



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)**

Thursday 10 April 2008

Jeudi 10 avril 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
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

Thursday 10 April 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 10 avril 2008

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the McGuinty government should agree to define its proposed tire tax as a "tax," like the \$2.6-billion health tax, and the McGuinty government should immediately cancel all plans to implement the \$60-million tax on purchasing new tires, which will impact all Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Chudleigh has moved private member's notice of motion number 24.

Mr. Chudleigh, pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: This is an interesting resolution. It's an interesting proposal by the government. Opposition to a tire tax does not in any way suppose that I am against recycling, against environmental protection or against environmental legislation generally. In fact, my record speaks for itself. I have been adamant in this House for the past 13 years in supporting the environment, environmental causes and recycling.

My record speaks for itself, going as far back as the Oak Ridges moraine, where I remember voting in favour of protecting the Oak Ridges moraine at the time when the government which I was a part of was not in favour, although about a year later we did pass legislation saying that the Oak Ridges moraine needed protection.

The Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act is such that I'm very comfortable with my environmental record going back to land purchases and supporting the environment in those areas as well.

Members across the aisle, I'm sure, will be standing in their place and accusing me of thwarting their environmental cause, and they'll probably try to take credit for being the only party in Ontario that cares about the environment. I want to let the House know that I have grave concerns about those statements.

The environment is rightly becoming a very non-partisan issue in this House. I think that's a very important place for the environment and environmental issues to be. We should stop the games and get on with the meat of the issue: how best to protect the environment without

punishing Ontario consumers and weakening an already hurting economy. The environment and the management of waste is of paramount concern.

I fully support the government's intention to deal with the problems surrounding the disposal of used tires. However, my support ends there; there is no shining city on the hill that we can look to to find a solution to this difficult problem. However, there are a lot of examples around the world that would lead one to believe that there are solutions, albeit piecemeal, that we could adopt. If we took this seriously, we could be the first jurisdiction that selects those successful programs from around the world, and we would indeed become the shining city on the hill that people would look to when they talk about an environmental jurisdiction that says what it does and means what it says.

Once again, I believe this government is trying to impose an unpopular tax. I'm not sure why they would do this. They're calling it a fee, but I don't think that's going to fool anyone. A major point of this resolution is the semantics, that the government insists that this tax is a fee. They do this to avoid looking hypocritical after the Premier promised no new taxes not long ago. Call it what you want; this is a tax, plain and simple. Claiming it's a fee because it doesn't add to consolidated revenues but instead goes to extra-special stewardship programs certainly doesn't change the fact that this fee is indeed a tax or a levy or a duty, or whatever you would like to call it. It's coming out of Ontario's taxpayers' pockets, and when that happens, it's called a tax in my book. I hope that goes down in Hansard and I hope that is regurgitated some time in the future. Anything that comes out of the taxpayers' pocket, whether it be a duty, a fee or a tax, is in fact a tax. There is only one taxpayer, and he's gravely overworked.

A little bit of history on this subject: In 1989, the Liberal government did the same song and dance to try to avoid the word "tax"; that time, they called it a levy. In 1989, the Peterson government brought in the tire tax levy, and it stayed in place until 1993. Then, if you can believe this, under the NDP government, Bob Rae cancelled—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Their Bob Rae.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Yes, he was an NDP member at that time. Bob cancelled the tire tax. Understand the concept of this: This is an NDPer that cancels a tax. The NDP have never met a tax they didn't love, and here they are, cancelling the tire tax. So you know, without a doubt, how insane this tax must be when even the NDP would cancel such a tax.

In 2005, the same games began to be played. The Liberal Party was establishing a long tradition of manipulating words. In 2005, it became such a hot potato that they withdrew the tax before it was implemented. This proposed tax is also another broken promise from the Liberal government. This time, the promise only lasted a few days from the last budget. Despite the fact that they're trying to sneak it in under the guise of a fee or a levy or a duty, it's still a tax.

