



No. 24A

N° 24A

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 39th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 39^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 9 April 2008

Mercredi 9 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 9 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 9 avril 2008

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

ESTIMATES

Hon. Brad Duguid: I have a message from the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor signed by his own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2009 and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

Dated April 9, 2008, signed by David Onley, Lieutenant Governor.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WATER QUALITY IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Mr. Norm Miller: It appears that this government has still not learned from its experience with Kashechewan, when it waited for two weeks before evacuating the community after E. coli was discovered in their drinking water. A recent report by the Canadian Medical Association Journal points to an alarming number of boil-water advisories in hundreds of Ontario municipalities, but the most serious problems continue to occur in our aboriginal communities, many of which have been plagued by boil-water advisories that have lasted for years.

In a speech delivered at Laurentian University, former Lieutenant Governor James Bartleman pointed out disgraceful conditions facing aboriginals across the province: "In the isolated, fly-in communities, 50% of the communities are on boil-water advisories," said Bartleman. He continued, "Despite the fact we are in 2008; despite the fact we are going around the world preaching to everybody about how bad they are ... and how badly they treat their minorities, here in Canada we have a situation which is utterly disgraceful."

We continue to see announcements from this government that promise to improve the quality of life for aboriginals, but these communities should not have to wait any longer for access to basic necessities. If the McGuinty government is serious about helping Ontario's aboriginal population, it will take action now to improve the conditions for the aboriginal people in this province.

CARLETON UNIVERSITY CHARITY BALL

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm pleased to rise in the House and share with the members of this chamber the wonderful charitable work of my university and a great institution in my riding of Ottawa Centre, Carleton University.

For the past 21 years, students at Carleton University have gathered together to organize a gala ball and, through this work, have created the Carleton University students' charity ball endowment fund. These funds, combined with a portion of the charity ball's revenue, are donated directly to two Ottawa-area charitable organizations. Since its inception in 1988, the ball has raised in excess of \$212,000 for local Ottawa charities.

I had the honour of participating in this year's charity ball, which was held at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and based on the theme "A Glacial Gala."

The proceeds of this year's event were donated to two main charities: the Rideau Valley Wildlife Sanctuary and Rideau Street Youth Enterprises. As well, funding was provided to Habitat for Humanity Environmental Build and Sage Youth.

I would like to commend the members of the organizing committee, the volunteers and all those who had a hand in making the 2008 charity ball a big hit with the Carleton University community. The students' hard work and dedication made the event a tremendous success, and I know that next year's ball will be even better.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I rise this afternoon to inform the House of an urgent health care crisis in Wellington-Halton Hills, which must impel the immediate attention of the Minister of Health.

In recent days, 3,600 people in the eastern part of Wellington county have lost local access to their family doctors.

A trusted relationship, continuity of care, health service close to home: All of these are lost when someone loses a family doctor. When you or someone in your family is sick, you have no alternative but to visit an already crowded hospital emergency department. In many cases, you'll wait hours for care.

This Minister of Health, who boasts of being the longest-serving Minister of Health in recent times, has had five years to fix this problem.

We all know that the roots of the doctor shortage go back to the Bob Rae government's decision to reduce medical school spaces by up to 15%. The lasting consequences of that terrible decision have been devastating for public health care in Ontario.

Just this month, the president of the Ontario Medical Association said that there are a million people in Ontario without a family doctor. On this basic measure of quality of life, Ontario ranks last in Canada, under the McGuinty Liberal government. What an indictment of failure.

My constituent Jane Vandervliet of Erin asks, "What are you doing to cure the deathly ill health care system?"

I urge the Minister of Health to address the health care crisis facing Erin, Hillsburgh and Rockwood. Ontarians deserve a plan—one that actually works—from this minister to solve the doctor shortage once and for all.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I am delighted to rise today to honour Nora Smith, a constituent of Scarborough Southwest who, this spring, will receive a 30-year volunteer service award.

Since 1975, at the age of 48, Nora Smith has volunteered at Leisureworld Scarborough, a long-term-care facility in Cliffside Village, located close to the Scarborough Bluffs. Around twice a month, Nora comes in to play the piano for United, Presbyterian and Anglican church services, memorial services and hymn-sing programs.

Nora is assisted by her husband, Ron, a 27-year volunteer, who pitches in with the annual Jingle Bazaar book table, the Christmas tea and the spring tea.

I am proud that the riding of Scarborough Southwest is home to some outstanding volunteers. Eleven other dedicated volunteers in Scarborough Southwest will also be receiving volunteer service awards this spring, and I congratulate each and every one of them today.

Each year, more than five million Ontarians volunteer their time to make their communities stronger. Volunteerism is the cornerstone of all successful communities.

I've had the pleasure to meet hundreds of volunteers during my time as the representative of Scarborough Southwest. I want to take this opportunity to thank all Ontarians who make contributions in making Ontario a better place to live.

I hope to meet many more volunteers in the years to come and to continue to see the hard work that they do for the people of Scarborough Southwest and for all of Ontario.

EVENTS IN TIBET

Mr. Randy Hillier: As the McGuinty government pursues trivial matters which limit individual choice, freedom and judgment, they duck the real fight for

human rights in Tibet, where the whip of a dictatorship prevails, where thugs and slugs deny the innocent freedom and justice.

In the Olympic charter, "Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles." Meanwhile, the Communist propaganda tour deserves a gold medal for their oppression, violence and intolerance.

1340

Paramilitary thugs now escort the Olympic torch, mocking our ideals, our beliefs, our foundations. The Olympic flame, a symbol of hope and humanity, now stands as a darkened symbol of tyranny and repression.

No wonder the Olympic flame is not coming to Ontario; our Liberal ministers are going to China. With open arms, they embrace Communist China and its disregard for individual choice and freedom.

Tomorrow, I will once again proudly stand with those who strive for justice, democracy and freedom. I invite all of you to join me at the Chinese consulate tomorrow, where I will lend my voice to those ignored a world away. And I will not be alone.

ONTARIO CONFEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATIONS

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Today, I would like to welcome members from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, or OCUFA, to Queen's Park. This organization represents 23 faculty associations and over 15,000 university faculty and academic librarians in Ontario. Their mandate is to maintain and enhance the quality of higher education in Ontario.

They are concerned about the persistent threats to the quality of post-secondary education in Ontario. They're here today at Queen's Park to offer solutions to these threats, including more support for faculty hiring to keep up with increasing enrolments.

With us today are Professor Brian E. Brown, president of OCUFA and the faculty association at the University of Windsor, and Kimberly Benoit from the faculty association at Brock. They are hosting their reception this evening at Queen's Park from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. in rooms 228 and 230, and they are hoping a lot of members of provincial Parliament are going to be there. I urge you, and they urge you, to come.

CLIMATE CHANGE AWARENESS DAY

Mr. Phil McNeely: Climate Change Awareness Day in the riding of Ottawa-Orléans will take place on April 21 this year.

High schools in my riding are participating in our second annual Ottawa-Orléans climate change challenge. Students have worked very hard to produce videos on how we as individuals can help prevent climate change by reducing our carbon footprint.

These schools are École secondaire publique Louis-Riel, Cairine Wilson Secondary School, École secondaire catholique Garneau, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Secondary School, École secondaire catholique Béatrice-Desloges and St. Matthew Catholic High School.

Our highly devoted and environmentally conscious teachers have made this challenge a priority in their schools.

Several of our community leaders have graciously agreed to act as judges for the challenge. Judi Cane, Dan Biocchi, Sandra MacInnes, Simon Evanik, Marcel Gibeault, André Gascon and André Brisbois will be there to do the judging.

Pizza and trophies, notably the beautiful polar bear award, are being made possible by generous donations from three sponsors: Waste Management Canada, the Cement Association of Canada and Enbridge.

I would also like to acknowledge Dana Silk and the EnviroCentre for helping to coordinate our event.

The top two teams of students will win an exciting day trip to Queen's Park, courtesy of VIA Rail, where they will meet the Minister of the Environment, dine in the legislative dining room and be acknowledged in this House by our esteemed Speaker.

I would like to close by saying that I am so proud of the spirit, creativity and maturity of the students in Ottawa-Orléans. I hope everyone in this House will welcome the winners when they arrive for a visit.

CREDIT VALLEY HOSPITAL

Mr. Bob Delaney: What a glorious spring day for the city of Mississauga. The final contracts for the phase 2 expansion of Credit Valley Hospital have been signed. We're building our hospital again in western Mississauga.

Phase 2 will increase Credit Valley's bed capacity to 471 beds. The labour and delivery rooms will double from seven to 15. An expanded laboratory will provide more in-house support for diagnostics. We're adding much-needed beds and support for palliative and complex continuing care to serve our aging population.

More than 270,000 square feet of new construction will start this year and some 70,000 square feet of space at Credit Valley Hospital will be completely renovated.

This vital new project at Credit Valley Hospital means that more expecting moms will be able to give birth closer to home. It means our baby boom generation will have local facilities and resources to look after their aging parents. And it means that if you do end up in Credit Valley Hospital, you're more likely to get a bed in a room than a stretcher in a hallway.

Phase 2 is how Mississauga says that we choose world-class health care over a tax cut.

EDUCATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I rise in the House today to provide an update to the honourable members about

some recent praise of Ontario's education system. We're seeing positive results after four-and-a-half years of investments by this government in our publicly funded schools: We've restored peace and stability to the classroom, class sizes are getting smaller, test results have jumped higher and more students are graduating.

Last week, a colleague of ours told an audience in Sudbury that Ontario has an education system that is doing a good job. Who said it? Well, you will be interested to know it was John Tory, last Friday in a speech to the local chamber of commerce. More praise came from another colleague during a breakfast speech in Brampton yesterday. He said Ontario has one of the best education systems in the world. Who said it? Well, that came from John Tory.

I appreciate that while touring the province and talking down Ontario, Mr. Tory has found the time to recognize the McGuinty government's achievements in cleaning up education after the mess that they left behind.

We will continue to provide support so that our students are able to reach their full potential. We will continue investing in students, teachers, educators and parents, to ensure students get what they need to be successful in schools and in life, ensuring that Ontario remains a world leader in publicly funded education.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Michael Prue: I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): The standing committee on regulations and private bills presents the committee's report as follows:

Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr2, An Act to revive Grand Avenue Holdings Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Should the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated April 9, 2008, of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

UNLAWFUL FIREARMS IN VEHICLES ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 SUR LES ARMES À FEU ILLÉGALES DANS LES VÉHICULES

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Civil Remedies Act, 2001 to promote public safety and suppress conditions leading to crime by prohibiting driving on the highway in a motor vehicle in which there is an unlawfully possessed firearm / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant le Code de la route et la Loi de 2001 sur les recours civils afin de promouvoir la sécurité publique et d'éliminer les conditions engendrant le crime en interdisant la conduite sur la voie publique d'un véhicule automobile dans lequel se trouve une arme à feu dont la possession est illégale.

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. Mike Colle: The purpose of the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act is to promote public safety and suppress conditions that lead to criminal activities by adding to the Highway Traffic Act the new section 172.0.1, which makes it an offence to drive on a highway in a motor vehicle in which there is an unlawfully possessed firearm. A police officer who has reasonable probable grounds for believing an offence has been committed shall request the surrender of the driver's licence and detain the vehicle. The licence is suspended for seven days and the vehicle is impounded for the same length of time. The new section applies to drivers' licences issued both inside and of Ontario.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

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

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

Those in favour will say "aye."

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 1350 to 1355.

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

Mr. Bryant has moved government notice of motion number 38. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Moridi, Reza
Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	Naqvi, Yasir
Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Best, Margaret	Jaczek, Helena	Ramsay, David
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smith, Monique
Bryant, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Smitherman, George
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Sousa, Charles
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Carroll, Aileen	McGuinty, Dalton	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dickson, Joe	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed will please rise and be recorded by the Clerk.

Nays

Barrett, Toby	Kormos, Peter	Savoline, Joyce
Chudleigh, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Shurman, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tabuns, Peter
Gélinas, France	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hillier, Randy	Miller, Paul	Witmer, Elizabeth
Horwath, Andrea	O'Toole, John	Yakubuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael	
Jones, Sylvia	Runciman, Robert W.	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 54; the nays are 25.

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

Agreed to.

1400

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would like to introduce some guests on behalf of members in the House today.

First, in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Paul Davis and Mr. Stan Newman, brother and partner of Kim Davis, who works in my constituency office. Welcome today, gentlemen.

From one of the finest newspapers in southwestern Ontario and one of the last true broadsheet newspapers left, Mr. John Huston, the publisher of the Aylmer Express, and Rob Perry, one of his reporters. Welcome today in the Speaker's gallery.

In the west members' gallery, on behalf of the member from Parkdale-High Park, we'd like to welcome Mr. Michael Craig, chair of the China Rights Network.

Again in the west members' gallery, on behalf of the member from Parkdale-High Park, Mr. Wayne Samuelson, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour.

On behalf of page Bethany Jones, in the east members' gallery this afternoon, Ruth Jones. Welcome to Queen's Park.

