adam Medon of Huntsville for having signed it, filled it in and sent it to us. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased to sign this petition and to ask page Michael to carry it for me.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I’m pleased to present a petition supporting the member for Mississauga–Streetsville.

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Western Mississauga ambulatory surgery centre:

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

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

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care allocate funds in its 2008-09 capital budget to begin planning and construction of an ambulatory surgery centre located in western Mississauga to serve the Mississauga-Halton area and enable greater access to

'day surgery' procedures that comprise about four fifths of all surgical procedures performed."

I support this petition.

DAVID DUNLAP OBSERVATORY

Mr. Reza Moridi: I present to you today about 100 signatures which were presented to me during the rally held at Queen's Park on January 16, 2008.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I'll sign this petition.

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 daily proceedings in the Ontario Legislature; and

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

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message is one of forgiveness, of providing for those in need of their 'daily bread' and of preserving us from the evils that we may fall into; it is a valuable guide and lesson for a chamber that is too often an arena for conflict; and

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

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

I am in agreement, affix my signature and give this to page Prakash.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly submitted to me by a number of homeowners from Mississauga, Hornby and Milton. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

I'm pleased to sign and to support this petition, and to ask page Thomas to carry it, and to welcome him to the Legislature.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM APPROPRIATION ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS

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

Bill 44, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 44, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm going to be splitting my time with the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. I think it's probably best to let him just go ahead.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The government House leader has moved second reading of Bill 44. We're going to let the parliamentary assistant just go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister as well. As you know, the business of this place is such that often you have to

multi-task and be in two places at once. I was a moment or so arriving back in my seat from another meeting.

It's a particular pleasure of mine today to rise and speak about the Ontario budget. We began our second mandate with a very strong statement this past fall when we introduced the Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review.

The Ontario budget 2008 continues to implement our economic plan with a broad approach to stimulate investment and address the challenges faced by many sectors.

Ontario's economy has been strong and resilient in recent years. We've had higher growth than forecasted, healthier consumer and business spending and strong job numbers, all of this despite a challenging external environment, including a weakening US economy, higher oil prices and a stronger Canadian dollar.

Our government's prudent approach to managing the province's finances continues to produce very positive results. We're on track to produce six consecutive balanced budgets, and our accumulated deficit-to-GDP ratio is forecast to improve to 16.2% by 2010-11 from 25.2% in 2003-04.

The McGuinty government is paying down debt, balancing the budget and investing in this province to build a better future for all Ontarians. We have the right plan to lead this province in good times and in difficult times. Our plan balances prudent financial management with vital investments that build on the strengths of this province, because we know that there isn't one simple answer to attract growth and investment to this province. It takes a comprehensive approach. Our quality of life is affected by many challenges and many opportunities.

The people of this province agree. The government has invested, and continues to invest, in tax cuts for business. However, simply lowering taxes is not enough to ensure that an economy can compete in a global marketplace.

According to a 2006 competitiveness study by KPMG, the combined total of all taxes imposed by all levels of government represents only 3% to 13% of location-sensitive costs. As KPMG notes, selecting the best site for a business operation requires balanced consideration of many factors, including business costs, business environment, personnel costs and quality-of-life issues.

That's why our government has a five-point plan that factors in all of these considerations, a plan that will attract investment and help grow the Ontario economy. Our plan invests in skills and knowledge, accelerates our investment in infrastructure, supports innovation, lowers business costs and strengthens key partnerships to maximize our future potential.

Attracting investment now and into the future requires an environment that supports business and people in all areas of their lives. We must continue to build upon the strengths that we have, because businesses are run by people, and our citizens want to live in a modern, well-run province. We want solid infrastructure, good public health care and quality education. Ontarians want a government that supports businesses and people.

We believe the key to success is building on the strengths of this province and supporting an environment where new expertise can grow. Our skilled and highly educated workforce is a key economic advantage. It enhances our position as a choice for global investment. Many high-growth industries, such as information technology, construction, energy and health care, face a shortage of skills as we speak today. I've been told that the "innovation triangle," the area in and around the Kitchener-Waterloo area, is in need of some 1,800 computer specialists. The challenge is to ensure that workers with the right skills are available when growing industries need them.

We saw this challenge as an opportunity to retrain unemployed workers to get high-paying jobs in expanding areas of our economy and to encourage young people to gain the skills our province will need in the years ahead. Our new \$1.5-billion skills-to-jobs action plan invests in infrastructure. It invests in student aid and supports new skills for new careers. The McGuinty government's goal is to have the greatest number of people possible working in the jobs that will strengthen Ontario's competitive advantage. This means ensuring all Ontarians have the opportunities and tools they need to succeed. Skills training programs will give Ontario's workforce the knowledge, the skills and the flexibility to compete with the world's best.

Our second-career strategy will help 20,000 unemployed workers who commit to a long-term training plan to make the transition to new careers and good jobs in areas of the economy that are undergoing growth.

We will expand the number of new apprentices. Our goal is to reach 32,500 registrants annually, an increase of 25% by 2011-12.

Because we know how important it is to be at the forefront of technology, the McGuinty government will invest \$45 million over three years to buy state-of-the-art equipment essential for technical training.

An estimated 70% of new jobs in the next decade will require post-secondary education. That's up from just 60% in the last 10 years. To further assist students, our government will help expand post-secondary student aid and programs. We're providing post-secondary grants to students with a new textbook and technology grant, and we'll help to lower the cost for every full-time college and university student.

To address the needs of students from rural and remote areas, we're offering a distance grant to help with transportation-related costs.

The McGuinty government knows how important it is to ensure everyone has opportunity and the assistance they need to achieve their goals. To help more students achieve, we're enhancing our successful Pathways to Education program and increasing the number of at-risk youth finishing high school and proceeding to post-secondary education or directly into the workforce.

1550

We realize how important modern infrastructure is to attract new students and provide the best possible facilities in which they can learn. The McGuinty government

is investing \$970 million over three years to build and repair facilities and to keep our colleges and universities at the cutting edge. We'll invest in the maintenance and renewal of university facilities and invest in new and expanded skills training centres, facilities and equipment.

The McGuinty government is making these strategic investments to keep Ontario competitive in this changing economy. Our five-point plan recognizes that we must be competitive in many areas and not focused on one area alone. We also acknowledge the importance of a competitive tax system and investing in business and in industry.

In fact, just three short months ago, we proposed a package of business tax relief worth \$1.1 billion over three years. In this budget, we're proposing a further \$750 million in business tax relief over four years, starting in 2007-08. We're proposing to eliminate the capital tax retroactive to January 1, 2007, for manufacturing and resource firms. This will entitle them to an additional \$190 million in rebates. The government proposes to extend the acceleration of the capital cost allowance for manufacturing and processing machinery and equipment investments made before 2012. This will save businesses some \$433 million over three years and encourage Ontario manufacturers, and forest companies in particular, to invest in new equipment. To help northern businesses, the business education tax rate cuts will be accelerated in the north, a total savings of some \$70 million during the next three years.

The McGuinty government recognizes that supporting business in Ontario will encourage growth and innovation. To encourage innovation, we're proposing a 10-year Ontario income tax exemption for new corporations that commercialize intellectual property developed by qualifying Canadian universities, colleges or research institutes. Our income tax exemption will help educational and research institutes create meaningful public-private partnerships. Small and medium-sized corporations employ some 60% of the private sector employees in Ontario. We'll continue to support an environment where they can flourish and grow Ontario's economy.

In this budget, the government is also proposing to enhance the Ontario innovation tax credit, which provides a 10% refundable tax credit to small and medium-sized corporations performing eligible scientific research and experimental development here in Ontario.

The government will also do its part to move with the times. It is our goal to lead all Canadian jurisdictions in efforts to measure and reduce regulatory burden. To help all businesses, the government will modernize Ontario's regulations, starting with an aggressive cap-and-trade initiative for government regulations so that when new regulations are enacted, others will be eliminated.

The McGuinty government is committed to making investments in key economic sectors.

We're helping Ontario's entertainment and creative cluster, a cornerstone of the province's new innovative economy. Ontario is home to some of North America's top entertainment and creative industries. Between 1999

and 2007, this sector alone created more than 80,000 net new jobs. To further help this growing sector, we're proposing to enhance the Ontario interactive digital media tax credit. We'll increase our funding for the festival attraction and support program.

The McGuinty government is also striving to make the tax system fairer and simpler for all Ontarians. We've asked the Ontario Ombudsman to look into property tax assessment in our province and provide recommendations to improve the system. One of the recommendations was to reverse the onus of proof on property assessment appeals. The government will introduce legislation that, if passed, would place the onus of proof on the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. to prove the accuracy of property assessments that are appealed to the Ontario Assessment Review Board. We also intend to implement changes to the appeal system designed to create a more streamlined and transparent appeal system. It would make the request-for-reconsideration program the first stage of appeal for property owners. The program is free of charge and encourages the sharing of information between MPAC and the property owner, and provides the owner the opportunity to resolve concerns directly with MPAC in a more informal setting. These and other improvements will help provide a more effective and fair system for Ontario property taxpayers.

The McGuinty government has consistently supported innovation in Ontario. We continue to do this in this budget, with nearly \$300 million in new innovation initiatives. Our government supports a culture of innovation through investments that encourage the start-up and growth of innovative firms.

We'll also provide our young people with the best skills and the best equipment to help them develop the ground-breaking ideas of tomorrow. The government is moving forward with our Next Generation of Jobs Fund, a five-year, \$1.15-billion strategy to help innovative companies keep pace with changes in the global economy and secure new knowledge-based jobs and investments in Ontario. The McGuinty government is investing \$250 million in the Ontario research fund for investment in research infrastructure at Ontario institutions.

To help our next generation of innovators, we're making investments in our post-secondary institutions. The University of Western Ontario will receive support for interdisciplinary research into chemicals and fuels made from agricultural resources. A new centre for research and innovation in the bioeconomy will be located in Thunder Bay to undertake frontier research in the next generation of higher-value forestry products. We're providing funding to the University of Guelph to support research, animal health and the Ontario Veterinary College. The Vineland Research and Innovation Centre will benefit from our continuing investment yet again this year.

These initiatives are so important because our young people are the future of this province, and the McGuinty government is determined to help them become the best-educated and most skilled workforce in this global market.

To encourage an innovative economy, we need to attract and keep the best and the brightest. Supporting strong communities and improving the quality of life for Ontarians are key to making our province a first choice for people and investment. The McGuinty government's investments in Ontario's infrastructure will build and improve our communities and attract businesses. Our initiatives will create jobs and will support a more productive, competitive and greener economy.