Improved tire recycling is indeed a desirable thing for Ontario. A tax burden for consumers is not. The government should have consulted with the industry, an industry that is more than ready to talk about recycling. You should have talked to the Recycling Council of Ontario, the Ontario tire recycling association and the Ontario Tire Collectors Association. None of these people have been consulted with this year. None of these people have seen conversations from the government during this session of the Legislature. In discussing this issue with these people, other solutions could have been put forward, and those solutions could have been extremely meaningful. They may not have included a beloved tax for government revenues, but they would have been very, very effective in how they solved the problem. Especially with high public enthusiasm these days for recycling and improving recycling technologies, it is in the best interests of industry to implement profitable recycling programs, and to use and advertise products that include recycled tires or recycled rubber.

It's a matter of how to get there; it's not a matter of how big a tax you can levy against the people of Ontario. Instead of proposing an unpopular tax at a time when a recession—the R word—is looming over the Ontario economy and has indeed taken hold in our largest customer south of the border, at a time when those kinds of things are happening in our economy, imposing an unpopular tax doesn't seem to be the prudent thing to do. This government loves to talk about its prudence, yet it doesn't seem to be the prudent thing to do. We're working in a framework that should encourage new and green businesses, and we're not doing that; we're taxing the consumers of Ontario at a time when they sorely don't need that tax.

1010

One of my friends here will talk about the tire tax as a safety issue. The more expensive tires are, the more you try to get another few miles out of them, the more bald tires there are on the highways. At least once a week—it seems nightly—I see Sergeant Cam Woolley on the TV news talking about car safety: You should wear seat belts, you should have a safe car, and you should have good tires on that safe car. That's the only thing that touches the road, between you and eternity. So you should have good tires, and this bill will not be encouraging that.

There are a number of industry-led associations, which I have talked about. They are more than willing to consult with the government. Many of them have not been consulted with during this session, and they were very

surprised when this came in. You would think that the government would look at the lessons of history that have been taught about the tire tax. In 1989, it was withdrawn. In 2005, the public outrage was so great that it was aborted. This government is apparently refusing to listen to the stories of history.

If the government truly believes that it wants to implement a tire recycling program, what it would do is consult with the manufacturers, consult with the first importers and, through regulation, have the importers and the manufacturers take responsibility for the disposal of tires through a transparent system. If there are costs involved, those two, the manufacturers and the first importers, should be the ones who move the products through the system and create a transparent system that pays its way through the system.

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'm very pleased to be here this morning to set the facts straight as to exactly what the government's plans are with respect to tire recycling. Let me get one thing absolutely straight. We have an organization called the Waste Diversion Organization, which has been mandated, as a result of a law that was passed about five years ago, to come up with plans that the government wants to initiate from time to time with respect to certain recycling efforts. That's what we're doing in this case. We are giving direction to Waste Diversion Ontario to work with its stewardship organizations, which are basically the manufacturers and the producers—in this case, of tire materials—to come up with a program. Whatever program that they come up with will be totally funded by that organization. How they charge for that by adding it to the prices of vehicles etc. is up to them.

We've done exactly the same thing with respect to hazardous waste, which is a program that's going to be paid for, by and large, by the associations that contribute to the hazardous waste materials etc. In that case, I believe it's an 80-20 split: the municipalities paying 20%, and 80% by the actual producers of the different materials. We're doing exactly the same thing with respect to electronic wastes; in other words, the television sets that we have, the monitors etc., in which case the producers are going to be paying 100% of that cost. None of the money that is required to run these various programs comes from government or goes into government. It goes directly to the various stewardship councils. Those councils in effect will determine who, amongst the various producers and manufacturers, are going to contribute what to the program by way of finances.

I know the member talks about the tire tax that was around 20 years ago, which was a totally different situation. Yes, in that case there was a fee placed on tires, and that money went into the general revenue fund of the province of Ontario. Under the act—as a matter of fact, it was passed while the Tories were in power—Waste Diversion Ontario is mandated to come up with various programs that are going to be funded, again, by the

organizations and producers of the materials that are part of that program. There is no tax; there is no fee. It's a program that is going to be totally funded by the industries themselves that are involved in the tire industry.