On behalf of the member from Willowdale, in the east members' gallery, Mr. Phillip Hein, a member of the United Nations Committee for Developmental Policy from New York, and his wife, Catherine Hein, who is from the International Labour Organization, dealing with the Indian Ocean, from the United Nations in Geneva in the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park today. Of course, in the east gallery is David's wife, Donna. We welcome you as well.

On behalf of the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, seated in the east gallery today are representatives from the Eglinton Flats public safety committee—its president, Yoeville Caddle, George Clarke, Joseph Bart, Danny Edwards, and Junior T. Jordan—and from the Lawrence Heights community, Deeka Abdikarim, Marian Abdikarim and Halimo Ragé. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is for the Premier. Premier, over the past several years, when Ontarians have expressed concerns regarding your government's high taxes and reckless spending, you've consistently told them, "Don't worry. We're doing it to protect the delivery of services, because we won't, for example, cut hospital services; we won't fire nurses." We now know that hospital beds will be closed and nurses will be fired, and this may be just the beginning. Premier, I don't think it is an unfair judgment to suggest that you sold the people a pig in a poke. How can you possibly defend your high-taxing policies now?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I disagree with the premise of the question, the notion that somehow we're going to be closing hospital beds or laying off nurses.

I think it is important to understand just how strong our commitment to health care is for all of us. Since 2003, we have increased funding by 37%. Put that in contrast to the about 1% as the rate of economic growth that is projected for the coming year. That is \$11.1 billion more. With that, we have been able to do great things for all Ontario families, whether to find doctors for 500,000 more people, to reduce wait times for hip and knee surgeries and cataract procedures and the like, or to hire thousands more nurses. We have 100 hospital construction projects either completed or under way. We've made a massive investment in health care on behalf of Ontarians. There is always still more work to be done, but again, by any objective assessment, we've made some real progress.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It's a consistent pattern. Again, the Premier has declined to answer a very direct

question. Twice in this House yesterday, the Premier said his government is not firing nurses, and we have to wonder if the health minister is so distracted that he is not briefing the Premier. They are firing nurses.

You are firing nurses, or have you accepted your minister's logic that nurses aren't real people?

A significant number of hospitals in Ontario are facing deficits this year, just like the Rouge Valley hospitals. Premier, are you again burying your head in the sand on health care like you have done for three-plus years on the looming crisis in the economy in the manufacturing sector? Is that your approach to this concern as well?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just think that \$11.1 billion, a 37% increase in funding over the course of four years, is a lot of money. Ontarians may have heard many of us say over time that about one half of all program spending is now devoted to health care. Some 40% of all that money is devoted to the people aged over 65. They're going to double in number over the course of the next 20 years. One in three Ontarians is now being diagnosed with cancer; one in four is dying of cancer. We doubled the cancer drug budget in the past four years; we've increased that dramatically.

There are some real challenges. One of the things we've asked our hospitals to do is to work with us. We've expanded their funding dramatically, but we've asked them to find a way to live within those constraints—not an easy thing to do. I know the Minister of Health is working with all Ontario hospitals to find a way to manage these considerable increases. There's always a greater demand for more—I understand that—but we're going to find a way to work through this together.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Nurses aren't the only victims of this government's policies. I want to give the Premier a real-person example of what his government's high taxes and pork-barrelling have done to the province. Morris Bradley of Burlington has been unemployed twice in the last two years because of plant closings. He's supporting a family of four on \$325 a week, which runs out in May. At that time he's going in for surgery and then will have rehab for four to six months—no income, no insurance.

I think it can be legitimately argued that the government across the way, starting over three years ago, failed to address the looming economic crisis. That has cost Mr. Bradley and many others their jobs. Your bloated sunshine list will suggest to most that there will be more high-salaried executive types on the payroll and fewer nurses to care for him when they're in the hospital.

Premier, you like to wash your hands of responsibility with respect to what's happening in the economy. What do you have to say to Mr. Bradley and thousands of others who've lost their jobs under your watch and under your polices?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Well—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the member: Was that his final supplementary or was that a new question?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It was the final supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I didn't hear anything that dealt with the initial two questions, and I'm just going to move to the next question.

NURSES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Premier, you fired about 800 nurses in 2005, and yesterday we learned that 72 more nurses are going to be fired from Rouge Valley Health System as that hospital struggles, along with all the other hospitals in this province, to balance their budgets at a time when we have a growing and aging population with very complex needs, which is driving up hospital costs. I'd like to ask you, Premier: Why did your minister respond in such a cavalier way to the firing of these nurses yesterday by saying that they were "not necessarily real people," and that this may be a necessary evil when everyone in the province knows that we need more nurses and we face a nursing shortage?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: One thing I think is important whenever that party is asking us about health care expenditures on a day when our estimates are tabled and show a further investment on the part of our government of more than \$2 billion: What is the premise of their question when they have plans to cut health care spending by \$3 billion?

Now to the matter of Rouge Valley: Not one nurse at Rouge Valley has been laid off. There is some speculation about the prospect for layoffs. Not one has been laid off. Of the 800 that the member raises, please bring me one name of a nurse from those 800 who was laid off. This is all speculative.

1410

On the point about positions and actual named nurses, sometimes an organization has a position—nursing position X—and they eliminate it. But there is not an individual in that position. So I say to the honourable member: We do have some speculation about the prospect of this occurring. It has not. Not one nurse has been laid off, and I look forward to the opportunity for the honourable member to actually bring me a situation where an individual nurse has been laid off at Rouge Valley.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Mr. Speaker, through you, again, to the Premier: Your minister's comments yesterday indicating that nurses should be happy and that they don't need to worry because they can get a job nearby had a very chilling impact on the nursing community. In fact, two nurses were interviewed on CBC Radio this morning in response to this, "Don't worry, be happy, you can work elsewhere." Their comments were as follows: "Well, that's fine for him"—referring to your minister—"maybe he could get a job nearby." But they talked about the fact that if they needed to go from an institution where they've worked for 20 to 25 years and had to retrain, they might just retrain for another job, rather than

continuing as a nurse. The comment from the other nurse was, "Well, you know, maybe it's time to move to the United States to get a job."

This is the impact your minister's cavalier comments had that chilled the nursing community. I say to you today: Why did he respond in this way when we desperately need to retain nurses?

Hon. George Smitherman: If my comments can be characterized as chilling, then it was a downright flash freeze that brought that government to eliminate thousands of nursing positions overnight. In fact, at the nurse practitioner-led clinic in Sudbury, Ontario, they have a hula hoop affixed to the wall as a constant reminder of that member who was the longest-serving Minister of Health in the Mike Harris government.

We believe in our nurses. We're proud to see that our new nursing graduate guarantee has produced 85% of nurses transitioning to full-time employment. We were also proud to see the recent ratification of an agreement between the Ontario Nurses' Association and the Ontario Hospital Association at the highest degree of ratification in the memory of any people that are associated with it. With respect to Rouge Valley, there's lots of speculation—indeed, it abounds—but not one nurse has been laid off at Rouge Valley, and I'm working with nursing leaders to ensure that that is the trend that continues.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Well, it was the RNAO that indicated yesterday about the impact of these layoffs, this firing and the chilling impact it had on the nursing community. Obviously, nurses are concerned. I can tell you the public is concerned. It's been a topic of discussion on talk radio.

You fail to understand that we have a growing and aging population with more complex needs. We have growth in volumes in our emergency rooms—you haven't been able to fix that problem. We are not able to discharge patients from hospitals, and 20 % of the beds are occupied by people who should be in home care or alternative levels of care, which you haven't made available.

I say to you today, Premier: Will you guarantee that no nurses will be fired or no hospital beds closed this year?

Hon. George Smitherman: It seems like today the honourable member alerts to the growing demographic challenge that faces health care. But I ask her again: Why are you so proudly part of a party that has on their books, and will call for again today, a \$3-billion cut to health care?

This morning, I spoke to Doris Grinspun. She's the head of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. I asked her about her use of the word "chilling." I did see it as a very strong word, and she said, "It is because the spectre of cuts that was at the heart of their agenda for the years that they were in office is so remarkably memorable to nurses that any time there is a threatened disruption, this is a very, very big concern." We agree. Nurses must have the opportunity to work where they work. Not one nurse has been laid off at Rouge Valley,

and I am not done yet in working to try and ensure that no nurse is laid off at Rouge Valley.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Howard Hampton: To the Premier: New Democrats are concerned about human rights. Our concern is shared by many others, including the China Rights Network, which is represented here today. We believe the government of Ontario has a unique opportunity to send a strong message on human rights, on how the world ought to be, to the government of China—a message that what is happening in Tibet right now is wrong.

My question is this: Why is the McGuinty government's Minister of Economic Development and Trade going to China now? Why is the Premier putting trade ahead of human rights?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just don't see it that way; I don't see it as Canada choosing one or the other, and that's in keeping with the approach to foreign policy that we've brought as a nation for some 40 years now at least, where we pursued a policy of constructive engagement—the notion that we can approach so many other nations with our strong Canadian brand, be well received and have an opportunity to enter into discussions that extend beyond trade and give us a chance to influence, as a result of an ongoing strong, productive, positive relationship. That's been the foundation for our foreign policy for a long time now.

I think it's important that the minister visit China. I was heartened to learn that the Prime Minister decided that Canada is not going to boycott the Olympics. I think, as a nation, we have a responsibility to be there and to continue to influence.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Not that many years ago the world was faced with a situation in South Africa, and provincial governments, state governments and federal governments spoke out in unison. They said, "This is unacceptable." Their willingness to speak out on human rights produced a change, a change that everyone across the world has welcomed. Your government is trying to duck on this issue. When you were asked earlier this week whether the minister was going to China, your spokesperson tried to say that she didn't know a trip was planned.

I say again, Premier, there is a unique opportunity here to produce change in the world—positive, progressive change—and to speak out on human rights. Why is the McGuinty government trying to hide from the issue? Why are you playing duck and run? Why are you trying to deny that your minister is even going to China?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure there is any truth in any part of that question. The minister has indicated on at least two public occasions in the context of speeches that she's going to China to open up a new international office.

The choice here is to disengage, to pull back and somehow hope that things that are not in keeping with what we see as an ideal situation improve on their own.

The policy that Canada has adopted for 40 years now is one of constructive engagement, where we maintain a dialogue, where we seek to influence each other in an ongoing way. That's the way that we Canadians have done it for a long, long time. I continue to support that policy.

I've also said publicly that should our federal government decide that it would be inappropriate for my minister to attend—if we're adopting that as a national policy—then we will, obviously, carefully consider that.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty Minister of Economic Development and Trade doesn't answer to Prime Minister Harper. We've seen that; that's quite evident. The McGuinty Minister of Economic Development and Trade reports directly to you.

Just about 18 months ago when you went to China, Pakistan and India, the trip was announced well in advance. When the minister went to China, the trip was announced well in advance. When your spokesperson was asked earlier this week, "Is the minister going to China?" your spokesperson tried to say, "I don't know of any such trip." When the minister's spokesperson was asked, again the answer was, "We have no details about any such trip."

There is a unique opportunity here, Premier. It's not about the federal government; it's about whether or not the McGuinty government is actually going to speak up about human rights. It's not about ending trade with China—no one's proposing that; no one's proposing that we boycott the Olympics. It's about seizing the opportunity. Will you speak out about human rights, or are you going to continue to duck and run?

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Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Obviously today I'm here in question period, representing the government and being held to account, as I should be, when it comes to these kinds of issues. But the leader of the NDP would have us pursue a radically different policy. He would rather that we stay home. I think the Minister of Economic Development and Trade will have far more opportunities meeting with far more people of influence over there than she will here. That's the whole rationale behind constructive engagement: creating opportunities through ongoing and continuing dialogue to influence one another in a positive way. That's been Canada's role, to a large extent, on the international scene for decades. It's a role that I embrace, it's a responsibility that I accept, and that's why my minister is going to China.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Howard Hampton: Premier, I'm disappointed that the McGuinty government will not seize such a unique opportunity to speak out for human rights around the world.

I want to ask the Premier about his comments this morning when he said, "We want to demonstrate we take domestic violence seriously." My question is this: Is the

jailing of 19-year-old pregnant Noelle Mowatt for six days and six nights taking domestic violence seriously?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I know that the leader of the NDP will want to make reference to the entire transcript that was the result of that scrum. He will want to be reminded that something else I also said was that I was concerned about the circumstances and how they present themselves.

I have a 26-year-old daughter. This is a 19-year-old young woman. As a father, I think of her still as just a girl in some ways. That's concerning, obviously, but I also said that I'm not privy to all the facts. I have not heard all the arguments made by counsel on both sides. I don't want to second-guess the judge in his or her wisdom as to why he or she came to the conclusion that this was the appropriate thing to do in the circumstances. Maybe the leader of the NDP has other information and he's prepared to second-guess the judge, but I think it would be inappropriate for me to do so.

Mr. Howard Hampton: This is not about second-guessing a judge. The crown attorney, the agent of the Attorney General, went to court and asked for this 19-year-old woman to be incarcerated. That speaks to the policy of this government. It speaks to where you're coming from.