Our government has an ambitious infrastructure plan. We have begun our \$17.5-billion Move Ontario rapid transit action plan to expand public transit throughout the Golden Horseshoe, and we're making progress on our ReNew Ontario plan to improve our public infrastructure, create jobs and boost investment in Ontario.

In this budget, the McGuinty government is investing \$750 million, beginning in this fiscal year, to build new schools and repair school facilities.

Municipal roads and bridges are the backbone of Ontario's transportation network as they connect communities and provide access to economic opportunities. Our 2008 budget includes an additional \$1 billion to invest in municipal infrastructure. We're investing \$400 million in roads and bridges to help communities outside of Toronto. Our government is expanding public transit to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. The greater Toronto area and Hamilton will receive \$497 million in additional funding for public transit initiatives. They'll also benefit from improvements to the GO Transit infrastructure, including improvements at Union Station. We're also expanding GO Transit's bus rapid transit system to provide commuters in the Golden Horseshoe with more access to reliable public transit.

As you know, international trade is integral to Ontario's and Canada's economic prosperity. We are committed to ensuring efficient and uninterrupted trade with our partners, the United States, through Ontario's borders, its gateways and its trade corridors. The province is working closely with the federal government and our US partners on a strategy to develop a new border crossing and associated infrastructure at the crucial Windsor-Detroit gateway.

1600

We're also continuing to invest in our publicly funded health care system because it too is a competitive advantage. The government's plan is improving access, shortening wait times, promoting wellness, preventing illness and modernizing the health infrastructure. Our investments will provide more health care professionals, including \$500 million over three years to move towards our goal of 9,000 more nurses by 2011-12. We'll create 50 more family health teams in the same period and expand nurse practitioner-led clinics by providing \$38 million for that purpose over three years. The McGuinty government will continue to modernize our health infrastructure and proceed with a number of projects in 2008, including investments in e-health systems such as diagnostic imaging, drug and lab information, and a diabetes registry.

Our government continues to promote and support new business investment through partnerships with industry, other levels of government, other jurisdictions and our aboriginal peoples. These investments will create and protect jobs and forge new strategic partnerships. The McGuinty government will create Investment Ontario, Inc. to respond to intensifying global competition for new business investments and jobs. Investment Ontario, which is an independent agency, will provide businesses with fast and effective access to development services and the assistance they require. It will help our government become more strategic in targeting markets and sectors on which to focus investments and trade activities and improve Ontario's international recognition.

On March 26, Minister Duncan announced a new Centre of Excellence for Education in Financial Services. It will be the first of its kind in Ontario. About 350,000 people are employed in Ontario's financial sector, 213,000 of them in the Toronto area. Since 2003, employment in Ontario's financial services sector has increased by 12%. This new centre will build on this expertise by promoting innovation in technology, attracting more international students to Toronto and facilitating the export of Ontario financial educational services. It will work to maintain and support the scope and quality of our financial sector and drive economic success and competitiveness, and will help secure our advantage by creating a global hub for financial services education and training. This is the kind of strength our government is recognizing and supporting through these key investments.

The McGuinty government is building stronger relationships as well with the aboriginal peoples of our province. We're supporting Ontario's aboriginal peoples by providing \$600 million annually for initiatives to improve their quality of life. The Akwe:go program will receive an additional \$4 million to provide at-risk urban aboriginal children and their families with culturally relevant and community-based supports.

The government will invest \$1.5 million, to be matched by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, to establish a research chair in aboriginal and rural health at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs will continue to strengthen our partnerships in key areas.

We're helping students get international experience by starting a Global Edge program. Ontario students between the ages of 19 and 29 will benefit from the opportunities and challenges of conducting international business. To increase opportunities for Ontario business, we're investing in partnerships that will open global markets and encourage investment here in Ontario. We're also providing \$5 million to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce for a global expansion program to help companies increase their access to export markets.

The government recognizes how important farming is to both our economy and the environment. To that end, the McGuinty government is making a \$56-million investment over four years in our Pick Ontario Freshness

strategy and the Ontario farmers' market initiative to encourage Ontarians to buy locally.

Tourism in Ontario has suffered in the past few years from a number of external challenges. We're going to invest a further \$8 million over two years to conduct research on new tourism markets and inform Ontario's tourism strategy.

All of these initiatives will help move Ontario toward a more innovative, globally-competitive economy and help make our province better now and into the future.

In our fall economic statement, we began to implement our five-point economic plan. We continued with our recent budget. The plan will strengthen long-term productivity while stimulating growth in our economy.

We're making investments in people so that Ontario can compete. Our approach is a balanced one that is both prudent and pragmatic. The McGuinty government is making the investments today in training and infrastructure to create jobs now and improve productivity in the future.

Our innovation initiatives will ensure that Ontario continues to be on the cutting edge of new technology. They will move us toward a greener, more sustainable economy.

The choice to make investments in an economy is based on a broad range of factors including education, health care and taxes. Our plan strikes the right balance and strengthens those competitive advantages that make Ontario the best place in Canada to live, work and invest.

The resilience of our economy will continue into the future because of the people of Ontario—their skills, innovation and belief that everyone should have opportunity.

This plan affirms our belief that our province is only prosperous when quality public services are properly and adequately funded.

Ontarians have the tools and the will to make our province a great place for all of us, and that's what we intend to do.

The McGuinty government has the plan to build a stronger, better Ontario for our future, one that is prosperous and inclusive, sustainable and competitive, and where we constantly move forward and strive to achieve the Ontario we all want and deserve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm very pleased to respond to the member from Pickering–Scarborough East in his opening debate on the budget bill.

I see this budget as being anything but prudent. I see it as being a typical tax-and-spend Liberal budget. Some \$96.7 billion is the value of this budget—a tremendous increase from when this government came into power a few short years ago.

We know that there are economic storm clouds on the horizon. This government in the past year had an extra \$5 billion in extra revenue. Instead of saving that for a rainy day, which you'd think would be the prudent thing to

do—that seems to be their favourite word. Instead of saving it or keeping it for a rainy day, they blew it out the door.

They spent it in a way that is not necessarily fair. I look at the town of Gravenhurst, which has now applied four times for the MIII program or to others of various names and four times been turned down for this lottery style of project. They're applying for a very worthwhile project for road work. They spent a lot of money on the application and are turned down time after time.

What I would say that municipalities need is sustainable funding that they can depend and plan on, and not have to spend a lot of money to apply for and then get turned down. Sure, those that receive the money are happy, but more get turned down than actually receive it.

It's a question of priorities, too. The Burk's Falls Health Centre in my riding just closed its after-hours urgent care services at the end of March because they couldn't get \$107,000. This government had \$5 billion extra in the past year and yet they didn't have \$107,000 for the Burk's Falls Health Centre after-hours urgent care service.

Mr. Michael Prue: It's my privilege and pleasure to respond to the member from—that's changed now—

Interjection.

1610

Mr. Michael Prue: Pickering–Scarborough East. Okay. I'll learn all these new titles in short order.

Mr. Speaker, I listened intently. Of course, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, he has to, and did, wax eloquent on what he thinks his government is doing correctly. But I would suggest, notwithstanding what was said, that what was not said was far more important.

Very little was said or talked about on the job losses in the province of Ontario. Very little or nothing was talked about on the anti-poverty measures or their sufficiency. Very little was talked about, and nothing, I believe, was said, either in the budget or in the member's speech, on daycare and the advancing of daycare in Ontario. Very little or nothing was talked about on long-term care or whether what has been put forward is adequate. Very little or nothing was talked about on property tax reform, although I am pleased to say he did mention the word "impact," at least in one or two sentences. There was nothing about uploading the download that municipalities have asked for in his speech. There was very little or nothing about the environment, or about post-secondary education and the growing tax burden that students are facing.

So in all, although he was there to give the government position, that which was not contained within his speech was far more telling, to my mind, than that which was contained within the body of the speech. When I get an opportunity to speak myself, I will try to elaborate on some of these points. Although the member's job is to say what a good job the government is doing, I will be reminding them, over and over again, of those priorities

which they should have taken in this budget and which they failed to do.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: I want to address the matter of infrastructure, especially as it is dealt with through our budget for 2008. The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka mentioned that he didn't seem to have any funding going in his direction. I want to remind him that on the 24th of this month they will be opening a bridge project at Armour near Burk's Falls. I know his municipality shared in the \$400 million that went out for roads and bridges, as did all of my municipalities.

In the riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, we received \$21,319,103, all of that invested into Lambton, Kent and Middlesex. Not only does that create jobs for those people who work in that industry, but it also enabled my communities, which suffered a great deal when roads and bridges were downloaded to our municipalities—I was on municipal council at that time. In rural communities like mine, it becomes extremely onerous on the property taxpayers to have to maintain the number of kilometres of roads and bridges we have in rural ridings. So a thing such as the million dollars that went to North Middlesex is going to help them to deal with a street that is running through the back, that has drainage issues and has become a problem for them.

The winter, the kind of winter we've had this year, has certainly exaggerated some of those issues and made them even more urgent for our communities to deal with. So Lambton county, as a community and as a county itself, now has \$3 million to work with so that they can do the repair work they need to do. Warwick township has \$600,000. Chatham-Kent, which I share with our member Pat Hoy, received over \$6 million to do roads and bridges. All of it is very much needed and appreciated. I know my constituents are especially happy to have those dollars.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the comments made by the member for Pickering–Scarborough East. As I've been listening to the comments made by the members of the McGuinty government on the other side, I've been hearing lots of talk about spending here, spending there.

There's been an increase in spending of almost \$30 billion since the last budget. That's a lot of money. I think Ontarians can rightfully expect to have all of those services significantly increased and enhanced as a result of all of that spending. But I can certainly say that the residents of Durham region, particularly my riding of Whitby–Oshawa, are not seeing that.

There are so many areas that I could go on about, but I would just like to make a few comments about health care spending. I see that there was some money earmarked for population-based growth spending in terms of some of the GTA-905 areas, of which Whitby–Oshawa is a part. But I can say that we are so significantly underfunded compared to the provincial average that the money that's been allocated over the next three years is merely a drop in the bucket. Our population is growing so quickly that we are simply not able to keep up with the

health care demands of the residents of our region. This is having a significant impact on our community's health, not only in hospital care funding but in social services care funding for children with special needs, for other vulnerable adults, for our mental health population, which has significant mental health concerns. Something needs to be done to address this, because we have situations where our hospitals are now having to balance their budgets, and instead of receiving money that should be coming in as a result of this population-based growth funding, we are seeing hospitals having to cut back in their budgets. This is reaching a crisis proportion, particularly for some of the mental health beds that are being transferred from our community into the Toronto region. I ask the government to deal with this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Pickering–Scarborough East, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I want to extend my thanks to the members from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Beaches–East York, Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and Whitby–Oshawa for their comments and input.