We're at the stage now where we're basically giving them direction as to what kind of program we want them to develop over the next little while. So, all the comments from columnists and everyone else—maybe they're all referring to what happened 20 years ago. This is a totally different situation.

There is a cost to everything we do. If we don't do anything, there may be health costs. Right now we have tires stockpiled all over the province that may very well be dangerous from a disease viewpoint—West Nile virus etc. As a matter of fact, we set aside almost \$2 million in our budget to start dealing with some of the stockpiles we have all over this province. There will be a cost. But there's a cost, either to the environment at some point in time in the future that the government has to deal with, or that cost will be allocated today.

But we're getting way ahead of the curve. Until they actually come up with a plan that then will have to be approved by the province of Ontario, there shouldn't be any discussion about a fee or anything like that. It's going to be completely based within the tire industry. How that will work will depend on the plan they're going to develop over the next little while.

I'm sure that nobody is going to disagree with the notion that we should be doing something about the 11 million tires that are being produced in Ontario and are being somehow discarded.

The other thing, quite frankly, that a lot of people are upset about is the so-called environmental fee that many automotive shops charge. Some automotive shops are doing the right thing and making sure that the tires are being recycled. Others just have them hauled away and really don't know what's going to happen to the material etc. We want to get rid of that and make it quite clear to the retail industry that it's going to be unacceptable for them to charge fees that somehow, at times, are being looked at as a government fee, when we all know it really isn't that way.

I just want to make it absolutely clear: What we have done is given direction, or are about to give direction, to the waste diversion organization here in Ontario to come up with a tire recycling program with the various manufacturers and producers of tires. Until they deliver that program to us, some 90 or 120 days from now, we really don't know how it's going to be funded or how it's going to be costed. But whatever the funding arrangements are, none of the money will come into the coffers of government. It will all go into whatever stewardship council is set up to deal with the recycling situation.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to join my colleague, Mr. Chudleigh, this morning to support his resolution. I listened with interest to the Minister of the Environment and his undertakings and assurances with regard to this tire tax. He doesn't want to call it that, and he assures us that it won't be a tire tax. But we were all

here in 2003—we weren't here; we were on the campaign trail—when the Premier said, "I won't raise your taxes," and we were here in 2004, when he called the health tax a premium.

So there's a great deal of skepticism out there with regard to whether we can rely on the assurances of the Minister of the Environment, or anybody in the McGuinty government, when they tell us that this is not a tax and won't be a tax and won't be treated as such. We don't have any details, other than the fact that the minister said recently that you're going to be paying more for tires because of some decisions made by the McGuinty government.

This is the slippery slope I'm always concerned about with this Liberal government. It's déjà vu all over again, like the Peterson government: Let's just keep taxing to the breaking point. The problem for the citizens in this province is that under this regime, they're struggling to meet their obligations from a tax point of view as it is.

It's the mindset of this government. They believe that they can always do a better job of spending your money. That's why spending in this province is \$96 billion: because the government wants to take every nickel they can from you, and they believe that they're better stewards of your money. Well, I put it to the government that the people of Ontario believe that they are the best stewards of their money. The importance of recycling and caring for the environment—we all agree on that; there's no argument on that. That's not a partisan issue, and that crosses all party lines. How we get there is important. This government is always looking for more money and more fees, and that's a concern.

1020

My friend the member for Halton touched a little bit on the safety issue. As the cost of tires goes up, it is important that we consider, particularly under the taxing scheme of this government—we are aware that it's something people have to go out and buy. Are they going to stretch their tires? Are they going to jeopardize their safety? The two most important parts of a vehicle are your brakes and your tires, because without them, it doesn't matter what kind of shape the rest of the vehicle is in; you've got a dangerous vehicle. If those are not working properly and well-maintained, you've got a dangerous vehicle. We're into an era where people legitimately should have two sets of tires for their car: a set of tires for the summer and a set of tires for the winter. It has been proven over and over again that a vehicle on four snow tires in the winter is a far safer vehicle than a vehicle on so-called all-season tires: The rubber compound is different and reacts differently in cold weather, as well as the traction capabilities of it.