The Premier said this morning that this creates a little bit of discomfort for him. Unfortunately, Premier, your discomfort provides no comfort to victims of domestic violence. I want to know again: How does putting Ms. Mowatt in jail for six days and six nights send a positive message to women who are the victims of domestic violence?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Attorney General.

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To echo the Premier's comments, of course, whenever you take a look at a fact such as this in isolation from all the circumstances, it does create discomfort for us all. The former Attorney General does want to second-guess the decision of a judge and a justice of the peace even though it's a case before the courts. He wants to second-guess the circumstances. He wants us to hearken back to the time when I started practice, where there were no supports for those victims of domestic violence whatsoever, where police would often not lay a charge without supporting evidence—that's changed; where there were no crisis or other lines so that people could get immediate help—that's changed; where police were reluctant to prosecute—that's changed; where the evidence taken was not the best possible, such as videotaping, so that it couldn't be used later—that's changed; where many circumstances would result in cases being dropped before they got to court—that's changed—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: The minister tries to say something has changed. We contacted Ms. Mowatt's lawyer, who says that since she has been incarcerated for six days and six nights, no police officer has gone to talk to her, no crown attorney has gone to talk to her, and no

victim services counsellor has gone to talk to her. She has literally been put in jail and left there for six days and six nights.

What was interesting is that a professor of social policy, director of the women's mental health program at the University of Toronto, says, "I agree that this whole thing is outrageous ... nobody has paid attention to the reasons that this young woman might have difficulty coming forward and testifying. Nobody has paid attention to the lack of resources—both psychological, financial and housing ... to allow her to move away from the situation."

What they're saying is, the services aren't there. Nobody has come to visit her. Nobody has come to talk to her. Nobody has come to counsel her. Your whole response has been to jail the victim, a 19-year-old woman who is the victim allegedly of domestic assault. What message does that send to other women across the province who are victims of domestic assault?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: For somebody who doesn't want to get involved in the case, as the member suggests, he is second-guessing decisions, and I suspect he doesn't know all the facts. He doesn't know all the facts, but he has decided to be the judge in this case.

So what happens now with people who complain about domestic violence is that the police immediately provide supportive services. They get the best possible evidence, often in ways that can support the victim's presentation in court. There are victim/witness programs that begin as soon as someone comes into contact and help them throughout the process. There are the quick response programs that were introduced just a year and a half ago to provide victims additional assistance, often monetary, to make sure. There are the bail verification and support programs, which ensure that before the accused is considered appropriate for release, the court has all the information in order to ensure the safety of the victim.

It is always the safety of the victim that is paramount. It is always important, before any judge or JP would make any decision like this, that they know all of the facts of the case, as he doesn't; all of the circumstances of the parties, as he doesn't; and all of the important issues relating to the safety of the victim, as he has no—

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

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. The secrecy surrounding this minister's junket to Beijing is perplexing. She boasts about the importance of this so-called trade mission but has kept the details far from the press and away from opposition members. We can't do our job if we don't know the details.

The secrecy continues. I've asked for information on all the names of all the people—not just staff—who will be joining the junket; not just the minister and staff, but what companies are going, as well as the itinerary, the dates and the total cost. I have yet to receive anything in writing. Perhaps the saying "Don't put it in writing"

applies here, especially when it looks like the minister has something or someone to hide.

Will the minister explain why she has yet to publicize the exact dates, the costs and detailed itinerary of her junket? Will she provide me with this information today?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: As you know, I mentioned in the House the other day that I was very happy to be responsive to questions in the House.

As a matter of fact, after last question period your official leader of your party—he and I spoke on the telephone immediately after question period. I gave him the names of the individuals, exactly the amount that I had signed off for that may be spent, exactly who would be attending and what their positions would be. So perhaps you could organize some communication within your party.

I guess what's more important actually is that during this telephone conversation, I specifically said, "Is there something more that I can get for you?" And the leader of his party in fact said, "No that would be all. Thank you."

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I'm not sure that there was anything truthful in that answer.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask that you withdraw the comment.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: That's exactly the comment that the Premier made—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please don't argue with the Chair. I'm just asking you to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's exactly the same comment.
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The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd just ask the member to withdraw the comment, please.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Ask the Premier to withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Would the member please withdraw the comment?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I withdraw.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Your partisan slip is showing, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'll just ask the member to make his comments to the House. We can have a chat later about some of your comments. I'd be very happy to do so, because I'm very conscious of the role that I play within this chamber.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: There are 107 equal members of this House.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I would just ask the Minister of Revenue to withdraw the comment that you just made. Don't provoke the members one way or the other.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I withdraw.

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

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Thank you, Speaker. I'm easily provoked.

This junket is being planned at a time when the federal government and even the mayor of Toronto are promising to put serious diplomatic pressure on China regarding human rights.

Yesterday, the Premier washed his hands of foreign obligations, saying that he simply follows the lead of the federal government. On the other hand, he stated the importance of a policy of engagement with China. The Premier can't have it both ways.

However, given the current oppression of Tibetans, a friendly ribbon cutting is not all that opportune. If that is the case, will the minister protect Ontario's and Canada's international reputation and cancel her tactless and irresponsible junket immediately?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I think the Premier of Ontario made it very clear. My ministry is in constant and regular contact with the federal minister responsible for this area—in particular, confirming that the federal government's position is around constructive engagement with many parts of the world, including China. Constructive engagement includes economic development activity and business opportunities for Ontario, and that's what we're doing.

As I mentioned publicly yesterday in here, I would say that there will be much opportunity to have interaction, both in a public forum and in a private forum. The conversations that ensue, I will tell you, will cover a whole range of topics, not just business development, as has already been the case this month.

I will say again that we have been more than forthcoming with information, and I do think that it's the responsibility of the member asking the question to check with his leader's office as to the kind of communication that we have been very forthcoming with.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to direct my question to the Premier. Premier, Gordie Heffern died in 2001 from injuries he suffered in an explosion at a Sudbury nickel refinery. His employer was prosecuted by the labour ministry and fined \$375,000. In the year after the incident and the year the fine was levied, the same company received rebates from the WSIB totalling \$5 million, far exceeding the fine.

Steve Mahoney, chair of the WSIB, is quoted in the April 7 issue of Metro News as saying, "I didn't realize that we were paying out those kinds of bonuses to companies that are breaking the law."

Minister, Steve Mahoney should have known; the WSIB should have known.

Will the Premier ask for the immediate resignation of Mr. Mahoney and the WSIB?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The answer clearly is no, of course not. Mr. Mahoney is doing an excellent job at the WSIB.

We just have to look at what has happened with the WSIB over the last four or five years, Mr. Speaker—and

I look to you as a predecessor and Mr. Bentley as a predecessor. This government set a very ambitious goal at the time, and many people said we'd never be able to meet it, of a 20% reduction in workplace injuries. That's where it counts. That's where it matters.

Mr. Mahoney has been a leader in helping this government and working with this government, along with health and safety committees across this province, along with injured worker advocates across this province, along with employers across this province, to reduce workplace injuries significantly right across this province, and we're well on the way to reaching our goal of a 20% reduction. He has done a good job.

Mr. Paul Miller: To the minister: The outrageous rebates that went to Gordie Heffern's employer following his tragic death flow from a flawed WSIB program called "experience rating." For years, the labour movement and we in the NDP have been calling for an end to this perverse employer incentive, but neither the government nor the WSIB bothered to listen to us. Mr. Mahoney must go, the WSIB must go, and experience rating must go. Employers see experience rating as a profit centre. Will the minister end experience rating immediately, will the minister remove the WSIB, and will the minister begin the process of establishing a WSIB truly representative of the interests of all Ontarians, not just employers?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Our priority is to reduce workplace injuries. Our priority is to make workplaces across this province healthier and safer for our workers, and we're doing that in a number of ways. We're doing that through enforcement: 200 additional health and safety inspectors out across this province in workplaces, making our workplaces safer.

We're also doing it in a more targeted enforcement process, which is working. We're well on the way to our goal of a 20% reduction. We have acknowledged that the incentive program, the experience rating program, needs to be improved, and that's why Mr. Mahoney and the WSIB are engaged in a review at the moment and will be reporting back, and we look forward to hearing their recommendations.

We acknowledge it can be improved, and we look forward to working with the WSIB and all stakeholders in this particular area to ensure we do the best we can to make workplaces across this province as safe as we possibly can.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion, the Honourable Margaret Best. As a physician, I know that smoking, from a medical perspective, is a universal evil, accelerating and aggravating heart disease, high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases, which are still Canada's number one killer.

I also know that quitting smoking is an extraordinary challenge. The temptation to smoke again can be overwhelming. Many of my constituents have expressed the

challenge they face every day as they walk into a convenience store and confront the power wall in the retail industry. These displays test their resolve to quit and of course have the potential of provoking someone to start smoking once again.

Minister, would you tell this House how the McGuinty government plans to help reduce impulse buying of tobacco?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I would like to thank the member from Etobicoke North for his question. Effective May 31 of this year, the retail display of tobacco will be banned across the province of Ontario. Smoking kills 13,000 Ontarians every year and costs our health care system \$1.6 billion. It is also the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario. Our tobacco display ban will reduce impulse buying, especially among youth. Our government believes that putting cigarettes next to candy bars sends the wrong message. We are moving forward to ensure that the next generation of Ontarians does not pick up the habit of smoking.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Minister, as you will be aware, there have been several reports lately regarding the display ban. Local store owners and vendors in my own riding of Etobicoke North are concerned about meeting the requirements of this ban. Minister, will you be able to inform this House about the ministry's initiatives on this issue and what small business owners can expect going forward?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: The implementation of our display ban relies on working together in partnerships, educating vendors and ultimately promoting the health of Ontarians.

We are reliant on strong partnerships to achieve our goals. My ministry officials have been in regular discussions with the Ontario Convenience Stores Association and the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. In addition, public health officials have conducted thousands of educational visits and are also distributing 30,000 educational kits to vendors across Ontario.

As with any new legislation, we recognize the challenges faced by those most affected. We are working with all partners to ensure a smooth implementation. However, let us not forget the focus of the display ban is about promoting the health and well-being of Ontarians.

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POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, as you know, representatives of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations are visiting Queen's Park today. Professor Brian Brown, the president of the association, is in the gallery along with his colleagues, and they would like to know, along with many, many student groups in the province, why, after four and a half years of your government, Ontario is dead last in per capita student university funding—still last—and why we have the worst or the highest student-faculty ratios in Canada.

You made a big deal in your budget about building classrooms, but what's the sense in having more classrooms if we don't have enough professors to fill those classrooms and give our students a proper quality university education?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I want to begin by recognizing and welcoming the representatives of OCUFA here today.

I thank the honourable member for his question. It gives me a chance to remind this House that under the leadership of our Premier, we brought forward the Reaching Higher plan: \$6.2 billion, the largest investment in post-secondary education in this province's history. I think it's worth looking at some of the results, as we just passed the midway point of Reaching Higher.

We have 100,000 additional students in colleges and universities since 2003. We have the highest post-secondary participation rate in Ontario history. We've added \$1.5 billion for student assistance. I find it passing strange that a member of that party that cut funding to post-secondary institutions, that cut student aid and increased tuition, would stand up and ask—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: In 1999, the Premier—and I have a photo of it here—signed the following pledge. It says, "Ontario needs a strong, properly funded and affordable public university system to take us into the 21st century. I therefore promise to raise the operating grants per person for Ontario universities to the national average during my next term in government." So that would have been between 2003 and the last election, in October.

I'm glad the Premier doesn't sign our paycheques around here, because the signature isn't worth the paper it's written on. You talk about the money you're putting into universities and into post-secondary education. You call it the Reaching Higher campaign. It's really reaching for the bottom. We're dead last again in Canada, 10th out of 10 in terms of funding. We have the highest and worst student-faculty ratios. Some 5,500 new full-time professors need to be hired today just to keep up with the increasing enrolments that you're bragging about. When are you going to do something about it?

Hon. John Milloy: As I say, I find it very passing strange that a member from that party would have the gall to stand up—let me give you some facts. The Conservatives cut aid to students by 50%. They allowed undergraduate tuition in this province to increase by 71%. And in terms of their first two years in office, they cut \$435 million from our colleges and universities.

Not only have we brought forward the Reaching Higher plan, but our most recent budget contained more good news for Ontario's universities and colleges: \$465 million for Ontario's college and university students for their direct assistance, as well as \$970 million to help renew and build new facilities across the province. I'm proud of the leadership shown by our Premier on post-secondary education and I look forward to continuing to work with the sector.

NURSES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

Acknowledging how nursing layoffs directly affect patient care, Doris Grinspun of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, RNAO, says, "You don't solve an issue as serious as this by cutting the number of RNs on staff. You do the opposite."

People in Ontario are worried. Why does the minister see nursing layoffs as a simple fact of life?

Hon. George Smitherman: I would want the honourable member to be reminded that there was a time when her party was in government and they closed several thousand hospital beds, resulting in the loss of thousands and thousands of nursing positions. That's when Howard Hampton was on a five-year bathroom break.

But I do think that the question at hand is a very, very important one. That's why we've been working so hard to add nurses.