I spoke, and the budget spoke, to Ontario's future prosperity. We spoke about the kinds of issues that members on various sides of the House at various times have seen as a priority and on which they have tried to find the right balance in that regard.

Both in the fall economic statement and the budget, we spoke to tax cuts for businesses, finding those targeted areas where businesses had asked us to cut taxes to meet their particular needs in the best and most efficient way possible within the capacities that we have.

We spoke in the budget to the needs of those who are vulnerable by our dental initiative. We spoke a year or so ago through the Ontario child benefit. We spoke to increases in social assistance and ODSP. We've set the stage for our poverty reduction activity through the minister responsible.

We spoke to infrastructure. The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex spoke clearly about our investments in infrastructure, particularly in respect to our partners, municipalities, as they rebuild their roads and bridges, as well as our partners in education, particularly post-secondary education areas, as they provide, through about \$1 billion of investment, the necessary facilities for young people to be able to take that next major step into a new economy for us.

We spoke to the issues of innovation, where we are going to be in the future, through the first-ever effort at a 10-year potential exemption from Ontario income tax for intellectual properties as a result of research not just in Ontario, but any Canadian university or college or institute, so that we can capture and keep that Canadian innovation right here in Ontario.

We have spoken, I think, eloquently in respect to what Ontarians want through this budget and addressed many of the concerns that this House has.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I understand there is unanimous consent to defer our lead in the official opposition.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a great day for me. They've agreed with me on something over there.

I'm not sure if that spirit of agreement is going to continue as I make my remarks today on the budget bill, because while the parliamentary assistant to the finance minister may paint a rosy picture, what we on the opposite side and certainly workers and taxpayers in this province see are two different things. It's not quite as rosy.

In fact, Ontario is now straddling the line of being a have-not province. Our fiscal capacity has decreased dramatically in Ontario, meaning we're close to being an equalization province. I grew up in Nova Scotia, a have-not province. I came to this province, Ontario, 10 years ago with \$200 in my pocket and a lot of hope—not a job. I got dropped off by a friend of my parents who was up visiting his daughter. I worked really hard, but I always remember, growing up, what Ontario meant to the rest of Canada. It was the economic engine of this country. People were proud that they could send their kids from where we were from, where I grew up, out west, which meant Ontario, not Alberta.

But the economic status in this province is worsening to the extent that we have gone from first to worst in economic growth. We're now on the verge of have-not status. After five years and five budgets, the Liberals have driven down Ontario's per capita fiscal capacity from roughly \$400 above the equalization line just four years ago to barely over \$84 today.

1620

Over 194,000 manufacturing jobs have left Ontario since 2004. Long gone are the days when kids like me, who graduated from university, left for the prosperous province. Today, because of the mismanagement of the crowd opposite, kids like me, when they're graduating from university, aren't coming here; they're leaving here. That's a sad state of affairs. A lot of times we'll stand over here and my colleague's husband will be criticized, or the former Premier of Ontario will be criticized, but I'll tell you something: When Mike Harris was the Premier of this province, Ontario was the beacon of hope for every other Canadian who wanted a job and who wanted a chance. I can speak from experience on that.

But again, I digress—194,000 Ontarians, people we represent in this chamber, have lost their jobs in the manufacturing sector alone since 2004. That's 64,000 since 2007 alone. That's a lot of people. That's more than anybody who votes for any of us in this place. Our unemployment rate—can you believe this? You can laugh about this, but the unemployment rate in the province of Ontario is higher now than it ever has been. It's higher than the national average for the first time in 30 years.

What they provided us with in this House two weeks ago was nothing more than trinkets, baubles and recycled federal investments. I'll tell you something: They're on

the wrong track. They could have reduced our corporate taxes. They could have reduced regulatory burdens. They could have provided tax relief for low-income families and middle-income families, but none of that was in the budget. It shocks me, because all I ever hear is this rhetoric from the crowd opposite that all it is is “mean Conservatives, mean Conservatives.” Oh, my gosh, we're all mean Conservatives because we're the ones who cut taxes. Not so, because guess what? It's the Conservatives, it's the Liberals, it's the New Democrats, it's the Saskatchewan Party that are cutting taxes and reducing the regulatory burden on small businesses right across this country from sea to sea to shining sea. They've all got it except for one guy: Mr. McGuinty. Do you know what he tells people this week, Mr. Speaker? “Don't panic. Steel yourself.” Steel yourselves. How do you do that? How do you look at a man who is middle aged, middle income, who's trying to send his kids to university, and you've got no plan for him. All you've got is about 30 billion bucks more in spending, but they're not seeing it at the supper table, I can tell you that. They're not seeing it when they sit down at the evening news. Do you know what? They're worried. I don't know if anyone else has ever been in this situation before. I don't know.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I've got a member here heckling me, and I'm not sure if he has ever had to see his father go on unemployment. I don't know if he has ever seen a child come home from school wondering if they're going to be able to go to university. I don't know, because quite honestly they don't seem to care over there.

But I'm going to tell you something. When you're looking at the provinces now that are the beacon of hope in this country because of Mr. McGuinty's inaction, they chose to cut some taxes. It's not a right-wing policy. Even their rudderless federal leader, Stéphane Dion, will acknowledge that. Instead, these guys chose big government, big spending and higher taxes, all this as we look at the indicators in the budget projections for 2008-09, which say there is going to be a slower economic period, that employment growth in Ontario is going to stall.

The province is projecting a surplus of \$600 million for 2007-08. They enjoyed a revenue windfall of \$5.1 billion in 2007-08, and relative to their budget plan, they spent 95% of that surplus. I ask you, if you have a surplus of \$5.1 billion, first of all wouldn't you just put it toward your debt, so that kids like my daughter and the daughter of my colleague Sylvia Jones from Dufferin-Caledon won't have to pay because Mr. McGuinty decided to throw money away? Wouldn't you think it would be a great idea to give it back to those hard-working families I talked about one minute ago, who are contemplating how they're going to put bread on the table, how they're going to send their kids to school? It's something that didn't even cross the minds of the crowd opposite.

I just want to go back to my community, the city of Ottawa.

Mr. Jeff Leal: How's that Senate appointment going?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I wish I could get a Senate appointment, but I'm still two years too early; I'm still under-age.

Mr. Jeff Leal: You'd be Canada's youngest senator.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Yeah, Canada's youngest senator. Well, thank you so much.

But in all seriousness, I have a lot of work to do here and so do the members of the official opposition—and apparently the third party too—because we seem to be the only ones that are the voice of reason in this province. Whether we agree or not, at least the New Democrats will stand up and fight for their people. At least we'll stand up and we'll fight for their people.

But you know what? They just want to buy people off. They just want to spend on these big luxury government buyouts and things like that; billion-dollar boondoggles and slush funds for the rich and famous. But we're talking about real things and real needs for real people. I know they don't like to hear that over there.

According to Statistics Canada—I go back to 194,000 people losing high-paying jobs in this province. Couple that loss of jobs that are high-paying and what that's done to our economy, and the fact that these guys are raising our taxes because they haven't met a tax they didn't like to hike and they haven't met a fee that they wouldn't like to pass over to us, whether it is a tire tax or a recycling fee or whatever they want to raise, how do working families pay for those losses in income? I'm completely shocked by what they've done.

Now look at my federal colleagues. I had the privilege of working very briefly in Canada's new government. What I like about their philosophy—and it's not a right-wing philosophy—is that to them Big Brother doesn't know best. In fact, what they do is go over the heads of the type of people opposite. They just decide to give tax credits or tax breaks to regular working families. Most Canadians are aware that they receive \$100 a month per child under the age of six to help with child care costs and raising a child.

They're still balancing their books and they're doing great things. Of course, the great things that we can expect right now from the federal government are some of the great things that we were privileged to have here in Ontario under Jim Flaherty, when he was our finance minister. I think he's doing a wonderful job.

The one thing though—I want to go back to the credibility, if you like, of this budget. We talked about the economy, the warning signs, where we're at. And still they put forward this budget. My favourite part of the budget is not one that benefits my riding. In fact, this budget doesn't benefit my riding at all if you look at it. Any Ontarian that says, "It's great that this guy McGuinty has taken my economy and put it in the gutter"—there's not one person in Nepean-Carleton that thinks that and there's not one person in Ontario that does. That's just news for them.

But my favourite part of their budget is this: \$500 million, the centrepiece of their budget—the centrepiece. They were so proud of their skills training. They were

going to give people second-career skills training. You should listen this because this is fun. It was federal money all along, federal money that—you've got to get this part too—they didn't even sign on the dotted line for.

First of all, Prime Minister Harper announced \$500 million in an Ontario trust for second-career training for Ontarians. Well, Dalton McGuinty didn't like that. He was actually quoted as saying something like, "That's not enough. I don't really like it." And then he doesn't only criticize it; he takes another month, puts it in his budget and gives it another name. Then we find out that this is federal money. We should all be applauding Stephen Harper and Jim Flaherty, but we're supposed to be applauding, for some reason, Dwight Duncan. But I didn't; I applauded Jim Flaherty and I applauded Stephen Harper.

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Then we find out the next day that they put this \$500 million in there for second-skills training, and they never even called the Prime Minister's office to say thanks for the money. They didn't even sign on the dotted line until the day after the budget was tabled. Talk about asleep at the switch or not caring or whatever it is, but Ontarians deserve better. They deserve better. They deserve a government that's going to take into account every single penny and spend it appropriately.

Instead, what we got was a budget that was based on, "Maybe I'll get my allowance next week if I'm a good boy, but I'm going to spend it anyway." No Ontarian does their budgeting that way. How dare the finance minister of Ontario do his budgeting that way, in addition to all of the excess spending—the \$30 billion, or 41% more of revenues that they've taken in; and \$28.2 billion, or 48% more in expenditures since 2003? You'd think at this point they'd at least cut back the hated health tax that's not going to health care in this province, that's going into potholes and general revenues.

They've created the greatest myth ever over there. They could be doing something for the low-income and middle-class residents of this province by giving them a break, giving them that health tax back. You didn't increase health care spending. In fact, I got another little ditty for you. Your health care spending on this budget is basically the exact same amount of money that was increased in federal transfers. No new money. You've got a centrepiece budget that's \$500 million from Stephen Harper that you repackaged. Then you've got your health care money, which is roughly equivalent to the health care transfers from Stephen Harper, and then you've got nothing else, really.

My favourite part of the budget, other than the \$500 million, is the no-strings-attached cheques that you're giving out to municipalities. In my municipality—even Mr. McNeely over here can attest to this—you shoved almost \$16 million to the municipality, and instead of using it for roads and bridges, they actually used it to shovel snow. It was a snow job; it was given to the snow.