So I'm very concerned that this is just the tip of the iceberg for this government. It's another tax. When they promised no more new taxes—they've crossed that line already; they're going down that road with this tax. I believe it's just the tip of the iceberg, that down the road here—no pun intended; if you have good tires maybe you can get down that road, but for some people they're

going to have difficulty being able to afford them, in this government's regime—we're going to see more and more and more of this, because this government is addicted to spending. It is addicted to spending.

In your own houses, you have limited income, and when you reach the point where your spending is approaching your income or exceeding your income, you have to make adjustments. You can't go to your employer and say, "I need more money." You can't—

Mr. Peter Kormos: MPPs did.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, maybe you can put up a lemonade stand on your front lawn or something. But the fact is, your income is limited. This government believes, "No matter what happens, we'll just raise our income by raising taxes, and we're the guys who come up with the best ideas on how to spend it."

Again I put it to you: The people in the province of Ontario should be trusted to make the decisions with their own spending, and not have to hand it over to the McGuinty Liberals to spend any way they want.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Very briefly, I want to tell you that this New Democrat supports this resolution.

Look, down in Welland where I come from, I've been buying tires from Groff Tire over on Niagara Street for years and years and years. It's a unionized tire shop. The Groff family has been running it for half a century now. It seems to me that they charge, if I remember correctly, a tire disposal fee as part of their service, because they, of course, are an incredibly responsible dealership that ensures that the tires are dealt with appropriately. But it seems to me that for the government to stand up and wring its hands and say, "Oh, my goodness, we need this, because after all, where have these tires been going?"—well, that's precisely the question. Where have the tires been going? We have a government that's been in power for over four years. What has it been doing with respect to regulating the disposal of tires that are no longer usable?

The government has been delinquent. The government has been missing in action. The government has been off flitting around on trade missions here and trade missions there and not attending to the serious crisis. I've been here long enough—maybe you remember the Hagersville tire fire? That was during the Peterson Liberal government, the time that the crisis around improper tire storage first exposed itself, in a most dramatic way, to Ontarians. Since then, we've had—I recall the tire lottery. Remember that, Minister of the Environment? Mr. Bradley will tell you all about the tire lottery. Remember the tire lottery? That tire lottery got tired pretty quickly. Ontarians weren't about to buy into it. The question is, where has the government been? The government, it seems to me, has a responsibility to regulate the disposal of waste and exercise it in many other respects of waste generated in our community. Rather than imposing a new tax on hard-pressed taxpayers—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Kormos: Well, it is a new tax. You can call it whatever you want, just like, as has already been noted

and will be noted again, Mr. McGuinty wanted to call his health tax a health premium. He figured he was going to weave and dodge and bob his way through. Well, the various adjudicative tribunals shut that down in short order, didn't they? It's a tax. Come on; come clean. Straighten up over there. Call a tax a tax, for Pete's sake. Stop trying to dupe the taxpayers of this province. For once, I would like to see Mr. McGuinty display that rare image of a politician with his hands in his own pockets.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I was looking at the motion. I couldn't find anything new in the motion. Rather, it's confusing. The member from Halton calls it a tax. Maybe he didn't read the component of the program being put forward by the industry and corporations trying to deal with tires in the province of Ontario. I think he is a little bit confused, and hopefully he'll go back to read the whole component of the agreement between the industry and the recycling companies who are trying to deal with tires in the province of Ontario.

I want to tell you this: Last Saturday was good weather; it was beautiful weather. I decided to clean my garage and my basement. I brought the truck and filled it with old couches and metal and many, many different materials from my house. I took it to the recycling facility, called Try Recycling Inc., in my riding of London—Fanshawe. It's a beautiful facility; it's a great facility. When I went there, this company charged a tipping fee. This tipping fee goes directly to the company to try to segregate the products, whether it's couches or metals or lamps or glass or whatever. They charge a fee for that. Do we call it a tax? No. We call it a fee for the company. In the same way, this program has been put by the industry that produces tires, by many different organizations across the province of Ontario that deal with recycling tires in this province.