With respect to Rouge Valley, where there has been a lot of speculation in the media, no nurse has lost their position there. I'm working with all those nursing leaders and with the individuals who run our health care system to protect the nursing envelope. I would encourage the honourable member to separate herself from the speculation and to get down to the real facts. If she has the name of a nurse from Rouge Valley who has been laid off, I'd ask her to bring me that name. I don't think that she can find such a name, because it hasn't occurred.

Let's separate the speculation from the reality and let's all agree that nurses are the heart and soul of health care.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ce qui arrive à Rouge Valley, c'est vraiment juste la pointe de l'iceberg. Il y a 75 autres hôpitaux en Ontario qui sont dans exactement la même position : ils vont faire face à un déficit.

Even though it's clear that nursing layoffs directly affect patient care, is the minister telling the 75 other hospitals that the best way to balance the books is to let nursing positions go vacant so that they can be eliminated?

Hon. George Smitherman: No. Quite to the contrary. As evidenced even by the statistics that the member's leader relied upon yesterday, nursing employment in Ontario is up very substantially. Over the next four years, we have 17.55 million annual hours of additional care that will be provided by nurses in the province. We've completed a new nursing graduate guarantee.

We believe that Ontario's nurses are vital to the delivery of health care. That's why every single hospital in Ontario under our watch has received more money each and every year, as they will this year, and why I think it's important that the honourable member separate herself from the speculation about what might happen and focus more specifically on what has occurred. Like I said in my first answer, if she does have the name of a nurse who was laid off at Rouge Valley related to these stories that she's speculating about, please bring that

forward. I don't think it has happened, and I'm working hard to make sure that it doesn't.

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Northern Ontario and my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan are well-positioned to move into the knowledge-based economy with well-respected educational facilities, such as Lakehead University and Confederation College, and an abundance of natural resources.

It was great news that our government, in our recent budget, is fulfilling a commitment by providing \$25 million to make Thunder Bay the new home for the Centre for Research and Innovation in the bioeconomy. Minister, can you outline the significance of this centre and the bioeconomy for Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario?

Hon. John Wilkinson: The world's dependence on non-renewable carbon is creating global challenges as we see supplies dwindle, prices continue to rise, and the environment negatively impacted.

To face this challenge, we must find high-quality renewable sources of carbon to meet the global demand. Progressive industries and communities across this province want to seize that global opportunity.

I want to thank my friend the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan, particularly for his tireless advocacy for this new centre, and my colleagues the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and the Minister of Natural Resources, for inspiring us with this tremendous vision.

I'm proud that our government wants to serve as a catalyst, play a catalytic role, in the great community of Thunder Bay for the creation of this new centre, and I look forward to visiting the member in his hometown next month.

Thunder Bay has all the key ingredients to make this a success. It's home to world-class academic facilities, an abundance of natural resources, and a deep knowledge of the forestry industry.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Thank you, Minister. This investment is great news for Thunder Bay and the region. It will help to diversify our economy and build on areas of strength, creating jobs and bringing innovative ideas to the north. This partnership between academia, industry and our government will help provide solutions for local industry and leverage the largest possible investment in the community.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Mauro: As usual, good news for the north is bad news for the NDP.

Can you please outline the economic benefits this investment will bring?

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Hon. John Wilkinson: Researchers and innovators alike will look at the application of bioproducts in the 21st century. There are many new areas, including medi-

cal compounds, cellulosic ethanol, new industrial products, biomass conversion and the recovery of high-value molecules from our great legacy, the boreal forest.

The centre, I believe, will attract even more world-class researchers and students, as well as a wide array of industry and other investments to Thunder Bay and northern Ontario. Thunder Bay is well positioned to partner with other parts of the bioeconomy that are contained right here in Ontario through a network. I would mention Sarnia's bioindustrial centre, the University of Toronto's Centre for Biocomposites, Western's research into agricultural fuels and bioprocessing, the University of Guelph's Centre for Bioproduct Discovery and Development, and, I say to my friend from St. Catharines, also the wonderful work being done at Brock. There is a new vision in the 21st century. The heart—

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

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Premier: Premier, when discussing with the media the upcoming statutory review of the so-called health tax, you said, "We're mandated by law to review that health tax and we will do that." But then, disappointedly, you said, "I think the outcome is pretty predictable."

A cynic might say that this review is nothing but a sham and that the Liberal MPPs will be whipped to support the existing health tax at all costs. Others might say that the Premier will actually keep an open mind. I want to give the Premier the benefit of the doubt and ask the Premier what changes to the health tax, if any, he would contemplate.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This would be in the category of the "cut" question. What we're talking about is a premium that now raises some \$3 billion annually that we apply directly to investment in health care in Ontario. Since 2003, we've increased funding by \$11.1 billion; \$3 billion of that is derived from this specific health premium. With that premium, we've been able to invest in things like more doctors and more nurses and shorter wait times. We're covering new treatments. We're going to cover the PSA test, new vaccinations for children and the like.

We had a very important conversation around the health premium at the time of the recent election. I think Ontarians spoke unequivocally on this particular issue. They want us to continue to support their health care, to invest in their health care and to ensure it's there for them when they need it. We will continue to do that.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't know if I got an answer to the direct question: Is the committee process another Dalton McGuinty sham or will it be an honest process to review the health tax?

Premier, it was four years ago this month that you appeared on Global Television and said, "I am very clear about this. We're not going to be raising taxes." That was on April 24, 2004, and sadly, as we know, three weeks later you dropped the bomb of an up-to-\$900 tax increase

on working families and seniors. You know the problem. You have some \$5 billion in excess revenue that you shovelled out the door. You know that your so-called health tax is extremely regressive. You know it flows into general revenue and not into health care, and you know that by inaccurately and purposely calling it a premium, you've gotten into a lot of trouble with collective bargaining agreements.

I'll ask you again, Premier: In this review process, what kind of changes, large or small, will you contemplate, or is it nothing more than another Dalton McGuinty scam?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'll leave it to the committee and its wisdom to arrive at its decisions and draw any important conclusions. But I can say that this was a very controversial increase in government revenues. It was well talked about for a number of years, including during the course of the recent election campaign. We had the opportunity, all of us, on all sides of the House, to talk to Ontarians directly about this very important issue. They had the opportunity to choose that party and, by so doing, to eliminate our health premium. They chose not to do so.

It's interesting that the member opposite has written to us, asking us to provide \$1 million in one-time funding for a hospice in his riding. I'm not familiar with the hospice, but undoubtedly, it is a good organization doing good work for families in his riding. That's just one of countless demands we receive for limited dollars and that's why we continue to support our premium.

EMPLOYMENT LANDS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Premier, SmartCentres is proposing a large-scale retail development on Eastern Avenue in my riding of Toronto–Danforth. Both the city of Toronto and east Toronto residents are concerned because significant film employment lands will be lost to retail development. Premier, will you listen to Mayor David Miller and east Toronto residents? Will you announce today that the province is declaring a provincial interest at the May 20 OMB hearing regarding the zoning of these lands? Will you make that declaration?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Jim Watson: It's interesting that the honourable member, who I believe represents that area, is just now asking a question. He has yet to write to me, yet to deal with this in a public forum.

But I can say that the matter is before the Ontario Municipal Board. The Ontario Municipal Board, as the member knows, is an independent, quasi-judicial body. It would be entirely inappropriate for me as the minister to comment on a matter that is before the OMB. It's quite clear that the honourable member should be aware of the fact that ministers should not and do not interfere and intervene with OMB matters, and I won't.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary. The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Michael Prue: Back to the minister, yes, the OMB—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. This is the Minister of Health's last warning.

Mr. Michael Prue: Back to the minister, yes, it's absolutely true that this matter is before the Ontario Municipal Board, but it's also absolutely true that your government promised to reform the Ontario Municipal Board and yet developers are still bypassing the city of Toronto planning process and heading straight to that body.

The McGuinty government's growth plan promised big changes around protecting employment lands within urban centres, yet in this case SmartCentres' proposal on Eastern Avenue is easily able to bypass it.

So my question to the minister: Will you declare a provincial interest at the OMB hearing, simply saying that this province doesn't want this kind of action, on or before May 20, or are more employment lands such as these to be lost to the city of Toronto?

Hon. Jim Watson: Well, as usual the NDP are late to the party and they're scrambling. But I repeat the same answer I gave to the honourable member. This is a matter that is before the OMB. Perhaps the NDP may think it's appropriate that a minister of the crown intervene in a matter before the OMB. But we have made significant changes to the planning process. I commend my predecessor, the current Minister of the Environment. One of the things I'm most proud of, for instance, is that we have engaged a citizen liaison office that helps citizens understand the appeal process and how they can participate. We've made it more user-friendly for individuals and community groups to make appeals to the OMB. We're proud of those reforms, and we're proud of the work that we have done. But again, on the specific case that the member has raised, it is before the OMB, and it is completely inappropriate for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to offer comment or intervene in the situation.

ESL FUNDING

Mr. Charles Sousa: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, as you may know, my riding of Mississauga South has a high proportion of students with ESL needs.

I think we in this House would all agree that helping newcomers adjust to life in Ontario is crucial to our continued success. Many of these newcomers do not speak English as their first language. There's no better time for people to learn a new language than in their younger years.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, will the minister tell us what supports are available to these students?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you to the member for his support of kids in his community and especially kids of new immigrant families.

Since we came to office, we have increased English-as-a-second-language funding by 15%—\$64 million. We've committed to \$40 million over the next four years, \$10 million in next year's education funding formula alone. We have extended ESL support to four years. When we came into office it was three-year support, so we've expanded that. These investments and changes have meant that ESL students are improving their academic achievement. Grade 3 ESL results have improved by 18% since 2002-03, and grade 6 ESL results have improved by 15 percentage points since we came into office.

1500

Mr. Charles Sousa: The minister should know that many of my constituents are concerned. ESL students may not be getting the full program support they need. I have heard that in some cases, supports for ESL students do not in fact reach those students. Would the minister tell us what she is doing to address this?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When we came into office, one of the things that boards had to do was take money from one grant to put it into another, because the funding formula had not been fixed by the previous government. We've been changing the formula every year to enhance those grants so that the money that goes to the boards can go where it needs to go. We've put a new policy in place which next year will require boards to tell us where those ESL dollars are being spent, and the following year boards will be required to report publicly exactly where those ESL dollars are going, what programs they are spending the money on and the efficacy of those programs.

This is the first time that there's been a kindergarten-to-grade-12 ESL policy in place, and that means we will know exactly where those dollars are flowing.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the Premier on education: On August 14, 2007, the Premier stated, "Our commitment of \$309 million over the next two years signals our dedication to public education and puts school boards on firm financial ground." On September 18, 2007, the Premier said, "For rural kids, few things are more important than being able to go to school in your own community with your own friends. Rural schools help keep strong communities, which is why"—and I want to stress this part—"we're not only committed to keeping them open, but we're strengthening them."

Given your commitment to rural students and their families, will you fund these promises to have these rural schools like Phelps Central School stay open and keep them from unreasonable closures?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is absolutely true that we as a government have done everything we can to support those rural schools.

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you, guys.

Since 2003, we've put \$465 million in place to adjust for declining enrolment. What we have to recognize is that next year there will be 90,000 fewer students in our schools than when we came into office in 2003. It is absolutely imperative that school boards have the flexibility and the ability to make decisions about consolidating schools or school closures, if they need to do that. That's why we put pupil accommodation review guidelines in place. The boards were asking for those so that they could make rational decisions about their capital plans and how to move forward locally.

PETITIONS

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has proposed the closure of Fitzroy Centennial Public School as of September 2009; and

"It is the general consensus of the parents and communities involved that this decision was based on a flawed, biased process using inaccurate statistics and estimates; and

"It is felt that closing three rural schools in three years to create one mega-school is not in the best interests of the students involved. Constant shuffling of students because of school closures results in lack of stability and security.... There will no longer be an option available for those who fare better in a smaller, more community-oriented learning environment; and

"Closing rural schools is one of the first steps to destroying the agricultural culture and fabric of our rural area. The rural culture will be greatly diluted once these students are absorbed into a school with a much larger 'urbanized' population; and

"The existing funding formula rewards larger schools with larger populations with resources, teachers and programs and smaller schools to failure and eventual closure;

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

"To halt the closure of Fitzroy Centennial Public School;

"To review the process upon which the decisions of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board were based regarding this proposed closure;

"To halt the trend towards closure of rural schools, in general, and to consider the detrimental effect on our rural community and the future of our agricultural-based industries; and

“To review the existing funding formula, which essentially dooms smaller, rural schools.”

This has been signed by 350 people in the Fitzroy community, and I've signed it.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition from SEIU and the people of Windsor.

“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. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Bethany.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the people of Ajax and Pickering.

“Whereas the Central East local health integration network board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System's deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

“Whereas, despite the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, its largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach \$100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government, this plan now calls for the ill-advised transfer of 20 mental health unit beds from Ajax-Pickering hospital to the Centenary health centre in Scarborough; and

“Whereas one of the factors for the successful treatment of patients in the mental health unit is support from family and friends, and the distance to Centenary health centre would negatively impact on the quality care for residents of Ajax and Pickering; and

“Whereas it is also imperative for Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding;

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

“That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service to our Ajax-Pickering hospital, which now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

“That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain the badly needed 20-bed mental health unit.”