They're giving conditions now, but they didn't. The figure was \$14.9 million. Everyone here knows I have

been lobbying for a bridge, the Strandherd-Armstrong bridge, which was named as a priority for the city of Ottawa—a \$35-million bridge. The member opposite used to actually represent the riding there and didn't get the bridge. So I've been fighting for it, and he's telling me now I'm not going to get it, I guess because I've been effective at exposing their budget for what it really is today. But in any event, it's a \$35-million bridge. This crowd opposite—\$14 million; that's all they've given the city of Ottawa. The second-largest city in the province of Ontario, and we rate second-class status.

I can give you a little bit more: The \$14.9 million was used for snow shovelling, not for infrastructure. If that's not the worst thing possible, here is a comparative. I don't know how any member from the city of Ottawa who sits in the government could be proud of this budget when we found out that between 2004 and 2006 three vital local services—here is a comparative. For transit, the Liberals gave the city of Toronto \$246.06 per household, while Ottawa—don't be shocked—only received \$54.44. For general government services, Toronto cashed in with \$191.97 per household from the province, from Mr. McGuinty's Liberals. Do you want to know what Ottawa got? Ottawa got \$4.44. For public health and ambulance services, Toronto got \$511.86 per household, compared to \$370 for Ottawa. This is per household.

Our taxes in the city of Ottawa are 7.5% higher than they are in Toronto because this Liberal government, its Premier, its two cabinet ministers and two other silent backbenchers have not stood up for this city. I'll tell you something: That's \$519.75 less for Ottawa households than the city of Toronto. That's what we like to call "the McGuinty gap." We call it the McGuinty gap in Ottawa.

Mr. Bill Murdoch: Did London get any money?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I don't know about London, because we've got a couple of members over there who I think are still talking about some of the mismanagement there. I see that we've gotten under their skin.

I just have one final topic to talk about while we're here and I still have time on the clock. It's about agriculture in rural Ontario. I'm very proud to be a representative from the city of Ottawa, Canada's largest agricultural city and probably one of the largest agricultural cities in all of the world. My riding is a suburban-rural split. While farmers are struggling to make ends meet, the Liberals didn't put anything in here for them; nothing to help them in 2008-09. In fact, most of the investments for our farmers and for our agricultural sector are in this fiscal year.

I'll share with you the minor initiatives: \$56 million over four years for Pick Ontario Freshness and the Ontario farmers' market initiative; \$7.5 million this year and next for agricultural chemical fuels research at the University of Western Ontario; \$56 million in 2007-08 for the Ontario Veterinary College; and \$12.5 million in 2007-08 for the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. The proposal to expand the land transfer exemption for transfers of the family farm to include transfers from family farm corporations amounts to a paltry \$1 million across the province.

The Liberals have neglected rural Ontario since 2003, but they did a spectacular job on it in 2008. It has not changed anything. Their plan to help our struggling rural communities is nothing more than a series of band-aid initiatives: \$30 million over the next four years for broadband in southern Ontario; a \$30-million increase in funding over the next four years for RED programs; and work towards the promised eastern Ontario development fund is long delayed. I can tell you something: There is a lot of dismay on this side with respect to the lack of commitment to the Eastern Ontario Development Corp.

I know I've got them all excited over there and I'm very happy about that, and I look forward to their questions and comments. But I remind them to put their partisan rhetoric aside for one moment, think about what's best for this province and think about the province we can be, not what they have made it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Prue: It's always a privilege to comment on my learned colleague here from Nepean-Carleton. What may not be contained within the four walls of her argument certainly is contained in the enthusiasm with which she delivers. I would like to commend her for what she had to say because as a New Democrat, although I cannot always agree with everything that my colleagues from the official opposition have to state, the reality is that they state it forcefully and genuinely believe in what they say.

I was, though, drawn like a trout to the fly when the statement was made about Mike Harris and what he did for this province. I must, with the greatest of respect for my colleague, tell her that I cannot and do not support the statement that he did great things for this province. I lived through all of that as a municipal councillor and as a mayor. I lived through the amalgamations; I lived through the loss of jobs; I lived through what happened in Toronto; I lived through people being forced to live on 21% less money, hatred of the poor and all the other things that I think are part of that legacy. While I would not deny that he often did what he said he was going to do, what he did was not always in the best interests of this province.

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I would like my friend to keep up her strong statements, but I would like her to temper some of those statements with the reality of what did happen in the Harris years, what did happen to our hospitals, what did happen to our water inspectors, what did happen to the forced amalgamation of the cities which ended up costing enormous amounts of money, because those too are part of that heritage. I think she needs to remember that as well.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just wanted to thank the member for Nepean-Carleton and the member for Beaches-East York. I just want to add a couple of comments to this debate on the budget measures bill, Bill 44.

I join my friend and colleague from the city of Toronto council in his comments about the Mike Harris government because we both sat on the city of Toronto

council and we remember those amalgamation headaches that we put up with. We all know that amalgamation has not worked. It has ended up costing the taxpayers of Toronto a whole lot more. Many of us who were on that council struggled to make the city work and I think they're still struggling.

I want to speak about this budget and how it affects my own riding of Scarborough–Rouge River. Let me tell you that in this budget the government has made a commitment to invest in families and the quality of life of the residents in my riding.

We're going to benefit from the \$135 million being invested over three years for dental care for low-income families. There are a lot of families in my riding that will benefit from this program.

The student nutrition program: A lot of my schools are going to benefit from that because there are a lot of young people in my neighbourhood who do come to school some days without breakfast. Our breakfast programs will be augmented and we will definitely improve those children's learning ability. I welcome that.

The next one that is really important to my riding is what this government has decided to do with property tax for seniors. Seniors with a combined income of \$60,000 or a single income of \$50,000 will see their tax reduced by \$250 in the year 2009 and the following year by \$500. That is a direct benefit on their income tax return, and I can tell you, seniors in—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: I'm so pleased to hear my colleague Mrs. McLeod make the case for Ottawa because we have been making the case for Ottawa for I don't know how long with this government. It's absolutely embarrassing in Ottawa to open the press and find out how well the city of Toronto has been treated and then turn to the column where we find out what we have received from the government of Ontario. In this last budget, Ottawa got far less than their population would deem from the municipal grants. I think we got something like \$14 million, when we're the second-largest city in all of Ontario.

The McGuinty gap, as my colleague mentioned, is unbelievable. We pay higher property taxes and we get less money from the government of Ontario year after year, ever since Dalton McGuinty became the Premier. And the guy comes from the city of Ottawa. Can you believe it? I can't believe it.

One other item I wanted to mention: The long-term debt of this province has been increased by \$5.5 billion this year. You put the debt up by \$5.5 billion, even though you had a great surplus to work with. That's costing the taxpayer each year, from now on into the future, over \$300 million a year. That's what you're adding to the mortgage this year, folks. Be proud of it. You're not building an infrastructure with today's money; you're building an infrastructure with our kids' money and our grandkids' money in the future. You're putting a tax on them forever. You're adding \$5.5 billion to the debt this year. Be ashamed of yourselves.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I appreciate the opportunity to respond. As will come as no surprise, my take on this year's budget is a little bit different than our friend's across the aisle from Nepean–Carleton. I want to thank her, however, for her comments and perhaps even commend her seatmate for keeping a straight face through that 20-minute diatribe.

I do want to remind her, though, about one little piece in particular that was contained in that budget, the business education tax reductions that we have incorporated in that budget that are very significant for northern Ontario. The reason I want to dwell on that part a little bit is because we love to hear from the Conservative Party—historically in the province and even still, recently—that they're the people who take care of your pocketbook, they're the ones who know how to manage your taxes and they're the ones who have the fiscal wherewithal to take care of things in the province.

When we did our little exchange of services in 1997 or so under the Mike Harris government, when the province of Ontario took over responsibility for the business education tax rates in this province and the exchange of services, the whole revenue-neutral exchange of services that we all remember, what they adopted was a hodge-podge of different business education tax rates across this province. The ones in Thunder Bay and northern Ontario were the highest of any place in the entire province. The average rate in the province was about 1.6; in northern Ontario and in Thunder Bay, it was about 3-point-something. In our budget, we had originally committed, previously, to a seven-year phase-in, where they would come down to the provincial average. We've now accelerated that to a three-year phase-in. What that means in the pockets of northern Ontario businesses is \$25 million more staying in their pockets.

The Conservative government of Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, and those people across the aisle who like to tell you that they know how to fiscally manage this province, ignored the businesses of northern Ontario for six or seven years while they had an opportunity to address this issue. We're putting \$25 million back in the pockets of businesses in northern Ontario, and while there's a lot more I can talk about, that piece I'm especially proud of.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Nepean–Carleton, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: To the Liberals, I want to congratulate you. It was under your watch that we went from first in economic growth to worst, that we went from over \$400 above the equalization line to just \$84 above the equalization line. You guys can claim credit for being the government whose unemployment rate, for the first time in 30 years, is higher than the national average. If you're proud of that, folks, give yourselves a pat on the back, because I'll tell you something: It is you people, not us, who have driven away 194,000 manufacturing jobs from this province, 64,000 of them last year alone.

I don't know how they can look at themselves in the mirror after what they have done to the economy of this

province and then stand there behind their Premier as he says, "Steel yourselves, people. Don't panic. It's going to be okay." You're not going to have a job, but we're going to grow bureaucracy in the province.

But I'll tell you something: They could have done something. They could have reduced corporate taxes, reduced the regulatory burdens on small businesses—like those I met with in my riding all day last Friday and all day last Monday—provided tax relief for the middle class. Wouldn't that be an option? I still get the rhetoric that tax cuts are right-wing policies, and I am going to tell you something. They're doing it elsewhere. Conservatives, Liberals, New Democrats—right across this province, right across this country—believe that you have to help small independent businesses; you've got to help the middle class.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I'll try to go on in the same vein. I don't know whether that is possible, though.

We are here to debate Bill 44, Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act. If people are watching on the television, they are probably wondering, "Haven't we heard all of this debate before in terms of the budget?" I just want to advise them that this is a companion piece, and much of what was said before will be said again. I am sure, in subsequent bills that come forward under the budget act, more of the same will be said in the coming weeks and months.

When I was in the lock-up, as some of us were—on the day that the budget was delivered, anyone who wanted to see it in advance was required to go to a lock-up. I went there with some of our staff and some people from outside agencies. My leader Howard Hampton and I were in the lock-up for a number of hours and had an opportunity to look at what was contained within that very large budget book, so that when we came back to this House under escort and were plunked down in our seats, we had a pretty good idea of what the minister was going to say when he said it.