I think it's a very important initiative, and it's important for our health. I still remember, when I came to Canada in 1989—I was a recent Canadian back then—I heard about the big, huge fire in Hagersville, where thousands and thousands of tires were burning for almost 17 days. Can you imagine the cost and the cause and many different aspects of those burning tires to the environment, for health, for many different things around us? It was very dangerous. I think it's very important to deal with the issue now rather than in the future, especially now, when you go into the countryside and you see a lot of tires in many places. As you know, sometimes those tires are a very safe haven for West Nile, to create diseases, and not good for the environment—not good for the ground, not good for the health of human beings, for animals, for insects, for many different things. It's very important to have some kind of mechanism in order to deal with the issue.

The member from Halton wants to call it a tax. How can it be a tax when this money does not go to the government coffers or treasury? This money only goes from the industry to the non-profit organization to deal with the issue; it has nothing to do with the government. Therefore, you cannot call it a tax. It's a fee to deal with

it; it's not a tax. The only time we call it a tax is when it comes to the government's treasury. Since it does not go to the government treasury—that's it.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I am pleased to speak to this tire tax resolution. We're told there's something like 11 million or 12 million used tires created every year, and they end up stockpiled, buried in landfills or shipped out of the province to be burned as fuel. I know there's a proposal for a major tire-burning facility just across the lake from me, in Erie, Pennsylvania.

1030

One problem is, nobody really knows where a lot of these tires go, and it is unacceptable that we're the only province in Canada that does not have a tire recycling program. That being said, I don't feel it's necessary for people in Ontario to be hit with yet another tax. I really feel that there's nothing worse than implementing a tax like this one, under the guise of environmentalism.

David Peterson tried such a program. He brought in the tire tax, as we heard, in 1989. That was ineffective. Essentially, it was dishonest to the point that Bob Rae rescinded it in 1993. Imagine: It was such a bad tax that even the NDP, under Bob Rae, were forced to become tax fighters on that particular levy.

This government touted its latest budget as being tax-free, and then, only a few days later, we're pondering the idea of slapping a \$4 tax on every tire sold in Ontario—again, shades of the infamous health tax that this government brought in after the 2003 election. At least that one was announced during the 2004 budget.

I'm in favour of a recycling plan, but I sincerely doubt the commitment of the minister opposite with respect to any kind of plan on recycling. We have before us a trial balloon being pushed out the door. I feel that taxpayers could accept this tire tax if this government had acted in good faith to start. But again, what can we expect? We constantly think of that so-called health tax. Regardless, to deliver a so-called no-new-taxes budget very recently and then a few days later come up with something like this, we're just left with the image of nothing more than a tax grab.

Back in 2005, when this issue reared its head through Waste Diversion Ontario, Premier McGuinty told reporters at that time, "There will be no tire tax. Everybody get that one?" Those are his words. Just six months ago, prior to last October's election, the same Premier was still against a tire tax. Just like the infamous health tax, Premiers say one thing before the election and the opposite after the election.

There are alternatives that could accomplish the same: something as simple as using the stick of a tire tax. In fact, the Ontario Tire Collectors Association proposed a plan in 2005: (1) bring in a system of consumer-based, buy-recycled rebates similar to those provided for the purchase of energy-efficient appliances; (2) we need a system for registering tire collectors and tracking the disposition of collected scrap tires in order to prevent these tire stockpiles; (3) having said that, we do need a stockpile inventory moratorium and a remediation program;

and (4) manufacturer or producer responsibility, whereby funds used for rebates, market development, research and development, scrap tire collector registration, program monitoring and administration would be provided by brand owners and first importers of tires into the province.

I believe in a tire recycling program; I'm not convinced that this government does. If you want to implement a program, take a look at the alternatives that have been presented before us, because people in this province really can't afford more to end up getting less. We do learn from history. History has shown us that taxing consumers is not really the way to go. Let's have a little more carrot on this one and a little less stick.