I would sign and affix my name to that.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. John O'Toole: I was pleased to attend a Trillium presentation at Port Perry/Prince Albert Pastoral Charge a couple of weeks ago, and the administrator, Pat Bird, presented me with a series of petitions. The charge had taken a vote and agreed to sign the petition, which reads as follows:

“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”—as has been done since the 19th century.

I'm pleased to present this petition and give it to Rheanna, one of the new pages in the Ontario Legislature.

1510

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it has to do with fairness for Ontario workers' employment insurance. It reads as follows:

“Whereas, even though job creation in Ontario is far outpacing job loss, one lost job is one too many; and

“Whereas last year the average unemployed worker in Ontario received \$5,110 in regular EI benefits while the average unemployed person in the rest of Canada received \$9,070; and

“Whereas, on average, the federal government provides an unemployed worker in Ontario with \$684 less

for job training than it provides for an unemployed worker in another province; and

“Whereas fair funding could mean additional investments in important areas such as enhanced apprenticeship programs, labour market integration for new immigrants, and skills training for older workers; and

“Whereas Ontario workers deserve the same opportunities as other Canadians to improve their skills, find meaningful work, contribute to Canada’s prosperity and support their families;

“We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to press the federal government to be fair to Ontario workers by providing equal funding for employment insurance benefits and job training compared to other provinces.”

Since I agree with this petition 100%, I’m delighted to sign it.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Jim Wilson: This petition was sent to me by Mr. J. Currie Philips from Elmvale, and I thank him.

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

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

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

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

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

DISABLED PERSONS PARKING PERMIT PROGRAM

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a petition that was circulated by the Bikers Rights Organization, Spanish River region number 29.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there currently exist problems of exposure to theft and the weather when displaying a disabled person parking permit on a motorcycle while parked in a disabled parking space;

“We, the undersigned, petition our members of Parliament to promote the development of a special, fixed permit as proposed by the Bikers Rights Organization, for use by disabled persons who ride or are passengers on motorcycles, even if that requires an amendment to the Highway Traffic Act.”

This is signed by Ontarians from one end of the province to the other. I will happily affix my signature.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank Rev. Brian Sharpe and the members of the congregation of Renfrew Presbyterian Church for this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition and affix my signature and send it with Ida.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joe Dickson: I have a petition for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the residents of Ajax and north Pickering.

“Whereas the Central East local health integration network board of directors has approved the Rouge Valley Health System’s deficit elimination plan, subject to public meetings; and

“Whereas it is important to ensure that the new birthing unit at Centenary hospital, a \$20-million expansion that will see 16 new labour, delivery, recovery and postpartum birthing rooms and an additional 21 postpartum rooms added by October 2008, will not cause any decline in the pediatric services currently provided at the Ajax-Pickering hospital; and

“Whereas the significant expansion of the Ajax-Pickering hospital, the largest in its 53-year history, a project that could reach \$100 million, of which 90% is funded by the Ontario government—it is important to continue to have a complete maternity unit at the Ajax hospital; and

“Whereas it is also imperative for the Rouge Valley Health System to balance its budget, eliminate its deficit and debt and realize the benefits of additional Ontario government funding; and

“Whereas the parents of Ajax and Pickering deserve the right to have their children born in their own community, where they have chosen to live and work;

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

“That the Rouge Valley Health System continue to provide the current level of service; and

“That our Ajax-Pickering hospital now serves the fastest-growing communities of west Durham; and

“That the Ajax-Pickering hospital retain its full maternity ward.”

I will attach my signature to that petition.

GYPSY MOTHS

Mr. Toby Barrett: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's titled Stop the Spread of Gypsy Moths.

“Whereas gypsy moths pose a dangerous threat to our forests in Norfolk county and across the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas many properties in Norfolk and Haldimand counties have been deforested and dramatically harmed by gypsy moths; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario has previously funded a cost-shared gypsy moth spraying program;

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

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

The signatures come from Cayuga, Caledonia, Hagersville, Turkey Point, Waterford, Simcoe and Victoria.

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I have a petition signed by the students of Chaminade College School in York South-Weston.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I want to thank the students of Chaminade College School for their hard work in furnishing this petition to me. I sign it and support it, and I will give it to page Michael.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO HEALTH PREMIUM

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 8, 2008, on a motion that the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, as constituted by the assembly, review the Ontario health premium in accordance with section 29.2 of the Income Tax Act.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: With respect to government order number 6, I do welcome the opportunity to debate this Ontario Liberal motion to review the so-called health tax. This will be reviewed by the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

With respect to this health tax, it's an income tax increase. It was brought in by the present Liberal government in their first budget, back in 2004. At that time, it was the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario.

1520

Our finance critic, the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook, did an opening speech yesterday, and he referred to Bill 106. Bill 106 was the 2004 budget bill, and I think it is important, as we review this particular income tax increase, as required by this legislation, as we evaluate this budget increase, that we look at the history of how this came about. We can learn from the past. It's very important to take a look at the inception of this particular tax-increase boondoggle.

To debate this motion as well, we have to think back to the election that occurred a few months before that 2004 budget. During the course of that 2003 election campaign, Mr. McGuinty said definitely, “I will not raise taxes on Ontario families.” That was the election before this big tax was brought in. He was quoted on CFRB, for example, as saying, “I won't raise taxes one cent on Ontario families.” They claim they had a four-year fully costed plan, and this was independently costed by a number of individuals. At that time, the Liberal opposition claimed that even if the deficit was as high as \$3 billion, they could eliminate it “like that,” to use their quote.

Then they introduced this budget in 2004—the 2004-05 budget. They called it a plan for change. Really, it's all about how they changed their plan. They obviously had changed their minds. During the introduction of that budget, there was a scrum held right afterwards, and in that scrum the then Minister of Finance, Greg Sorbara, went before the media. Greg Sorbara became known as—of GST fame, essentially a GST stance for the Greg Sorbara tax, which we are at present reviewing and evaluating. He was asked by a reporter why they promised one

thing and did another thing right after the election. Here's what he said: "It's the realities of the work that we do. It reminds me of a former Prime Minister," referring to Pierre Trudeau, who promised not to introduce wage and price controls before the election and then after the election, he said, and I quote Mr. Sorbara, "Zap, you're frozen." After the 2003 election and right after this 2004 budget, I guess we can say, "Zap, you're taxed."

Most of us, I would assume, teach our children that you shouldn't make promises you can't keep. Back in 2003-04, there was already the perception that this government could not be trusted to keep its word; that they were not doing after the 2003 election what they promised to do before that election. The reality is that in the perception of an overwhelming majority of people in Ontario, that's what we're left with to this day. Unfortunately, I feel for this government that the 2004 budget did nothing but confirm that perception in Ontarians' minds. They now have solidified in their minds that any of us who think about these broken promises and these taxes that arrive, even though we're told there won't be any taxes—essentially we know we just can't trust this gang at Queen's Park who are currently the governing party. They can't be trusted to deliver on any commitments they make or commitments that they don't articulate and then, to our surprise, show up after an election.

I'm afraid that feeling is just as prevalent today in 2008 as it was back in 2004, when the details of that budget were made known. The bottom line is that people did not vote for this health tax that we are now obligated by law to review.

There was a question raised during the outrage after that 2004 budget, when this so-called health tax came in. I'll put the question: "Do all fairy tales begin with 'once upon a time'?" The answer is no. In Premier McGuinty's Ontario, this particular fairy tale begins with the words, "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, promise, if my party is elected as the next government, that I will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters and will not run deficits. I promise to abide by the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act." This was signed by then-Liberal leader McGuinty on September 11, 2003.

Despite this promise, Premier McGuinty fraudulently proceeded to raise taxes and impose new ones without any mention at all of getting the consent of Ontario voters and no mention at all of having a referendum.

We recall then that the electricity bills went up and gas prices went up. The Ontario Liberals introduced a budget that ensured that you and I and the people across this great province had little money left after paying these kinds of bills, putting food on the table and lining government coffers. Quite simply, Dalton McGuinty broke faith with the people of Ontario by hiking taxes when he promised he wouldn't. It's a hard, fast fact. The best way to lose good character is to not keep one's word.

This is not the government that the people of our province believed they were electing back on October 2,

2003. I reiterate: The Liberals promised change; then they changed their minds and we've ended up with these kinds of increased taxes. Again, the most contentious one was the one on health care in the 2004 budget.

One of the hardest pills for people in Ontario to swallow was the introduction of a health care tax, with figures at the time estimating that families would be paying as much as \$1,800 a year in extra taxes. Individuals would be paying somewhere between \$300 to \$900 a year—again, depending on their income. The tax for those earning between \$20,000 and \$36,000 rings in at \$300, representing a 1.5% increase in tax on an individual's income.

We do know that, the way things are going, close to half the Ontario budget is used to fund health services in the province, and therefore, by extrapolation, close to half the taxes we pay already go to the Ontario government to pay for health. We already have that in health taxes. Back in October 2003, I don't think the people of Ontario understood that they were voting for this increase in their income tax, the so-called health tax.

With great fanfare, on September 11, 2003—another disaster day, if you will, of September 11—Dalton McGuinty signed the taxpayers' protection act, promising, in what amounts to about 50 words or so, that he would keep the faith with the bill that he voted for, that he would balance the budget, not raise taxes and keep spending under control; there would be no deficit. He also specifically promised that he would have a referendum and he would let people decide about any tax increase if circumstances should change. No wonder people are cynical.

We wonder why people are cynical about politics and politicians. We wonder why people think they can't trust politicians. Again, I put to this House that it's because of the actions like the one taken by Dalton McGuinty and Greg Sorbara starting back in 2003-04, where they very clearly promised something they couldn't deliver.

1530

Going back a little further, 1996 was the Ontario PCs' first budget. At that time, many people said to me, many people were saying in the province of Ontario, "Very clearly you're doing something you said you would do. You campaigned on what was felt to be a very difficult platform"—and at that time, we were going through very difficult times—"and you're keeping your word." We were re-elected in 1999. It was in large measure because we kept our word, because we kept our promises. We felt people could trust us when we said something. We felt, and people indicated to us, that we would deliver on those promises, for example, with balanced budgets or anything to do with taxes and spending.

Just going back a little further in history, people were frustrated at that time. Many people were unemployed, they were very cynical and they were just coming through a 10-year period under the two previous governments at that time, a 10-year period of tax increases. There were 66 tax increases, if you add them up, over that 10-year period, a period of big-spending government.

At that time, people went so far as to say, “We want each candidate who’s running for office to sign a pledge that you’ll vote for a bill called the Taxpayer Protection Act”—I signed that pledge—“and to also sign and vote for another bill called the Balanced Budget Act.” It wasn’t enough just to promise; as a politician, one had to sign on the dotted line and specifically promise to introduce and to support that bill. We passed that particular law in this House in 1999, and every Liberal MPP who showed up for the vote stood in favour of that bill. They said they would live up to it.

I think it is important to explain this, to reiterate this, because we are reviewing this health tax. We are evaluating what went wrong. Members opposite said they would honour their pledge. They said they would keep their faith.

However, we all recall—we all watched on television. I think every single major network replayed those Liberal campaign ads where Dalton McGuinty looked right into the television camera and he said, “I won’t raise your taxes.” CBC ran a clip of Dalton McGuinty with a big smile as well, signing the taxpayer protection pledge. I recall that the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore was standing over one shoulder and the then Chair of Management Board, Gerry Phillips, was standing over the other.

In 2004, people in Ontario regrettably soon discovered they were paying more for health care and obviously getting less. With the introduction of that 2004 Ontario budget, Liberals turned their backs on their much-publicized commitment to universal health care, in my view, not only with their regressive two-tier health tax but also with their regressive two-tier listing of a number of vital health services, despite paying lip service to medicare. This Liberal government, as we know, no longer pays for visits with respect to chiropractic, optometry or physiotherapy. Our optometrists, chiropractors, physiotherapists and, most important, their patients have been betrayed by a government that turned its back, for example, on preventive eye care and sentenced people to live with back and muscular pain if they cannot now afford to get the help they need.

Liberals today seem to continue to defend their actions. Their move to delist health services has created a situation where, obviously, health care is being denied to those who do not have the money to pay for it. In my book, that would be described as two-tier health care. It really does fly in the face of any commitment with respect to health promotion, with respect to disease prevention, with respect to any thought of community-based primary health care services.

As the Ontario Chiropractic Association pointed out at that time, in addition to decreasing public access to health care, delisting chiropractic care was a “short-sighted move that would end up costing the health care system far more money than it would save.”

Over 1.2 million people in Ontario—obviously, seniors, middle- and low-income earners and their children—depend on chiropractic care for treatment, the kind of

relief that’s required for back pain, for neck pain, headaches and other musculoskeletal disorders.

While the government at the time expected to save \$93 million by eliminating chiropractic coverage, the OCA argued, “Additional direct costs from patients accessing physicians, emergency departments and drugs will exceed \$200 million annually.”

Similarly, the president of the Ontario Physiotherapy Association said at the time that delisting community-based physiotherapy “will impact particularly on Ontario’s most vulnerable populations.”