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When I was in that budget lock-up, many people were looking at the various programs, the costs, the cuts, and what was going to change in this ministry or that ministry. But to me, the telling issue of the whole budget was something that not many people have talked about so far, to date. That was what was contained within the fiscal framework. The fiscal framework sets out where the government gets its money, where it has got it in the past year, and where it is likely to get it in the coming budget cycle.

The fiscal framework said a couple of things. Number one, it said that in 2007-08 the government had planned for \$91.5 billion in revenue, and in fact actually had \$96.6 billion in revenue. So the government was very lucky that more money came in than they had anticipated.

The reason I say it was lucky is because it didn't all come from one source, or it wasn't planned. They got about \$1 billion extra from ordinary individual taxpayers

like all of us, they got about \$2 billion from corporate taxation because the economy was booming and corporate taxes were paying for more, and they got about \$700 million from the federal transfer payments—so money that they had not anticipated at the start of the year, but which had flowed through. Those were the two or three big chunks where that \$5.1 billion came from. So I think the government was very lucky in terms of this last budget cycle, where the money came from and unanticipated revenues.

Then I looked from that point to what was coming next, the planned revenues for 2008-09. The planned revenues for 2008-09 are set at \$97 billion, or about a 0.3% increase over what the government received last year.

I looked in terms of the budget to see what they said about a number of factors, including the number of workers, and see that they are forecasting that the unemployment rate will increase from 6.4% last year to 6.6%, on average, this year.

Those figures were contained within the four walls of the budget only a couple of weeks ago. And in those couple of weeks, what has happened? We have seen that job declines have been much more rapid than forecast. We have seen in the last month alone that there has been a net decline in jobs for the first time in a long time. This isn't just the loss of manufacturing jobs; this is the combination of the loss of manufacturing jobs and the increase in service sector or other jobs which most governments always want to talk about. There has been a net decline in the last month of about 25,000 jobs. That should be contrasted with one of the key government announcements within the budget, that they were going to look after some 20,000 people with new training, while in the last month alone more people lost their jobs than actually will be retrained.

What is more troubling to me is the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate was forecast to go only to 6.6%, on average, over the entire year. We know what is happening with the economy south of the border. One only has to go down to the United States to see all of the impact of Bear Stearns. You only have to go down to the United States to see the impact of the sub-prime mortgages, the number of homes that are boarded up and the number of homes that are for sale in large metropolitan areas. It is enormous, and the loss of jobs taking place in that country is absolutely huge. You have to look at that in terms of where we are already—the forecast of 6.6% unemployment, which we have already passed; we're at 6.7% this month—and I would suggest to everyone that that forecast for the coming year is very rosy indeed.

Now, I hope I am wrong. We all hope that the stock markets rebound, that confidence comes back, that Bear Stearns sells for more than the two bucks that it sold for, or the \$10 they now say it's worth. We all hope that the American economy and our own improve; everybody hopes that's going to happen. But unfortunately, what we are seeing out there is not that case.

By coincidence, yesterday I was walking through the mall and saw one of my old friends walking towards me.

We gave each other a big hug, although she is a Liberal. Her name is Gail Nyberg. Gail Nyberg was quoted by the Premier, by the finance minister and by several people last week as saying what a wonderful job the government is doing. I was not surprised that a Liberal Party member would say that kind of thing and that Gail Nyberg would offer her support to whatever the government was doing. I chastised her a little for her statement that she had to make. She good-naturedly shot back, "Well, that's what Liberals do." We got into a discussion about where she saw the poverty issues, because that's what she was quoted on. She is the head, after all, of the Daily Bread Food Bank here in Toronto. She was talking about the whole poverty agenda and what she expected. I asked her if she was not disappointed in what the government had to say on poverty issues; that surely they were far too meagre to have satisfied her or her organization. She said no, she had been told to expect next to nothing, and they got next to nothing. But next year is the big year for poverty, she said. Next year is the year that all of these things that the government promised are finally going to come forward.

I asked her about the state of the economy, and we continued to talk about the state of the economy and whether she could realistically expect that our economy was going to grow to allow any of this to happen. All she could say, and I think with complete honesty, was, "It looks really bad." She hoped against hope that it was wrong, but if the economy does continue to decline, there may not be anything for the poor. I walked away; we're friends still. She has a different viewpoint on where all of this is going.

It is the decline in the economy next year that leads to what I'm going to say for the balance of my time, and that is what was missing in this budget that should have been there, because many economists are telling us now that this budget was the last of the good-times budgets. This is the last of the budgets where things could and should have been delivered, and the golden opportunity was missed in so many key sectors in this budget for improving what the people of Ontario really need.

The first thing I'd like to start with is the manufacturing and resource jobs. Very little was contained within this budget, and some of what is talked about here today came out in the fall financial statement back last November following the election, when the Minister of Finance stood in the House and talked in his rosy projections of where things were going to go and who was going to get what tax cuts or not get the tax cuts. But the reality is that within this budget very little was done. From this budget there was a total of \$37 million in tax cuts. That's all there was—\$37 million, these much-vaunted tax cuts. But what was missing that New Democrats believe in is the manufacturing investment tax credit, for the people of Ontario to get an opportunity for a tax credit in manufacturing. Now, there are some jobs becoming available—not in the resources sector; certainly not—in the service sector. There are some jobs still being created in the service sector. There are some jobs still being created in high tech. There are some jobs still

being created in banking and, of course, in government. But where there are not jobs is in the underpinning strength of the province of Ontario: There have not been jobs created in the manufacturing sector. We believe that the government missed a golden opportunity. They handed out \$36 million in tax credits, largely to companies that don't need them. When I ask people—sure, you want tax credits for companies, and we all want tax credits for companies, but you have to be selective in how you give them. The tax credits that have been given out both in the fall financial statement and here go to all companies—all companies. They're modest, but they go to all companies. When I remind people that the banks with the much-hated ATM machines get lots of those tax credits; big oil companies that are gouging me at the station every time I go to fill up are getting some of those tax credits; when I remind people that insurance companies, which this year are all profitable and showing profits in the double digits, are all getting money from these tax credits, people wonder whether or not this was an appropriate venue. I would suggest it was not, because what we have seen and experienced from those tax credits that are given federally to the Maritimes is that they are starting to show some promise in the creation of jobs and the keeping of jobs in those locations.

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What we're seeing in Manitoba is that the creation of that tax credit is allowing companies to not lay off workers and that the unemployment rate is certainly not anywhere near what it is here in Ontario. What is showing in Quebec is that it has been earmarked in such a successful way in the last couple of weeks since they came on board that areas with high unemployment rates are starting to really see an opportunity to get those jobs back. I think that's all missing here.

I take that as the first sort of problem, that the whole job sector has been woefully done wrong by very modest tax cuts—done wrong because they have not been targeted to protect and enhance the manufacturing sector of the province, which, after all, in the last 50 years has provided probably one of the highest standards of living in the world, which we are seeing rapidly decline, only to be replaced oftentimes by much poorer types of work.

I went on to look at what else was in the budget. We came across the whole area of long-term care. I remember the last election. I remember what the Liberals talked about, not only in the last election but the one before that, having a revolution in long-term care. We looked in there and saw that there was some money, some \$278 million over three years for various programs, \$93 million of that for the fiscal year 2008-09. But one only had to start to do the math and listen to the people who are there in the long-term-care homes, the people who provide the service, even the people who pay them, to understand what that is going to do.

The Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors, OANHSS, called for \$586 million in increased funding for long-term care in order to guarantee a minimum average of three hours of care per resident per day—\$350 million specifically for nursing

and personal care. They didn't get it; they got half of that. That has left Ontario near the bottom of the ranks of how we care for our elderly; how we care for those who are frail; how we care for those who have cognitive disabilities, who have Alzheimer's disease; how we care for people who have helped to build this province and some of whom fought for Canada in times of war. We treat them quite abysmally in this province. This government promised to do something about it and only took a half-hearted measure.

When we did the mathematics and tried to figure out what was happening, the reality is that the increase which \$586 million would have brought us—up to three hours to make Ontario in the average range—was not there. In fact, all that was there was enough money to add about six minutes of personal care a day.

I don't know about you, but I've had many opportunities to go into the long-term-care homes, many opportunities to see my constituents, and an opportunity until she died to visit my mother-in-law. She was there in that long-term-care home, and the people there struggled against all odds to provide the kind of care that I only wish we could have given in our own home. But they loved her and looked after her. They did the very best they could with minimal resources. I believe that she deserved more dignity, and I believe that the people who live there deserve more dignity. They certainly did not get it from this budget.

I have to say I'm very disappointed. The government can talk all it wants about how much money they spent, but it wasn't enough. It wasn't enough for our mothers, our fathers, our grandmothers, our grandfathers—the people who built this country, the people who fought for it. It simply was not enough. If we want to be at the top of the pack, if we want to be like Saskatchewan or Manitoba, if we want to provide 3.5 hours of care, it's going to cost a billion dollars, not the amount this government has put forward.

Obviously, they've said in the budget that our seniors are not, perhaps, as important as some other aspects of what money is to be spent.

So I then looked at poverty. Oh, there was a big ballyhoo. I read the next day in the paper about a 2% increase to ODSP rates and a 2% increase to Ontario Works, knowing full well that that was not going to be the case because the amount of money that had been budgeted was only \$36 million for this year and \$86 million for next. The question had to be asked, and I asked the question of the finance minister in this House: "When are you going to institute this huge 2% increase to our poorest citizens?" I got back the answer I expected: "It's going to be later in the fall, perhaps in the last quarter of the budget year"—so that the government doesn't have to spend that money but can try to pretend and look good to all those who are out there watching on TV that there's this huge 2% increase to our poorest citizens.

It is a shame. It is a shame what happened back in 1995. It is a shame that people who lived below the

poverty line had 21% of their monies taken away from them. It is an absolute disgrace that over all these years they have never again had, as poor as they were, the level of living where they were in 1995.

Since 1995, as the Minister of Community and Social Services said again today when asked a question by one of her colleagues, there has been a 9% increase. I would like to remind the House again how that 9% is looked at: 3% in the first budget, which took place in 2004; 0% in the next year; 2%, which was only for the latter half of the year, in the third budget; 2%, which was only for the last quarter, in the fourth budget; and 2%, which is only for the last quarter, in this budget. That's how the 9% is arrived at. That's where the numbers come from. But the reality is that from 2003 to 2009, when the money is actually delivered from this budget, there will have been something in the effect of about an 11% increase in inflation, so that the people, by the time they get this last amount of money, will actually fiscally be worse off under the Liberal government than they were in the deepest, darkest days of Mike Harris. I don't know how to put it any more succinctly than that.