Mr. Michael Prue: On this particular issue, I went back and tried to read a little bit of history. Too often, there's too much history in here. Everybody yells back and forth about what the other guy did 20 years ago.

But I went back to look at why there was a tire tax in the first place. It appears to me that although it was properly motivated all those many years ago, the problem with the government of the day was that they flowed the money to general revenues. The money did not go into a dedicated tire tax to get rid of the tires at the end. That's what made the consumers mad, that's what made the people angry, and that's why it was eventually abolished. I would hope that, whatever the government plans, they never again put that money into general revenue because, as my colleagues the Conservatives here are saying, it will never be approved or supported by the populace.

I went back as well to look at what the government did in its last term of office, to try to get some indication and figure out where this minister is heading in the pronouncements that were made in the last couple of weeks, and I find it perplexing and a little troubling because I had to read what the last Minister of the Environment had to say. Less than a year ago, on April 20, 2006, in a speech to Waste Diversion Ontario, of which the minister spoke so highly today, the then Minister of the Environment, Laurel Broten, confirmed the death of the tire recycling program. She stated on that date:

"Turning now to the used tire diversion program, I want to thank WDO"—Waste Diversion Ontario—"and Ontario Tire Stewardship for your commitment to finding more innovative solutions to this difficult issue. We have carefully reviewed the options on how to proceed and I have decided to defer the finalization of a used tire program for the immediate future." That's what the minister said.

Fifty weeks later we have some musings about going somewhere else.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Two years later.

Mr. Michael Prue: Okay, two years later we have musings about going somewhere else. In those two years, what did the government do? The first thing they did was to give permission to Lafarge at Bath, Ontario, to burn the tires in their kilns. Now, some people would say, "Well, the tires are gone. They've been burnt." But the effect of that government action was to enrage the envi-

ronmentalists. The environmentalists in the immediate area formed a group called the Loyalist Environmental Coalition. They went out and tried to stop this government and Lafarge, which was burning the tires in their kilns, from doing that, because they thought it was a really bad environmental action. They went before the Environmental Review Tribunal and that tribunal agreed to a hearing. Then, as soon as the tribunal agreed to the hearing, Lafarge took them—the environmentalists—to the Divisional Court to stop the hearing of the appeal, which is where it is today.

Now we have musings of a tire tax or something. And I should say that the government has also placed a temporary ban until the pilot project, as they put it, in Bath is reviewed. I don't know how that's going to be reviewed. By the government? By the Divisional Court? By the Environmental Review Tribunal? I'm not sure who is reviewing it at this point, but certainly the government—the reason that it's all there—has to take the major responsibility for giving permission to burn the tires in the first place.

We in the NDP absolutely support sustainable tire recycling. It has to be supported. We have to be able to get rid of the waste tires. I don't have to tell you, because I'm sure all members of this Legislature, especially in the spring, in these months, go out into the fields and the ravines and the creeks and the valleys in their own jurisdictions, as I will be doing next week and the week after, to clean up all the stuff that has been dumped there. And every year when I go into those valleys and creeks around the Don Valley and in my riding, we find tires. We find people who have dumped those tires. Even though it was clean and pristine the year before when we finished, we find more, and I'm expecting to find more. Those tires are an environmental hazard. Not only do they leech chemicals into the soil but they are also pretty good breeding grounds for mosquitoes, and we all have to be worried about West Nile and other diseases.

1040

I want something to be done, the NDP wants something to be done, but slapping a fee on consumers at the end of the process won't change the behaviour of the producers. We have to do something other than simply charge those who need the tires on their cars to do so. We prefer, in our party, an extended producer responsibility. That is exactly what we want, but we're not very trusting, because of past government actions. We want an extended producer responsibility where the producers take responsibility for the life cycle, including disposal.

Hon. John Gerretsen: That's exactly what this is about.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, it's not.

Hon. John Gerretsen: It's exactly what it is.