So, again, we are left with that fairy tale, that document, the Taxpayer Protection Act, that was signed by today’s Premier. Obviously, his signature is not worth any more than the paper that it was written on at the time.

Our finance critic, in 2004, raised a question in the House to the Premier at the time: “We all know that you had no intention of keeping your campaign promise not to raise taxes. You raised taxes, but you say you were not aware of the \$5.6-billion fiscal risk. But, even after Erik Peters released his report on October 29, 2003, the Premier continued to tell people he would not raise taxes.”

On November 1, 2003, on Focus Ontario, the Premier of Ontario said, “... we will not be raising taxes. Families are carrying enough of a burden as it is.”

Even with the throne speech, once this government was elected, on November 20, 2003: “We’re not going to raise taxes. That’s just not on the table.”

In a December 18 media scrum, the Premier said, “I don’t want to raise taxes. It is not my intention.” Again, this was just a few months before the 2004 budget, where he did just that.

On January 14, 2004, when asked point-blank if he would raise taxes, Dalton McGuinty said no.

We’re left to question: Why did the Premier break his promises?

Our finance critic at the time mused, “What kind of man is this Premier when he knew full well he had no intention of keeping his promise?” Mr. Hudak said at the time, “Nobody believes a word you say anymore. Dalton McGuinty as Premier promised one thing before the campaign and had no intention of keeping his promise. Even as Premier, he continued to say he would not raise taxes when he knew full well he was going to be raising taxes on middle-class families.”

So, there we have it. We are debating government order number 6. It calls for a review and evaluation through legislation, and it’s a review that is more than overdue.

1540

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The health tax is on the table this afternoon, and it’s interesting to see all of the prevarication that’s gone on in the past on this matter. The Conservative Party has pointed out that the Premier was not keeping a promise when he brought in this health tax.

What’s interesting to me is that not only did he break his promise on that, but the budgets that have flowed from that initial election in 2003 and the budget that has

just come out now don't reflect the commitments of this Premier. When you look at this budget, which supposedly is having a lot of big issues taken care of with this health tax, you see a huge disappointment. If you care about the future of this province, you know the health tax has not actually corrected the fundamental budget problems that we face in a wide variety of areas. We have a do-nothing budget based on a measure that was a broken promise.

If you look at education, the funding formula is not corrected in the budget that this House will be debating. There is no question that English-as-a-second-language funding is at risk because boards of education are under incredible pressure, incredible strains all the time. That lack of investment, those holes that those funds fall into mean real problems for children from new Canadian families. In this province, 48 of 72 boards report that they need to spend more money than they are getting. So in this province, the failure to fix the funding formula, the failure to follow through on a variety of promises, not just this health tax promise, is creating big problems for people in Ontario.

In my city, in Toronto, we have a problem with swimming pools no longer being funded, pools that were paid for by the taxpayer—absolutely necessary to keep our children healthy, fight the obesity epidemic and give them those physical education opportunities. But the Liberals who broke their promise on the health tax have not followed through on their promise to deal with the funding formula. So in my city, people who have spent millions over the years to provide physical education for their youth are not allowed to continue doing that because they're not getting the money they should have with a repaired funding formula. Just like the promise was broken on taxes, the promise has been broken on making sure there's adequate funding for education. The people in Toronto have not been well served. People across this province have not been well served.

The broken promises continue. This Premier has talked before about developing a strong economy in Ontario, just as he said that he would not bring in a health tax. Look at what has happened with culture in this provincial budget. The other day I talked about the fact that what was needed in culture, the investment that was needed, was far beyond anything that was put into this budget. Just as the health tax promise was broken, the promise to take action and make sure that our economy and our cultural sphere were looked after has not been attended to.

The film tax credits in the budget were fought hard for by the film community. Do they have an ongoing life? Are they something they're going to have to fight for all the time? Absolutely they're going to have to fight for them, because they have a defined time limit, up to the end of 2009. The film industry has faced very tough times here in my city and, Madam Speaker, in your city. We need an ongoing film credit for the film community. We don't want them to be in a situation where the Premier again makes a promise that's broken and puts

them into an impossible situation. Why can't they have stability? Why can't they have predictability? Why are they not treated with the respect they deserve to have?

It's not just in the film community, it's in the performing arts. In the budget there's retention of the retail sales tax credit for people who buy tickets for smaller theatres, but that is not adequate to the situation that's faced. Talk to the writers, the performers, the production people in theatre and the performing arts in this city and across this province and the simple reality is they are in incredible financial difficulties. They need assistance. They're not getting it from this government. This government broke its promise on the health tax; it's breaking its promise to take care of Ontario and make sure that it's fully healthy across the spectrum of the economy. Visual artists, authors, the whole creative sector, deserve much better than the very small measures that are incorporated into this budget.

When you look at the environment—and you look at the other promises that were broken by this Premier who promised not to bring in that tax—he promised to take action on climate change. Last summer, he promised a climate change plan and action so that Ontario's emissions would be reduced 6% below the 1990s by 2014; not the Kyoto commitment, weaker than that, but even this new, inadequate commitment is not reflected in this budget. If you look at the actual measures—\$100 million for rehabilitation of social housing units was spun as potentially having a big impact on energy efficiency. Nothing's mandated. It's all vague; it's all general. There was \$30 million allocated over four years to support the northern table on land use planning and resource management to protect a vital carbon sink—no numbers, no specifics. Retail sales tax exemption for qualifying Energy Star household appliances and light bulbs is extended to August 2009. That does not make a climate change plan.

There was \$14 million per year put into the Pick Ontario Freshness strategy and the Ontario's farmers' market initiative. Those are good things, but is that actually going to do what needs to be done when we deal with the vast scope of the climate crisis that's facing our society in this province? This Premier, who broke his promise on the health tax, is breaking his promise on climate change. His approach is an absolute disaster. There's no plan. There's no legislation before us. There's no allocation of money in this budget to actually meet the targets that he's talked about—no detailing; none whatsoever; no meaningful programs.

This is a Premier who spoke about this as one of the moral challenges of our generation, talked about the need to act on climate change so we had something to pass on to our children, to our young people. We have pages here this afternoon who will deal with the full brunt of the climate crisis. The Premier, like me, is a parent. He has to think those long horizons of what's going to happen to our children. Frankly, if you aren't putting money in the budget this year to deal with that issue, then you are

neglecting your obligation to all of our children and to the young people who are here as pages this afternoon.

When you look at the other parts of the environmental spectrum, the other environmental issues that should have been addressed in this budget—in 2007, the Environmental Commissioner stated that the ministries of the environment and natural resources were “starved of funding for core functions,” in real terms operating with fewer resources than in the early 1990s, widespread non-enforcement of environmental regulations and laws—widespread. That’s the reality in Ontario. If you drive 150 kilometres on Highway 401, there’s a good chance you’ll be picked up or charged. If you’re a polluter, your chances of being picked up or charged are far less.

Madam Speaker, you represent an area in Hamilton that has had significant problems with air pollution. Previously, you represented an area farther east. You had constituents who had profound problems with air pollution and a complete lack of enforcement on the part of the Ministry of the Environment. That lack of enforcement, that failure to take action is perpetuated in this do-nothing budget. Another instance in which the Liberal leader, currently Premier, promised action, just like he did on this health tax, promised in that case not to bring in a new tax and he brought it in. He promised to deal with the environment—didn’t deal with it.

The increase in the budget for the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment together was a total of 3.2%. That’s extraordinary. The problems we face are huge, and yet, no climate plan, no investment in climate protection and minimal investment in environmental protection.

The budget that is connected to this health tax is a budget that is far below the needs of the people of Ontario, does not reflect our needs today, does not reflect our needs tomorrow, does not reflect the needs of the generation who sits here today before the Speaker.

1550

When we get on to citizenship and immigration, I’ve been in this House now for a little more than two years—not long—but I know that this Liberal government promised to take on the whole question of access to professions, the whole question of recognition of credentials—huge issues.

You talk to people in the Pakistani community, the Bangladeshi community, the Chinese community, Somali, Russian, Bulgarian, Albanian, take your pick—large, large numbers of people who, in this province, have the credentials, the training, the skill, the commitment, the energy and the fire to actually make a difference in this province, using their skills fully. But in fact that isn’t what’s going to happen in this province because, although this government passed an act in its last session called the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, that doesn’t solve the problem.

In fact, people in these communities talk to me about the problems they see in their families, in their communities, that have to be dealt with. And what happened in this budget? A 2% reduction for citizenship and immigra-

tion. Does that begin to start dealing with the problems that these communities are facing? Absolutely not.

At least I’ll say this for this government: It’s completely consistent in breaking substantial promises to the people of this province. We know when they make a promise, there’s a very good chance it’s going to be broken. You don’t have to spend a lot of nights lying awake wondering, “Gee, is this going to be different? Are they not going to break this promise?” No, they’ve got a pretty good record.

When it comes to energy, there’s a recommitment in the budget to a \$30-billion investment in nuclear power. Take a look at what’s happening in Finland, where they’re building one of the first new nuclear plants in decades in western Europe, a plant that’s already way behind timeline and way over budget. Look at Florida: A nuclear plant that’s way over budget. This is a government that’s decided to roll the dice with nuclear technology as the future, as the core of the electricity system in Ontario.

This is not a government that’s fiscally prudent. This is not a government that will keep its promises. This is not a government that’s thinking about, “How do we get on to the 21st century? How do we actually develop an economy that reflects the technological developments, that reflects where Germany is going, where Pennsylvania is going, where California is going?” No, this is a province that has decided that the high point of 20th-century technology is good for it, and that’s where this government wants to stay.

Today we have Mr. Wilkinson, minister of innovation, talking about the need to go beyond carbon. And he’s right. If you’re actually going to deal with energy for the future, if you’re going to deal with an industrial economy, you have to do that. But you don’t see that in this budget. What you see in this budget is the status quo.

I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, if you want to commit Ontario to a rust-belt future, you do that. But I know that those who come from industrial cities like yours, the city where I grew up—Hamilton—those people want this province to move into the 21st century, because they want the jobs that come with that sort of advance. They don’t want to stay back in the last century. They want a steel industry that uses all the energy that comes out of making steel so they can make electricity, so they can heat the industrial sector, so they can provide heat for other factories around the steel mills. That’s what makes sense, using 100% of the energy, 95% of the energy, not 30% of the energy.

This Premier and this government are committed to making sure that we are going to have difficulty in the years to come.

When you look at the greater Toronto area, how does the greater Toronto area benefit in this budget—the questions of municipal finance, of uploading of social services, of transit, of sprawl? In fact, just like the broken promise on taxes, we find ourselves in a situation where we’re not getting the action that we need on transit, on sprawl, on municipal finances. There is no uploading of

the services and costs that were dumped on the cities by the Harris regime.

The Premier is perpetuating the actions and the policies that make cities very vulnerable, that make them fragile, that make it difficult for them to provide the social services and the social service safety net that you need for safety, for education and for a high quality of life; it's not coming from this Premier. In the greater Toronto area, those cracks, those fissures, those problems show up on a regular basis in our newspapers. We see the stories of kids getting shot; we hear about children being knifed. We know that as the social infrastructure deteriorates, you get more violence and crime. We have not had that corrected in this budget.

When we look at transit, last year the Premier promised a 17-and-a-half-billion-dollar Move Ontario 20-20 program. There were no specifics. There's nothing here. The Premier has been talking transit, but the real money continues to go to fund new highways and highway expansions. There's an investment of almost twice as much in highways as there is in transit. Ultimately, if we want to breathe clean air, if we want to avoid asthma, if we want to avoid lung disease and if we want to avoid sending billions of dollars every year out of this province to buy oil and gas, we have to have a large-scale, efficient, rational, well-funded transit system. We don't see the action in this budget. What we see is a continuation of the problems that plague the 20th century. They're simply being reproduced in this.

We know that gridlock is causing more and more problems for families. I know that those who live an hour's or two hours' drive from the centre of this city can count on continuing to take long trips home and on being held up in traffic, because until the money is spent on transit, until action is taken to deal with sprawl, that's the way things will continue to go and that's where we're headed in this region.

You know, it's interesting to me, just as an aside, that today, when I raised the question about provincial interest in a development in my riding, a suburbanization of Toronto, the Minister of Municipal Affairs said, "You're a latecomer to this. You're raising questions too late." Well, the minister wouldn't talk to me earlier about this. In fact, this minister, who has the responsibility of making sure that our municipalities work, who should in fact be intervening without us having to ask questions, is throwing up smoke when he is asked questions in the House, refusing to actually talk to people when they come to him, refusing to take on a declaration of provincial interest—which is entirely legitimate. It's entirely legitimate for him to hear about provincial interest and have arguments presented to him. He is simply hiding behind the OMB so that he doesn't have to deal with sprawl, he doesn't have to deal with the bringing of sprawl into the downtown, into the port area, into Toronto's waterfront. His negligence in that area is going to have significant costs for my riding. It will also have significant costs for the GTA and for the film industry in the greater Golden Horseshoe because my area, the area

where this rezoning is going on and the demolition will be going on, is one of the key studio areas for the film industry. His inaction threatens an industry that matters to the whole of the greater Golden Horseshoe and the GTA.