I started to ask questions about the rates. I am particularly concerned about the children, as I believe all members should be, but the big concern for me is all of those people, Ontarians with disabilities—all of the people who cannot work. They all wish they could work, but they cannot work. They cannot work because of age; they cannot work because of infirmity; they cannot work because they have doctors' letters saying they cannot, they have medical conditions; they cannot work because they have psychiatric or psychological problems. They cannot work, and every single one of them has gone through hoops, through doctors and government doctors, to be certified that they cannot work. We are keeping them in eternal poverty because the amounts of money that are given each and every year do not match inflation, and in the end they tend to be worse off.

The government answers, "Oh, we have a thing for that. We've raised the minimum wage." I started to laugh. You can raise the minimum wage to \$100 an hour. These people cannot work, and I don't know why the government hasn't cottoned on to this. A raise in the minimum wage, which I will deal with in a minute, does not affect people on ODSP and people on general Ontario Works. They do not and cannot work, so it doesn't matter.

The government's second answer to this is, "Look at all the wonderful programs we are giving to young people to help them stay in school, and the new program for youth" and this and that. But if one goes back and looks especially at ODSP, if one goes back and looks at Ontarians with disabilities, and the minister will confirm this—I know, because she is listening intently; she will confirm that 92% of the people on ODSP have no dependent children. So it doesn't matter what the government does in terms of children and child benefits and this program and that program and putting more money in the schools and giving an additional dollar a week for apples

or whatever. It doesn't matter. Those people—92% of them on ODSP; 200,000 people in this province—are worse off today. No government program has affected them at all. When they get a raise, it is so tiny and delivered so late in the year that they must despair. I certainly know that when they come to see me in my office, they are in despair.

1710

They desperately look for housing. If they're lucky enough to find assisted housing, they grab it. They desperately ask where they can get additional food, and we have to, unfortunately, direct them to food banks. They desperately look to where they can get any kind of service at all, such as a pass on the TTC in Toronto. They desperately look for any kind of assistance at all. They come with tears in their eyes. Some of them are very proud. There's nothing they can do.

Some of those people have been born with developmental disabilities. God bless the people who work with them. They go out there day in and day out and try to find things for adults with developmental disabilities to do, something meaningful. There are some wonderful groups where the people work part-time, where they deliver sandwiches, where they—I'm just trying to think of all of the ones that I see around. They hire them. But where these developmentally disabled adults have been able to scratch out a meagre existence—sometimes with a few dollars, sometimes at minimum wage, sometimes with less than minimum wage—payments are clawed back. It's clawed back.

I was hoping in this budget to see something that would allow them to keep some of that money, but there was nothing in this budget that did that. I have to say how disappointed I am that this government sees people with very real disabilities trying their very best to go out there and find a part-time job, even if it's only a few hours a week, and the government claws it back. Now, they do let them keep a couple of dollars; I'm not going to say they don't let them keep some. But they don't let them keep enough to allow them to go up to the poverty level. That's all we are asking: Let them go up to the poverty level. That's what we ask of the \$10 minimum wage, that's what we ask for ODSP recipients, and that is certainly what we ask for the children who have, I guess, the misfortune of being born into families where their parents cannot or do not work.

None of that is here. None of it is here at all. When it is here, it's 2011, or 2014, or, "Wait till it's all folded in," or, "Wait until the \$10.25 comes in three years from now." I want you to know what that means to someone who's struggling today. If we gave them \$10 an hour now, their lives would be changed immeasurably. That would work out to about \$50 a week more than they're getting—the \$8.75. That would mean about \$2,600 a year more than they're getting now and it would actually bring them very close to the poverty line. I don't think that's unreasonable. I don't think it's fair to have them wait. I don't think the arguments the government has made around this budget are appropriate.

The national child benefit clawback: This is a great one. I've asked the minister this question so many times that she's got it written down. I'm sure she pulls it out of the drawer when I start to ask the question: all the things that are happening and how the government's new plan is going to do away with that.

Just this week, we had a group come in from Campaign 2000. They have written this so succinctly that I would like to read out what they have to say about this new government plan. They have set it down in a couple of paragraphs which should explain to the entire world that this new Ontario child benefit plan is not going to help the poorest of the poor, or those children who have the unmitigated gall of growing up in a family whose parents cannot work.

It says, "This important new program will assist many Ontario children. But a fundamental unfairness is being built into the system—the children of parents who receive social assistance will not receive the full value of the OCB. When the monthly OCB starts in July 2008, social assistance rates will be reduced, effectively clawing back a portion of the OCB.

"By the time the full benefit is paid out in 2011, children whose parents receive social assistance will get a net benefit of only \$50/month/child, not the full \$92, because OW and ODSP rates will decrease as the OCB increases. In addition, after July 2008, the winter clothing and back-to-school allowances will be rolled into the OCB. These small annual allowances help families with the cost of new clothes and school supplies for their growing children, and help low-income children have a fair chance at school. Incorporating them into the monthly payment—when incomes are already so low—will mean forcing families to decide between paying for food and buying their child a warm winter coat.

"This is unacceptable. All low-income children, regardless of the source of their parents' income, should receive the full value of the Ontario child benefit. 2011 is a long time to make low-income children wait for improvements in their families' incomes. The roll-out of the OCB must be accelerated to allow all low-income families to better cope with the costs of raising children."

I had hoped for something good in this budget about welfare. I had hoped for something in this budget in terms of wages for those who live below the poverty line. I had hoped for so much, because the Premier campaigned on this during the last election. Perhaps I did not have the benefit of Gail Nyberg, knowing that nothing was expected in this budget and that it's all going to come next year if the economy continues to be buoyant.

But the year it's going to take to get us to the next budget is a long time for the poor, and it's a long time especially for a child. It's a long time for that child to have to sit there in old clothes, it's a long time to be hungry and it's a long time to have to go to school without the proper supplies that he or she would have had before this government's budget. I only have to say, I am profoundly disappointed that anyone on the government side stands up and says that this is a good thing.

I went to look at provincially mandated social programs and the downloading of these provincial programs on the municipalities. I had hoped that something would be done on this. Certainly in the last McGuinty government, the one before the last election, there were some very modest programs designed to reduce the provincially mandated programs from the municipalities. There was a little bit about land ambulance, there was a little bit about ordinary ambulance, there was some talk about ODSP rates and general welfare rates, but I didn't see anything new in this budget. I didn't see anything at all that is designed to help the municipalities.

Let me tell you, if the economy does start to go down, and if it goes down rapidly, the cost to municipalities, which are ill-equipped to pay for social programs, will be enormous. I do know that the city of Toronto, the place from whence I come, was able to pay its last year's budget, was able to make ends meet and balance it out at the end, because they virtually depleted the social welfare budget. They are hoping against hope that the government takes it back, and if the government cannot take it back fast enough, there is virtually no money for the hundreds or thousands of people who will be reliant upon social welfare in the coming year. There was nothing much for municipalities.

So I went on to look at other things. What was there that everybody could be happy about?

Mr. Khalil Ramal: One billion dollars.

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm hearing "\$1 billion" over here, but I'm not sure what—

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Check it out.

Mr. Michael Prue: "Check it out," he says. I have checked it out; it's been nothing but checking it out for the last two weeks.

Municipal infrastructure funding—I thought maybe there's some money here. I listened that there might be some money. There was some talk of \$1 billion in new funding for municipal infrastructure; \$400 million of that only was new money for bridges and roads outside of Toronto, and the finance department could not or has not to date detailed how much of it will be allocated to the north. They stated it would be announced shortly. This was as of budget day, and I'm not sure, having heard Mr. Mauro speak about this, whether or not that's what he was talking about, that the money was finally earmarked for northern development. But the analysis here is that what has been given is very low in terms of the actual need.

1720

I'm not surprised that municipalities are all lining up to say, "Hurray, we got some more money." I remember being a municipal politician. I remember every time a government turned around and said, "We're going to cost-share with you on this infrastructure," or "We're going to cost-share with the province of Ontario and here's a million dollars. What are you going to do with it?" I remember what we did in East York: We built a community centre. The community centre is still there. It was a good thing. We cost-shared. One third came from

us, one third came from the province of Ontario, one third came from the federal government, and we all said nice things about the various governments. We took the money and we were happy. I'm not surprised that this is what's happening here.

But I think the municipalities were all very upset to learn that they had been brought down to this Legislature, that they had been paraded around with the Minister of Finance the week before, that they had said gushy things about how glad they were to get their hands on some new money—I'm talking specifically about Bill 35, which will be debated tonight, I believe—that they were all told that if there was an increase in money above \$800 million, then they were all going to get it. So they were all rubbing their hands in glee, expecting that there were going to be great sums of money. But when you look at the budget, the budget forecast is only for \$600 million. That means we're not going to get to the \$800-million figure. It means that there will be no money for municipalities.

When the finance minister was asked here to reconcile his two bills, his two finance bills, one promising them all the excess above \$800 million, and the actual budget saying there's only \$600 million, so there is no excess, his simple answer was, "We put the money into infrastructure already." The money that was given on one day was taken away on another. The money that's given here now is a pittance in comparison to what is actually needed. The money that is here will not build the crumbling infrastructure, which is estimated at \$65 billion across the width and breadth of this province. I have to say again we were very disappointed on behalf of municipalities in what was here.

I went on to health. Now, I have the great happiness of being on the finance committee. We travelled from one end of this province to another over eight cold and blizzard days in the month of January, hearing from 175 deputations, looking at 100 written submissions, asking people what they wanted. Some of the strongest and most poignant of statements were made around building community health centres and how they would help hugely in communities where there were not enough doctors, how they would help hugely in places where there was poverty and where there was a lack of access. They talked hugely about helping our First Nations peoples.

I opened up the budget and there wasn't one cent—not one cent—for new community health centres or aboriginal health access centres. This would have been a relatively small investment for the government to have made. Twenty new community health centres would have cost the government a very small amount: about \$5.5 million. It would have given huge access to aboriginal communities. It would have given huge access to northern communities or to those communities that live in poverty. But there was nothing here in the budget. If there was any place, in my view, that health dollars could be spent more wisely, it certainly hasn't been pointed out to me.

I understand the needs. I understand that getting primary care, getting excellent care with a nurse practitioner, perhaps a psychologist, perhaps a chiropractor all

under one roof is what most communities would want—and it is not there. If any of my colleagues have had an opportunity, and I know some have, to travel throughout northern Ontario, to travel to some of the poorest communities in our country, and in fact to some of the poorest communities in our hemisphere, they would know how desperately this is needed. When you go to the nursing station in a place like Attawapiskat or Peawanuck, in an isolated community that has no roads, that is all there is there. We should want for our First Nations people what we have for ourselves. There was not a penny in there for that, or a penny for all of the communities that are crying out for a community health centre.