Mr. Michael Prue: That isn't what I'm hearing from you. It's not what I'm hearing from you and that's not what this motion is.

Everybody is worried about who is going to pay for it. If the consumers are going to pay for it, we have some

real difficulties with that. If the producers are going to pay for it, then it may be a very good thing.

Okay, we believe that this will help the producer re-engineer the processes. We believe that it will reduce waste. We believe that the reducing of use of dangerous chemicals will also be a net result of taking the appropriate action.

Progressive jurisdictions around the world have adopted this. In this jurisdiction, in Ontario, up until two years ago their only solution was to burn the tires at Bath. I would think that if this government has learned anything from that mistake, it is that we cannot continue to go down that road.

This government has a pretty dismal record to date. I am hoping this minister will turn it around, but I want to tell you the dismal record on waste diversion: There's been a dismal record on taking things out of landfill sites, a dismal record on landfill sites themselves and a dismal record on developing an environmental plan. In spite of years of asking, "Where is your plan? When are you going to commit to a plan?" we haven't seen one from this environment minister or the preceding one.

There's also a side effect to all of this. One of my first jobs as a very young man of 17 years of age was working in a place called Dunlop. Dunlop produced all kinds of rubber products. Mostly I worked where they made hand-rails and conveyor belts and things like that. Dunlop used to, in Canada, produce huge numbers of tires. Bridgestone used to produce huge numbers of tires. Goodyear used to produce huge numbers of tires. All of these groups are gone. All of these tire manufacturers are no longer in Ontario.

I would think that if we developed an environmental plan that is sensitive, if we put restrictions on the tires, this will have a net effect of having producers come back to Ontario, because we would not allow, I would think, tires that were built in other jurisdictions that did not meet the standards to be sold here.

I am hoping that a government will go even further, beyond how to dispose of them, but how they are to be built so they can be more environmentally sound, so that they will cause fewer problems to the environment, and that would force producers to produce tires like that and, hopefully, to produce those tires here in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to leave some time for my colleague from Toronto–Danforth, who has arrived, to speak about this issue because I know how important it is to him and how passionately he cares about the environment. So I would just simply conclude by stating that we will be supporting the motion before us today. If the protestations coming from the government side are right, we look forward to seeing a real environmental plan. We look forward to seeing extended producer responsibility in a government bill and not simply the musings of putting a tire tax on consumers, because if there is anything that is not going to work, that is not going to work.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I'd like to thank the member from Halton for raising the issue of tire recycling, but let's see what he says here. He says there's going to be a

“proposed tire tax,” and furthermore that there are plans in place to implement a “\$60-million tax on purchasing new tires.”

I don't know where he gets this from, but I would hope he will address what he says here and tell us just where he gets that information from. I'd like to know.

Then we've got the member from Haldimand–Norfolk that there's going to be a tire tax of four dollars on each tire. I'd like to know where he gets his information from.

It is clear: There is a letter being sent from the Ministry of the Environment to Waste Diversion Ontario to come up with a plan to issue or to produce and to develop a tire recycling program. That's great; that's what our interest is here. That's the plan now, and we're moving in the right direction.

We've got to come up with a tire recycling program right now, as all of us know. Why is this an important issue? Because Ontario is the only province in Canada that doesn't have a tire recycling program. Note this: Not one dollar is going to the government, as you indicated. Not one dollar is going to the government coffers. It stays.

Finally, let me say something to the member from Beaches–East York. He's right when he says, “Let's look at the ravines. Let's look at the pristine countryside”—we do find a number of tires. Just go to Sutton, Ontario—just south of Sutton, near the 7th concession. Boy, I was surprised the other day. It was beautiful before, and now, a bunch of tires: big tires, small tires, bald tires—all kinds of tires. What are we going to do about this? They're saying to me, “Mr. Ruprecht, do something about these tires.”