Lastly, I just want to say that this budget does not attend to the huge infrastructure deficit that's faced in the social housing sector. We've had people come to us, as sitting MPPs, talking about crumbling housing—and they're right. Is this budget actually going to deal with that? No. On an absolutely minimal basis, there is a nod to dealing with this issue, but it's not really correcting it. This government has broken its promises on taxes and its promises to take action.

1600

Mr. David Oraziotti: I'm pleased to join in the discussion this evening on government order number 6.

I want to talk a little bit about the positive benefits in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie of the health premium and the expenditure of additional health resources, certainly across the province and in our community. I also want to take a few minutes to point out a couple of ridings that I have some information on here, opposition member ridings that have received substantial funding through the Ministry of Health, and yet the opposition members come to the House and talk about how we should eliminate the health premium, how we should eliminate \$3 billion in public health spending. So I want to explore that a little bit this evening, and I'd like to know from the opposition members where they would like to see these dollars come from, what part of their ridings, what jobs, what nurses, what hospitals, where they want to see these cuts made, because that's what I'm hearing the opposition members talk about this evening.

Back in 2003, we had a very difficult decision to make, and Ontarians wanted us to reinvest in their vital public services. We had been left a \$5.6-billion deficit from the past government that has been well documented, certainly by the auditor. We faced a tough choice, but we knew that we were making the right choice by adding additional resources to the vital health infrastructure in this province and to the resources of many ridings.

Interjection.

Mr. David Oraziotti: I hear my colleague from Peterborough echoing these sentiments and talking about how important the health investments have been in the riding of Peterborough. I know they have a new hospital under construction—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Opening in May.

Mr. David Oraziotti: —opening in May. The leadership of the member for Peterborough is remarkable, and I know he's a great asset to his community.

Additional funding through the health premium has allowed us to create more physician spaces and hire more nurses. It has meant vaccinations for children who didn't previously get the new vaccines that are provided through public health units across the province. It has meant shorter wait times for hip and knee replacements, MRIs, CT scans, cardiac surgery and cancer surgeries.

We can't afford to take \$3 billion out of our health care system. We have an aging population in Ontario, and increased pressures and demands on our health care system.

I can't imagine for a minute that the opposition members would want to go back to the days in which we were cutting health care funding in the province of Ontario. The former Conservative government closed 28 public hospitals, cut \$557 million from countless budgets of hospitals in the province, closed 7,000 beds, laid off thousands of nurses and cut \$136 million from community public health organizations. The number of communities that were underserved by physicians in Ontario went from 63 to 142. There were so many that the number almost became meaningless. We all know in this House how important it is to have access to primary health care and have family physicians. I know it has been a challenge in my community as well.

Ontarians have made their position clear, both in 2003 and in 2007, that they are not prepared to continue down that road of cuts to the health care system. They have spoken in two elections on this issue. This year, we're proposing a \$40-billion investment in the health care sector, and that's \$11 billion more than when we came to office in 2003, a remarkable 37% increase in health care expenditures in the province of Ontario since 2003.

We can talk about some of the comments that were made by leaders of the opposition when they were in office, the Premier of the day calling nurses hula hoops and laying off thousands of nurses, again, driving up the number of underserved communities. When the NDP was in office, we recall cuts to medical schools. Some 13% of the seats in our medical schools were eliminated, adding to our shortage of physicians today in Ontario. We know that, while they talk about the importance of nurses and physicians to the public sector, their collective agreements were ripped up by the NDP. They simply said, "We don't want to honour your collective agreements any more, and we're going to eliminate those." That's not how our government has treated nurses and physicians, or anyone in the health care sector for that matter, so it is in stark contrast to where the opposition wants to take this province.

We have made a lot of these investments as well as maintaining a balanced budget. If you think of the period in which the Conservatives were in office, the price of a barrel of oil was about \$30 and the Canadian dollar was at about 60 cents US. Today, oil is over \$100 a barrel, the Canadian dollar is at par with the US, and we are still managing to maintain a balanced budget and make substantial investments in our health care sector.

I can't support the opposition's position that they would cut \$3 billion from health care. Certainly, my community doesn't support that. They want more investments in our health care sector.

We've shortened waiting times. To point out a few of them specifically: The wait time for cataract surgeries is down 191 days, or 61%; the wait time for angiography is down 26 days, or 47%; the wait time for knee replace-

ments is down 196 days, or 45%; and the wait time for CT scans is down 32 days, or 40%.

In Sault Ste. Marie we were able to purchase a new CT scanner, and a number of communities benefited from these new CT scanners. The cost of one of these pieces of equipment was about \$2 million. I remember a community group in my riding, years ago, fundraising to buy one of these pieces of equipment because it was so important to have.

The example in our community is that 6,600 more residents in Sault Ste. Marie are now able to get CT scans than they were previously, because the previous piece of equipment, which in its day was useful but became somewhat dated, took about eight images of your body. The new CT scanner takes 64 images. It takes 90 seconds to put somebody through this piece of equipment. The previous CT scanner took about 15 minutes.

Wait times are going down because of access to technology, and that's something that our government is pleased to be funding and supporting.

Hip replacements: The wait time is down 129 days, or 37%. Cancer surgeries: The wait time is down 12 days, or 15%. Angioplasty: down nine days, or 32%; and MRIs down seven days, or 6%.

Under our government, the wait times for key medical procedures in the province of Ontario continue to go down.

Opposition members need to recognize, not disregard, these realities of our health care system in making these investments. Eliminating the health care premium, cutting \$3 billion out of our health care budget, is not going to accelerate wait times, get us more doctors, allow us to hire more nurses, provide more long-term care, provide more home care services, or improve public health organizations. It's counterintuitive. I'm not sure why such a partisan interest is being presented here in the House when, clearly, the evidence is counter to that.

We've improved access to health care professionals.

We've got 500,000 people today who in 2003 didn't have a family doctor but now have somebody to call their family doctor.

We've hired 8,900 new nurses since 2003 in the province of Ontario.

We've got a new, fantastic Northern Ontario School of Medicine. My colleague from Thunder Bay-Atikokan is pleased that one of the campuses is in his riding as well as in Sudbury. It has been a great benefit to northern Ontario. I know the first class will be graduating next year. I know the interns are out in the communities across northern Ontario, already working and helping to support other medical professionals in the community. We're the only province building new medical schools. This is the first new medical school built in Canada in more than 30 years. It's fantastic news for people in Ontario and certainly in northern Ontario.

The collective effort of increasing physician supply by increasing the number of foreign-trained spaces from 90 to 200, by increasing the enrolment at medical schools by about 15% and by building a new medical school has

added to increasing physician supply in Ontario by about 23%. It's certainly in stark contrast to the NDP, who decided that they would cut medical school spaces—that didn't help get more doctors—and the Conservatives, who sat on their hands, really, for eight years when it came to physician supply, driving the number of under-served communities up from 62 to 143.

Interjections.

Mr. David Oraziotti: I hear some of the opposition members expressing concern about that, but we know that's the reality on this side of the House.

We've provided more services for home care—approximately \$800 million since 2003, or 38%, as well as adding an end-of-life care strategy supporting an additional 200,000 Ontarians.

We've increased the provincial share of public health funding for our public health units by 50%. It has been an absolutely fantastic initiative, certainly in our community, and well received.

Today there are three new, free vaccines that children in Ontario get, which would cost, on average, a family \$600 if they wanted all of those vaccinations.

1610

We've also introduced the human papillomavirus vaccination for 84,000 young women in grade eight to be able to have access to that vaccination.

Doctor Janice Willett, the president of the Ontario Medical Association, who lives in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie and practises medicine there, had this to say:

"The government has taken steps in recent years to reduce wait times, and together with the hard work of doctors and other health care professionals, patients in targeted areas are getting better access to care.... The additional investments in general surgeries are a positive step towards improving access for patients in the province."

Terry Sullivan, who is the president and CEO of Cancer Care Ontario, said he "applauds the Ontario government's budget commitment to increasing cancer screening rates for breast, cervical and colorectal cancers. This will enable to us detect more cancers early and save lives."

That's what we're talking about. We're not talking about cutting \$3 billion from the Ontario health budget like the opposition would like us to do. That's not going to make individuals in the health care sector interested in supporting our budget or our position, and it is certainly not going to provide Ontarians with the services that they need when it comes to very important medical procedures that all of our loved ones need and deserve.

In our community in Sault Ste. Marie, we've provided \$2.7 million to the Algoma Residential Community Hospice. I want to congratulate the Minister of Health, Minister Smitherman, on his support for this particular initiative in my community. It's being very well received. The organization has been struggling to raise funds, having many fundraisers and voluntary efforts to find the \$3 million that they require to support residential hospices. It has been fantastic news in our community.

In fact, Helen Ross, the executive director of the hospice, said, "The Ontario Liberal government has recognized the need for residential hospices and has moved forward to support all of us who believe that everyone has the right to die in dignity, free from pain and surrounded by their loved ones." That's Helen Ross, who's the executive director of the Algoma Residential Community Hospice.

We've also provided about \$13 million locally in my community to reduce wait times at the Sault Area Hospital. I mentioned the new CT scanner, helping to accelerate the number of individuals who are able to access that equipment; in fact, 6,600 more procedures a year. They've been provided with almost \$4 million for new medical equipment, 48 long-term-care beds and 12 new convalescent care beds.

The group health centre, which has been a model of delivery for family health teams right across the province, received a contract of about \$26 million. They've also seen some money for research, for vascular intervention and cardiac rehabilitation. It has certainly been very well received in our community.

Nearly \$5 million in additional resources have flowed to Sault Ste. Marie for home care services. I can tell you: In 2003, the phone at my office was ringing off the wall with individuals saying, "I need to get my 85-year-old mother a few hours a week—a nurse to come to her house and get her some home care services," or, "my 75-year-old father," or whoever it may have been. I know that we substantially increased the funding for home care organizations. Our community care access centre in Sault Ste. Marie received substantially more money than they had in the past and, as a result, hired over 20 new staff—dietitians, occupational and physiotherapists, nurses and the like. In effect, those waiting lists in our community dried up, which was great news for our community.

We've provided \$1 million for a new state-of-the-art emergency medical centre, and also resources to support land ambulance—a very important partnership with our municipalities. This is something that I recall, as a former city councillor, seeing the former Conservative government download provincial service after provincial service and claim to municipalities, "Trust us, it's revenue neutral; don't worry, we're going to give you the money."

Interjections.

Mr. David Oraziotti: I hear some of my colleagues who were also on municipal councils at the time, who know that that was about the furthest from the truth as you could get. We continue to struggle. I recall our finance commissioner coming in to do a budget and say, "We have increasing costs, and the province hasn't come through with the money again and again and again. We're going to be a couple of million dollars short, so we have to find a way to make ends meet." It was part of the big one-point plan that the Conservatives had to cut taxes and not reinvest in health care or schools, infrastructure or really anything else, for that matter. That was a challenge.

I'm very pleased that we provided about \$1 million on an ongoing basis for land ambulance improvements in our community so that we can reach really what municipalities and AMO had been calling for, which is a true 50-50 partnership when it comes to land ambulance.

I just want to highlight a couple of examples from various ridings.

In the Niagara West–Glanbrook riding, residents have benefited from an investment of about \$92 million to reduce wait times in Niagara and Hamilton area hospitals. Hospice capital funding has been provided to support the construction of residential hospices in Grimsby and Stoney Creek. And yet I hear members from the opposition and the member from this riding stand up and say, "I don't support the health premium, I don't support this funding, and I want to see \$3 billion taken out of health care." Yet here are the investments that are being made in their ridings. I'd like to know which of these projects they don't want to see move forward, they don't want to proceed with. I think it's fair that constituents in that riding know about the more than—

Mr. Jeff Leal: Norm Miller forgot about that new bridge the other day.

Mr. David Oraziotti: Absolutely—more than \$500 million to renew hospital infrastructure in Hamilton and Niagara area hospitals, including the construction of a replacement hospital in Grimsby. Grimsby residents will benefit from a new local-share policy set by our government to reduce the local share required for the construction of the new West Lincoln Memorial Hospital. Their local share is going to be reduced by about \$15 million. It's fantastic news for residents in Niagara West–Glanbrook, but I heard the member from that riding stand up yesterday and say, "Well, I can't support this, and I don't support this." So I'd like the member to come clean when it comes to what they're telling their residents.

One hundred and thirteen new full-time nurses have been hired in area hospitals, including five new nursing positions at West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby. Two family health teams in Niagara West–Glanbrook picked up more than 3,000 orphan patients so far. So it's absolutely fantastic news not just for members' ridings on this side of the House, but in many opposition ridings as well.

Wait-times funding for the Kitchener-Waterloo area hospitals has equalled about \$24 million. They've got about 39 new positions. Twenty-one nursing grads also took advantage of our new nursing guarantee and got jobs at the Grand River Hospital. Two family health teams in Kitchener also picked up more than 3,000 orphan patients thus far.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Wasn't she the former Minister of Health?

Mr. David Oraziotti: I think that is the riding of the former Minister of Health. I think you're quite right.