I went on to housing. I thought, “Surely to God there’s going to be something for housing.” What was in there? Almost nothing. There was \$100 million to repair existing housing. One can say, “That’s good,” except in Toronto alone they need \$300 million this year and every year for a number of years to get them up to code. You have to remember that this was a downloaded service of the Harris government that the McGuinty government has had for five years and has done virtually nothing with. The state of repair has decayed over each and every one of those five years to where it is now in an atrocious and abominable state. I challenge any of the members to go into those housing places, to go into Jane-Finch, to go into Regent Park, to go into all of those places where people live—Lawrence Heights—and look at the state of the infrastructure.

In fact, for I don’t know how many years running, the city of Toronto has had the dubious distinction of being called the largest and worst slum landlord in Toronto. The Phil Wynns of this earth, who used to have the worst slums, don’t have them anymore; the city of Toronto does. Those homes are literally falling apart. Walk through them and see the cockroaches and the mice—try not to step on the stuff. See all the excrement around the buildings or sometimes in the halls. See the leaking roof or the plaster falling off. See the windows that will neither keep the draft out nor the heat in. See people demoralized. Look at them, talk to them, see where they live, see what they have to put up with, and then, for God’s sake, do something.

But what’s contained in this budget? One hundred million dollars—Toronto alone needs \$300 million—for the province. It will leave the province of Ontario, again, along with the various cities, be they Hamilton, be they St. Catharines or Toronto or Ottawa, of having the distinction of being the largest slum landlords in the province. Nothing.

Then we ask, “If you’re not spending the money on things that the government or various governments already own, where are you spending the money?” It was humorous, if I might say, to watch the Premier go all over the map when questioned by one of my colleagues, Ms. DiNovo. He went all over the map on how many housing units had been built. He started off with 18,000, if you remember that; “18,000 units we built.” Then he

had to pull back a little. “Actually,” he said, “we built almost 4,000, and we have another 3,000 where construction has started but nobody lives in them yet. We have another 4,000 where some planning has taken place. It’s up to the municipalities. They’re looking at the planning issues”—which can, as we all know, take years. Then he said, “The last of them are still a dream in a developer’s eye.” There it is. The much-vaunted housing strategy of the McGuinty government for five years is to build some 4,000 homes that are actually occupied. And in this budget, not an additional cent.

One might ask, “Where did the money come to build those 4,000 homes?” It was all federal dollars. The federal government gave that money to the McGuinty government in the last Parliament to build affordable housing. This government to date has not put one penny of its own money into a resource that we all know is desperately needed. There are 75,000 families on the waiting list in Toronto alone; 165,000 families in Ontario who don’t have decent housing.

When I opened up the Toronto Star on the weekend, there was a story of a gentleman formerly from Mexico who every night goes and sleeps in a bank tower in a stairwell somewhere around 11 o’clock at night. In the morning, he wakes up—he has a \$25 card per month—he goes down to the YMCA, he has a shower, he cleans himself up and he goes out looking for work. This is just one of countless people in our city and our province who have no housing because this government in its wisdom over five years has only built 4,000 units with someone else’s money and has done nothing whatsoever with the rest.

1730

We do know that there are hundreds of units for our First Nations communities that have been planned and never been built, including some of those in Toronto.

I looked at the people, I looked at what the Save Our Structures Committee were asking for, I looked at what was given, and I see again that everything has been woefully inadequate.

I went on to see what else this government had promised, what else we could reasonably expect in a budget. What about the schools? The Premier in the last election said that he was going to be the education Premier. I must say, if anything has been done—and I don’t think it has been done well enough—there has been some movement on that front. I will say that to Liberals and all present: that there has been some movement. But what still remains to be done is not being done. There is peace with the teachers. There is a better ratio in some regards between the teachers and the class sizes. There are some monies for available programming. But what there has not been is monies available for capital, monies available for the rebuilding of our schools.

In Toronto, in Ottawa, in Hamilton, in all the large cities, in all the downtown cores, the average age of the schools is 45 years. I don’t have to tell you, if you have a 45-year-old house, the kind of enterprise you need to put into it—because I have; I have a 50-something-year-old house. It’s constantly in need of a new roof, a new

furnace; it has things that leak and go bang in the night. Our schools are no different. They have not been repaired and there is nothing in this budget to repair them.

People for Education confirmed that, “Half of Ontario’s schools are at least 45 years old. The situation has been made worse by the fact that over the past four years, school boards have been deferring maintenance and building projects to compensate for inadequate government funding. Forty-eight of 72 Ontario school boards reported that they spend more on school operations than they receive from the province.” So the province gives the money, the school boards are of course required to pay the teachers and everyone else, the school boards are forced to rob from themselves, and where do they do that? They do that from the maintenance budget. Money needs to be spent there. There was no money in this budget to do it.

I kept looking to see where the money might be going. This government talks a great deal about new immigrants and recognizing immigrant rights and doing things. Sadly, the citizenship allocation falls by 2%, to a mere \$89 million in this budget.

They talk about the environment, and so little was done. I looked at the province of British Columbia. Whether you agree with them or not, they had some real guts. They went out and talked about a carbon tax; they went out and talked about carbon footprints; they went out and talked about changing the tax system in order to protect the environment of British Columbia. Other provinces have gone way out of their way—Quebec in particular—to do things that will ease the crunch on our environment. And what did I find in this particular budget? An absolute disaster when it comes to addressing the issue of climate change and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. There is no climate change plan before this Legislature, not in the first year of the McGuinty government or the second or the third or the fourth; not after the election; not now; not ever. There is no climate change plan and there is nothing that will help us to reduce greenhouse emissions to 6% below the 1990 levels by 2014. That’s what Ontario and Canada signed on for in terms of Kyoto. It is not there. I don’t know how we are ever going to meet that unless the government gets serious.

There was nothing in here at all, save and except if you buy a bicycle that costs less than \$1,000. You can now save the PST.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: And on your helmet.

Mr. Michael Prue: And on your helmet.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Helmets are very important.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, helmets are very important; I would agree wholeheartedly. I think maybe the government should also take the private member’s bill of Mr. Milloy, who is now a cabinet minister, dust it off and ensure that people wear helmets. I’ll speak to that on another day.

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: Mr. Levac did it as well. Okay, well, please dust it off and bring it back, and this time get

some cabinet support around that issue. But I digress, because the heckle was a good one.

There were no meaningful programs for long-term funding for residential, institutional and commercial retrofit programs on the scale necessary to actually affect climate change. We know that most of our schools, being 45 years old, have very little or no insulation, particularly in the roofs. We know that if we actually retrofitted them and conserved energy, we could probably halve the budgets. The school boards would be very happy, and we would be helping the environment. We know that on many of our larger buildings in the downtown core of Toronto, Ottawa or Hamilton, you could put on green roofs, which would help enormously, but there was no money made available for that. There are literally hundreds or thousands of things that could be done, and they’re not being done.

In his special report in 2007, the Environmental Commissioner stated that the Ministries of the Environment and Natural Resources were “starved of funding for core functions,” and that in real terms they were operating with fewer resources than in the early 1990s. We need to do something, and it certainly was not contained within the budget.

I’ve talked about First Nations. I’ve talked about the poverty of those First Nations and about wanting to do something for them. I listen every day, and I know it’s a difficult circumstance that the government has found itself in in KI, but we need to do a lot more than we have done for our First Nations people during my lifetime. Ontario is a signator to Treaty 9, which was signed way back, more than 100 years ago. It affects virtually all of northeastern Ontario. It affects the people of Cree descent. It affects the people of at least one town of Ojibway descent: the town of Marten Falls, Ogoki. It encompasses a huge swath of land probably half the size of France. We have not lived up to the obligations of that treaty. The treaty said that we were equal partners with the federal government to ensure that First Nations people residing within that territory were given all the rights and freedoms which they possessed at that time and that they were to be brought into the larger Ontario family. That has not happened.

People from Treaty 9 came down to ask about jails. They have their own police force that had been set up and has been successful in many communities over many years, but they have antiquated jails. When a man died, I believe it was in the Attawapiskat jail—because if you’re in jail, you can’t get out. It’s made out of wood. It started to burn down, and there was nobody there to let him out because the police officers go home at night. They only have enough police officers to staff during the day. He went home that night. The jail burned down, and the man died. That’s just an example of what happens. There was no one on duty. The structures are poor. The structures don’t work. There was nothing in the budget. I understand that they came to meet the minister. They asked for \$12 million in order to rebuild the jails across northern Ontario in all of the small communities so that they would meet the code. The minister told them he wasn’t

going to give them the money until the federal government gave it first. I don't think that's what the province should be doing. I think we have an equal obligation under Treaty 9 to treat our First Nations with respect. We have an equal obligation with the federal government, and if they're not going to do what they should be doing, then we should be prepared to do our part alone. That was not contained within this budget.

The Liberals promised to address revenue sharing. They have not done that either. Some of my colleagues and I had an opportunity to travel throughout northern Ontario. You had an opportunity to go to some of those places. I don't know that you remember them. I don't know whether you remember that milk in some of these outlying places up on Hudson's Bay costs \$16 a bag. Something you can buy here in Toronto for \$4 costs \$16 there. A 50-pound bag of potatoes costs well over \$100—little, tiny things. I remember my colleague from Willowdale commenting about his favourite ice cream. He actually found it in one of the northern stores. He pays around \$4 for it in a store in Toronto; it was \$27 there. That's the kind of life, with very little resources, with no money, that these northern communities have. They have no roads. They have no sewers. Most of them have boil-water advisories. The kids very seldom finish high school. There are a lot of problems with drugs. The communities are just not self-sufficient.

1740

If you ever have an opportunity, I would ask all of you to look at what we have in northern Ontario, around Hudson and James Bay, in those communities. Then just skirt around the bottom of James Bay and into Quebec and look at the homes and look at the cultures in Quebec, where the government of the province has done an admirable job. I know that there are resources and I know the James Bay hydro project did put some money in, but all of those communities have roads. None of ours have roads. All of those communities have sewage and septic systems; none of ours do, that work. They all have clean, potable water. We don't have it. They all have wonderful schools. They have a dropout rate that is pretty much the national average. We can't say that in our communities. They treat their First Nations with respect, and I don't believe we have done so at all.

Giles Bisson put forward his bill on revenue sharing. We travelled northern Ontario and met with countless First Nations communities to talk about revenue sharing. After all, it's all they want. They want to get some money and some benefit out of the use of their land, something that every single municipality in this province can and does have.