In the riding of Haldimand–Norfolk, more than \$200,000 has been provided to the general hospital to reduce cataract surgeries by about 61%—great news for the people in that riding. Twenty-eight positions have

been funded for late career initiatives to assist experienced nurses and help them stay working and on the job to support younger nurses and mentor them as well. They've also had two new family health teams that have picked up about 850 former orphan patients in the riding of Haldimand–Norfolk.

I have yet to hear the members from these ridings recognize that the resources that we are ensuring are delivered to all ridings in all parts of this province. Health care is not a partisan issue. This is an important issue to all Ontarians. We are living up to our responsibilities to ensure that all Ontarians have better access to health care, closer to home where they need it and certainly where they deserve it.

Certainly I want to recognize that we have more to do when it comes to health care. I fully acknowledge that. I know that I continually meet with local stakeholders in my riding and with various organizations, but I want to say that we've come a very long way when it comes to our approach in terms of dealing with physicians, nurses, long-term care, public health, home care services and the like.

In very sharp contrast, we've balanced the budget and we're not leaving Ontarians with a \$5-billion deficit. We're making very important investments in our public health sector, improving access to health care, shortening wait times and promoting health awareness. We've got a new Ministry of Health Promotion. I see the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is here, who was the first Minister of Health Promotion and has done a fantastic job in the province of Ontario. The current minister is here as well, Minister Margaret Best.

Interjection: She's the best.

Mr. David Oraziotti: Absolutely. She's doing a fantastic job as well, as we work to help reduce health care costs and pressures in the province of Ontario and work hard to educate Ontarians about health care. I'm going it to continue to support this position.

1620

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to join this debate on the substantive motion on the government's promise to review the health tax that they so illegally instituted in 2004.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: Promises made; promises kept.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I hear the member for Huron–Bruce say, "Promise made, promise kept." Oh, what a perfect segue: "promise made." That is, in fact, the issue here. It's about the credibility and the dependability of the word of the current Premier. When he was the opposition leader, running to be the Premier, he insisted over and over and over again—in fact, he made a big deal about signing the pledge. When I was a kid, when you got confirmed, you had to take the pledge that you wouldn't drink until you were legally able.

Hon. Jim Watson: Did you sign that pledge?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm not sure about that, but I do know this: The Premier wilfully and gleefully—he kind of smirked when he signed it—said, "I, Dalton McGuinty, do solemnly swear," blah-blah-blah, "that I

will not raise your taxes.” He repeated that over and over again. This was during the campaign. Then, subsequent to the election, let’s just look at some of the things that the Premier said. I’ve got some of these quotes here.

First of all, when he got elected, he insisted that—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, that’s good. We’re good with that.

October 30, 2003: “The McGuinty government ... will ... maintain personal income tax rates.”

“I won’t lower your taxes, but I won’t raise them either.” You remember him saying that.

Prior to that, on September 22, just prior to the election, he said, “Taxes paid by individuals and small businesses will be the same as they are today if the Ontario Liberals form the next government.” He did that in response to a question saying, “But, Premier, there seems to be some speculation and a possibility that the budget of the province of Ontario could be in a deficit to the tune of \$4.5 billion or more.” He basically said, “That doesn’t matter. Regardless of what the circumstances are, when we inherit the government, I will not be raising your taxes.”

So on October 30, he talked about maintaining personal income tax rates. Just two days after that, on November 1, he said, “We will not be raising taxes.” He said that on Focus Ontario. You know, it’s sort of like, when you try to pull a fast one once, somebody might say, “Oh, he’s a bit mischievous, a bit of a trickster.” But when it becomes a pattern and it’s over and over and over again, then the word “pathological” comes to mind.

Three weeks after that, his throne speech contained this statement:

“... this government made a commitment to maintain personal income tax rates at the current level.

“Legislation will be introduced to keep that commitment.”

So now we’re almost up to Christmastime.

He followed this up with, in the Sudbury Star the following day, “We are not going to raise taxes. That’s just not on the table.”

And this in Hansard, November 24, 2003: “We are going to maintain personal income tax rates.”

He specifically dismissed the idea of tax increases as a tool to deal with the deficit during question period on December 17 that year. That was the day that the government released its economic statement on the province’s finances. Hansard, December 17: “I just don’t believe that Ontario families should have to pay the price.... I’m not prepared to encumber them with further taxes.”

On and on it continued right up until April 24, just a couple of weeks before the budget, under continuing question, amid the speculation that he might raise taxes. Focus Ontario, April 24: “Well, what we’ve said all along, I am very clear about this, is that we’re not going to be raising taxes.”

Three weeks later on May 18, 2004: The infamous budget in which Dalton McGuinty brought forth the largest tax increase in the history of the province of

Ontario. He instituted a tax increase, a health care tax of up to \$900 a person.

Originally, they denied that it was a tax. First of all, we have gone through this and, as I say, the word “pathological” comes to mind. So, on and on and on we heard about this, that he wouldn’t do the exact thing that he did in May 2004.

When somebody says over and over and over—they don’t say it once; it can’t be dismissed as, oh, maybe they weren’t thinking or they just didn’t understand the question, but they say it over and over and over again—“I won’t raise your taxes,” a pattern has been established.

You would think that someone would care enough about their own credibility that if they thought they were going to do the exact opposite, they would have somehow changed their story. But no, no, right up until the 11th hour, right up until the hangman was there to pull the lever on the gallows, he insisted that he wouldn’t be raising taxes. Then they did exactly that.

Then they compounded the problem because they insisted: “No, no, no. This is not a tax; it’s a premium.” Well, you know that if you pay premiums, when you do your income tax at the end of the year, you can claim premiums and get a deduction and have your taxes reduced because you’ve paid premiums. Some of them are tax deductible, some of them are not, but for the most part you can actually claim them. This is not a premium, as we know, because at the end of the year you actually were hit with an additional tax. It’s an unfair and regressive way that they did it. First of all, it’s the diabolical way that they instituted it, and then it is so unfair because of the fact that the higher your income, the less you actually pay as a percentage of your income in health tax. So it’s the low-income people and the middle-income people who are actually hurt the worst.

The Liberals talk about their principles and how they care about the working man and the below-average income earners and people like that, and then they do this exact thing.

I have to be careful in the way I choose my words here, but it’s the way in which they instituted the tax that is the real crime here. In some societies, if somebody did that so many times over and over again, they would be guilty of a crime.

What happens here too is they’re not only paying the health care tax once. Hard-working Ontarians are also finding that they’re paying it twice. Once isn’t enough for Dalton McGuinty. No, no; you’ve got to get it twice. It was so ill-considered and it was so ill-conceived that they didn’t realize that all of these collective agreements out there, these workers who have negotiated collective agreements with their employees—many of them public sector employers such as the cities of Toronto, Ottawa and London—they’ve lost court cases now, which says that they, as the employer, have to pay the health care tax. But what does that mean? It’s not that the city of Ottawa or London or Toronto is paying that tax; it’s the people whom the cities get their revenue from who are paying that tax. So those taxpayers are getting hit twice:

once when they pay their own income taxes at the end of the fiscal year and also on their property taxes, because these cities are now paying for the health premium that the people under their employ pay. So they have to pay it not once, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, but twice. I'm sure that if those Liberals could find a way to charge them a third time, they'd be doing it.

1630

The other thing that bothers me about this whole motion—and I sometimes have to wonder why we're here—is that the outcome has already been determined. He's not interested in debating. He's not even looking for ways to fix the problems with the health care tax. There are all kinds of things that were either unintended, possibly—I might even give them a bit of the benefit of the doubt there—or certainly unexpected consequences of this tax. But they're not interested in making any kind of changes or amendments so that this ill-conceived and illegal tax would actually work in a fairer way. They're not looking at making any changes.

Dalton McGuinty has said, first of all—do you know why he's doing this? He's doing it because he's mandated by law for us to have this debate. He's not doing it because he wants to see whether there's a way that we can make things better. He's not doing it because there might be a way that we can make this fairer for lower-income people, because if you're making \$1 million, you're still only paying \$900 for this health tax. If you're making about \$60,000, you're paying \$900 for this health tax. So how is that fair? But he's not interested in looking at that and seeing if there are ways that we can change this to be fair. He's not looking at that. Here's what he said: "We're mandated by law to review the health tax and we will do that." The champion, the Guinness World Records book record-holder of all time for broken promises, wants to keep one, so he's going to make sure we have this debate. "We're mandated by law to review this health tax and we will do that." But he says, "I made it very clear before the campaign and during the campaign what my view is." He continued, "We're only doing this because we're obligated to do so." And finally, "I think the outcome is pretty predictable."

If you have no intention of trying to improve something, no intention of looking for ways that you can be fairer by the mistakes that you have made, then what is the point of going through this exercise? Just filling time in the Ontario Legislative Assembly? I think there should be other things to be talking about, but if you're really seriously looking to make this place better and to make Ontario better for the people who live here, particularly those who are struggling under the Dalton McGuinty tax-and-spend regime, then maybe we can make this debate worthwhile and meaningful.

Let's talk a little bit about health care. I heard the member from Sault Ste. Marie go on and on and on about what he perceived as the improvements to health care under the McGuinty Liberals. But if you ask the people in Ontario where they see the health system in this province, they don't agree with him. They see longer

lineups in emergency rooms; they see more and more people who can't get a bed in a long-term-care centre and are on waiting lists that never seem to get shorter, only longer; they see more people looking for a family doctor—and no help and no solutions coming from the provincial government.

When they instituted this tax, they promised that every single penny would go to health care in this province. We know that's not the case. They even had to admit that they were putting it into sewer pipes and other infrastructure projects in the initial stages, and now it's just gone into general revenue.

Hon. David Caplan: Look at Barry's Bay.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I hear the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal heckling me over there, as he likes to do from time to time. Infrastructure is important, but I think there's room to be honest about where you're spending your money and how you're spending it. You don't tell somebody that it's going here when it's going there. This is not about whether the priorities have to be met—of course they do—but I think there's room for the people in Ontario to get straight answers from their government regardless of what party forms that government. That should be expected of every government, in the province of Ontario or anywhere else. In a democracy we expect our governments to give us the straight goods, not to tell us, "We're going to put the money here," and then put it there. That's not too much to expect. I know the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal would agree with me on that point. We don't always agree, but I'm sure we would on that one.

By the way, we are very pleased with the assistance that was given to my community in Madawaska Valley to ensure that a new waste water treatment plant could be built. We do appreciate that.

Hon. David Caplan: Which is a health issue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Absolutely. Yes, it certainly is.

I wanted to talk about some of the issues that they say have been addressed in health care. I started to, and then we got onto the sewer pipe because the minister wanted to talk about sewers. More people in this province are looking for a family doctor. There was a big story in the *Ottawa Citizen*—front page—last Saturday about the number of people who can't get a family doctor in eastern Ontario; about the community of Eganville and the efforts they have gone to to secure a family doctor. They've got the building, they've got the office, they're ready to go, but they can't get the help from the McGuinty government.

The McGuinty government now has become fixated on family health teams, which is an idea they stole from the previous government, but they don't want to finance the kinds of projects that some of the smaller communities need to bring a doctor to their community. Some doctors don't want to work for a fee for service; they want to work as a salaried employee of the community health centre. But they don't want to support those any more, and that's a real challenge for people in rural Ontario communities. I think that people in rural Ontario

have the same rights to a family doctor as anywhere else. This government, I do believe, is failing in that regard.

I heard the member from Sault Ste. Marie talking about the medical school up in Thunder Bay. Well, it was the Harris government that approved that and got the ball rolling, and they know it. They simply want to take credit for it. The fact is that that started with the Harris government, and—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —the people on this side of the House are simply not going to let those people on the government side take credit for the good initiatives, the good ideas and the important things that were done to ensure that doctors would be taught and built here in the province of Ontario so that we could address the challenges of the years ahead. This government today doesn't want to give any credit to the previous government—and there are so many places where we could talk about that.

The one thing we never forgot in that government was that your word is your bond. When you tell somebody you're going to do it, there's a tremendous expectation that that's exactly what you're going to do. In the previous government, you could depend on it; in this government, they've clearly shown that you can't.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would ask the members to try to maintain order. Further debate? The member for Thunder Bay.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Why not? Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for this unintended consequence. This is a fortunate opportunity to respond to the comments of our friend from across the aisle. He was making

reference to some of the comments that were made by the member from Sault Ste. Marie in response to some of the good things that had flowed from the health care premium. Over the course of the last two days, and previous to that, I think it's been clear for most people in this House that all members in all ridings have experienced significant benefit from the implementation of this health—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan, apparently you've already spoken to this motion, so you are not able to take the floor a second time, as I'm sure you are aware. So I call again for further debate. Further debate?

The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal has moved that the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, as constituted by the assembly, review the Ontario health premium, in accordance with section 29.2 of the Income Tax Act.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion the ayes have it.

The motion has been carried.

Agreed to.

Hon. David Caplan: I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The House now stands adjourned until this evening at 6:45 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1642.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

ERRATA

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
19	668	1	46	vince's history. With \$5 billion at their disposal, you'd
23A	843	1	23	Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to add some

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