They are not getting it, and all of a sudden we find ourselves in the situation in KI. We find ourselves in the situation because those First Nations leaders were not consulted. Because they said no, they found themselves in jail. I've heard what the government has to say. I've heard what the minister has to say. He wishes they weren't in jail. We all wish they weren't in jail, but the sad reality is, they are. They're there because they're trying to protect their resource. They're trying to protect

their community and the people who live in that community. All they want from the community is an opportunity for access.

If you get a chance to go up to Attawapiskat, if you get a chance to go up to the De Beers mine, take a look at how successfully that has been incorporated, how successful one company has been in involving the local community, in providing jobs, in providing education and in giving opportunity. That is all the other native communities want. That's all they want. It's all they need, and it's not here in this budget. It could easily have been that way.

I can see my time is running out. Just one last thing, because I would be remiss if I didn't talk about agriculture. I'm not the most likely person to talk about that, having grown up my whole life in Toronto. In fact, it was only last year that I had an opportunity—my wife and I rented a farm for a week. Now, it wasn't a farm with chickens and things running around—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Why not?

Mr. Michael Prue: It wasn't. When I got there I was hoping for that, but it wasn't that. It was a farm where they grew wheat, and they were harvesting the wheat with great big combines and things. We watched that, and it was good. We spent a week near Creemore, Ontario, and it was a remarkable place.

One thing a city boy knows, though, is where his food comes from. I don't grow it myself. Somebody else works really, really hard to grow it for me, and I think that farmers and the agricultural community deserve the hugest respect in this province. I didn't see that meted out in the budget.

Sadly, when I go to Niagara, when I go down and see all of those orchards, when I see the pears and the peaches, I know that the only canning factory east of the Rockies is about to shut down. Something is terribly, terribly wrong with the farming community. Something is terribly wrong that we cannot eat and access the food that we produce so easily and so beautifully. I think something needs to be done in terms of the budget that is not there for our agricultural community.

As a city boy, I want to tell the farmers that I appreciate and acknowledge everything they do—the hard work they do, the risks they take—and that this government should recognize it as well. They should recognize it. They should put it within the budget. There should be monies available for struggling farmers. That's everything, from the tobacco farmers around Delhi, Ontario—because they need to be bought out. It's a struggling industry that's about to die. They know it too. They need to be bought out. We need to resource and give guarantees to keep places like CanGro, where our fruits are canned. We need to make sure the agricultural industry in Ontario remains strong. I did not see that in the budget.

Overall, when you look at the whole budget, what started out with so much promise and so many promises being made at the time of the last election, what started out with a government that said it was going to do so much, what started out with a government that found itself with \$5.1 billion in extra unaccounted money, has

largely been frittered away. It has been frittered away in ways that I don't think are going to end up doing the province any good.

At the end of it all, when it comes to next year, when it comes to a potential downturn in the economy where there is going to be a mere \$200 million of extra revenue available to the province of Ontario, when programs are going to have to be designed and implemented with no additional monies, I am very afraid of what is going to happen. All of those great things that were possible in this budget will not be possible if the revenue is not there to do it. Given what is happening in the United States, given what is happening with the high cost of oil, given what is happening with our loonie, which is staying pretty strong in spite of the bank's suggestion that it may fall down to 90 cents within a couple of years—it actually went up the same day the bank made that announcement; so much for their prognostication—I am very, very nervous and worried.

I want to assure my friend Gail Nyberg, with whom all this started, that this is a tough budget year. I wish the government had taken the actions that it could have and should have done while it had the money. I am only afraid that, come next year, they will not be able to do so.

I cannot and will not be supporting the budget, because it has failed me in so many ways.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: I know that the members will taunt over the days and weeks that follow, “You did not support the budget,” and they will pull some little minor aspect out which I might be able to agree with and will say, “You didn't support this or didn't support that.” It's always some little, tiny thing, you know, something that I ask about: “You didn't support our budget and it was in the budget.” But I have an obligation to look at the whole thing. I have to ask: Is this the right direction? Has the government done everything it could have done, given the resources it has? Sadly, the answer is no.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: The previous speaker concluded some of his comments by referring to the government's investment of infrastructure money as “frittering it away.” This is wrong. This is simply wrong.

Mississauga now has more transit money because we invested it in infrastructure at the end of the year.

Just two weeks ago, my colleague from Mississauga South, on behalf of all of the members from Mississauga, talked about the investment of \$11 million in a new Rattray Marsh water sewage treatment plant that increases the capacity for water sewage. This is not frittering it away.

We put \$12 million in a new firefighting training centre, money that was available at the end of the year. This was not frittered away. This was an intelligent, forward-looking investment.

We put \$9.5 million at the end of fiscal year 2007-08 in bridge and road repairs. This was an intelligent investment of money.

I know the member and his party love to spend other people's money, but as a government, we want to build Ontario and to create more opportunity for all, not merely take from one group and give to another, and that's what this budget does. It builds opportunity; it expands the pie. It makes more resources available. It helps our cities deliver infrastructure that our businesses need to invest in.

Just as one closing example, Peel Non-Profit Housing has now completed two non-profit housing complexes, and they are occupied, with Ontario's help. The priority was given to seniors and low-income families.

Intelligent investment: That's why I'm supporting the budget.

1750

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: This budget shortchanged long-term-care facilities in a massive way. They were hoping that they wouldn't be forced to keep people waiting to go to the washroom for hours, that there would be an opportunity to feed all the residents. This budget has failed them. But I think it gets worse, because I seem to recall not too long ago, in 1988, that the Peterson government, which was a Liberal government, froze long-term-care beds. They decided to freeze beds, and they didn't build any beds for two years. Strangely enough, when the NDP were elected in 1990, they continued the freeze. For seven years, not one new long-term-care bed was built in the province of Ontario.

I remember that in the 1995 election when we promised to construct over 10,000 new beds, no one seemed to be interested in it. I was in a long-term-care home speaking to the residents, and their lack of interest was interesting. After a little while, I realized that they already had their beds and they were not concerned with getting a bed, and therefore were not concerned with that particular topic. No one—and seniors aren't interested in talking about long-term care, simply because people don't intend to go into them and they usually don't go into them until their health requires them to. It's an easy way to save money in the short run. In the long run, it creates all sorts of problems for the health care system and in particular in the hospitals.

The bed blockers have started to go up once again. They cost this province a lot of money. They are in the hospital when they don't want to be. They want to be in a long-term-care home. I think this budget has failed our long-term-care residents in Ontario.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm happy to offer a couple of more minutes, especially in regard to the comments from the member for Beaches–East York. In the same theme as my colleague who spoke a couple of minutes ago, I do want to make mention on the infrastructure piece. He used the language “frittered away” and actually tended to characterize the investments in infrastructure almost as if they were photo opportunities for members of our party along with local mayors and reeves.

When we came to power in October 2003, people will remember very clearly that there was a lot of discussion of not only the fiscal deficit that was existing in the province of Ontario, which we identified six months later

as actually being \$5.5 billion, or the services deficit that was exhibited through massive cuts in the public service, especially in the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment, but we also became aware through discussions with college presidents, university presidents and mayors and reeves in all of our communities of a huge infrastructure deficit that existed in Ontario. One of the ways that party was paying for their tax cuts was by avoiding invests in certain areas, and one of them was in infrastructure.

In our last budget, in the riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, which I'm pleased and proud to represent, the \$9 million or so that we invested in community infrastructure, roads and bridges, in my riding was much more than a public relations exercise. I can tell you that Mayor Lynn Peterson is very proud of the money that we put into the city of Thunder Bay; that Mayor Lucy Kloosterhuis is very proud of the money that we put into a community like Oliver Paipoonge; that Mayor Dennis Brown in Atikokan is very proud of the money that we put into the community.

The member for Beaches–East York talked often about his travels in northern Ontario; he should understand and appreciate that communities like that, that have small assessment bases and small tax revenues, appreciate very much these investments in infrastructure, in roads and bridges, because they are the very communities that can least afford this kind of infrastructure.

Mr. John O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to follow up and, out of respect, respond to the member for Beaches–East York. I do respect the time he spent on municipal government.

What is surprising, and not surprising with the fact that he was somewhat generous to the government in his comments, is that he has a Toronto mindset. He doesn't get the scourge of despair in my riding of Durham. The manufacturing sector is struggling, and he should know that. Not everyone works for the government, although McGuinty often thinks that.

What I'm going to refer to, in the limited time I have here, is that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce did a survey in early 2008. They were told by business what the six main concerns or categories were, where they expected some sort of response by the McGuinty government. I think the member for Beaches–East York mentioned a couple of them; regulatory compliance was one. They mentioned specifically the WSIB, the environment, and overtaxation was mentioned several times; energy prices, which is a function of the provincial government—and we all know that the new regulated price plan is code language for higher energy costs, whether it's gasoline or electricity. Corporate tax levels were mentioned. This is the chamber of commerce; this isn't John Tory or the opposition alone. Increasing overseas competition—no action plan here at all except that our minister's actually going there to create more business opportunity for China; labour costs and the lack of skilled labour.

A lot of these plans, as in most of the Liberal plans, are post-dated cheques. Some of this spending doesn't occur until after the next election. It's questionable. People say, "Why can't you support this government?" The devil here is in the detail. That's what is most troubling. Every time McGuinty says something, I get nervous.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Beaches–East York, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Michael Prue: I would like to thank the members from Mississauga–Streetsville, Cambridge, Thunder Bay–Atikokan and Durham for their comments.

Just to deal with some of those comments, the member from Mississauga–Streetsville quite rightly pointed out that in Mississauga the monies the Liberal government has seen fit to give that municipality have been spent wisely. I would not have expected anything else from Her Worship Mayor McCallion and that council. Quite frankly, they are the ones who choose where the money goes. You give them the money. They spend it where they think it's correct.

I would also state the same to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan. I am not surprised that in small communities people look to money coming from Queen's Park as a godsend. They don't have the tax base. But at the same time, they are the ones who choose which road, which sewer, which bridge has to be repaired. They make that choice. The fact that you gave them the money is, I'm sure, fine. I think that every government should be giving money where that infrastructure can do the most good.

Both of you used the word "frivolous." I don't remember talking about municipalities being frivolous. I think I was talking more about your government being frivolous than them. As a former municipal councillor and mayor, I know that we valued every single cent. We made sure that every single cent was spent, and watched every penny with great care. That was easier in those days, when we still had pennies, than today, when we might not have them, but we watched them.

The member from Cambridge talked about long-term care. I commend him for his comments. In fact, there is a crisis in long-term care that this budget has not addressed. Six additional minutes is not going to do what is necessary. We need to get at least to the middle of the pack, at three hours. When we get there we can be the same as at least a couple of the provinces and a little better than some. Where we are now, we're way too low.

On the last, the member for Durham, I can only have time to thank him for his comments.

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

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): This House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1758.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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