We're here today—and the ministry should be thanked—to try to come up with a plan so that Ontario joins the other provinces in terms of developing a tire recycling program.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise today in defence of the people of Ontario, who are not fooled by the McGuinty government's use of the words “user fees.” I support recycling tires, but not in the absence of a concrete plan. I don't believe in sugar-coating things for my children, and I definitely don't believe that the government should try to sugar-coat yet another tax to be paid for by the citizens of this province.

User fees are directed into ministry budgets from which they arise. Taxes like the health tax, and now this tire tax, go directly into general revenue coffers. It is the very definition of a tax. But why should the taxpayers care which bottomless pit their money is deposited into? Is this just semantics? People should care because ministries have a greater chance of utilizing this tax for the purposes for which it was intended, instead of vote-buying, spending frees and slush funds. You may be interested to know that this announcement—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Would the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek come to order.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline:—about this tax is coming as quite a surprise to the stakeholders in the industry. Stakeholders in the tire recycling business have been working on an anticipated stewardship program designed to track and account for every tire slated for recycling in this province. This is precisely how government budgets and spending balloon out of control. When government takes over a project versus supporting a private sector initiative, everyone loses. I believe in letting the professionals handle this—the people who have studied tire recycling for years, developed consensus between the stakeholders and decided on a reasonable plan with manageable time frames. Once again, the McGuinty government has ignored public input from the leaders in their field and pushed ahead, like a bull in a china shop, with their own hidden agenda to tax the people of Ontario within an inch of their life.

Why has the government made no mention, until this morning, of this stewardship program that they led the stakeholders to believe was a done deal? Perhaps they ran the figures and preferred to have that money in their own pockets rather than in the private sector partners who actually want to achieve something on this issue.

My colleague Laurie Scott, together with PC Party leader John Tory, organized a waste summit in the month of June in 2006. This summit brought together the brightest minds in the waste diversion business and their municipal regional partners with the goal of creating real and significant waste diversion targets and processes across this province. This initiative fell on deaf ears, like the stakeholders in the recycling industry. The Premier and his government appeared to know best. Well, this daddy-knows-best routine is not fooling me, it's not fooling anyone in the opposition benches and for, sure, it's not fooling Ontarians.

We want to see well-constructed programs with benchmarks, deliverables that produce real results for hard-working people who are making this financial sacrifice in hopes of providing a better future for our children and grandchildren. I urge the government to go back to the drawing board on this proposal. Take the time to do this right. Meet with the stakeholders who have put a significant amount of time and energy into developing an effective program and take their feedback to heart.

Our children and our grandchildren are counting on us to get this right. Let's not throw another tax their way, one that does nothing to treat the root cause of the issue. Quite frankly, they deserve better, and so do we.

Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me. Ontarians will not be fooled again, again and again.

1050

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Essentially, we are being asked by this government to trust them. I don't know about you, Speaker—actually, Speaker, I know you're in a more difficult position than some of us.

I checked my watch when I asked the time from the Minister of the Environment, because the simple reality is, time after time, promises have been made and broken on substantial issues that matter to people in this

province. Stopping the burning of coal was promised in 2003—nope. At the time, now-Premier Dalton McGuinty said that he was going to stop burning coal. The environmental movement said, “What about nuclear power plants?” It was a complete promise: No new nuclear power plants. What are we doing in Ontario? Full-tilt nuclear.

In 2003, he promised waste diversion—huge action. It’s 2008; we’re at 28%.

For years, the Auditor General and the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario have been saying that laws in this province for the environment have not been enforced. We have people here from Hamilton today from Environment Hamilton with photos of pollution going on in that city today, and they are not getting satisfaction.

So the question I have for everyone in this House is, why on earth would we believe that you’re actually going to do something useful with that? Put forward legislation for us to consider, allocate the money where necessary to make sure that things happen, and then perhaps we could say that there’s something real on the table. All we have is this trial balloon of this proposed tire tax. If you want to do something about waste diversion and waste reduction, you have to put the responsibility, first of all, on the manufacturers so that they re-engineer for recovery of materials.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: “Check,” says Mr. Hoy. I think the simple reality is that your history has been one of taking the money and putting it into general revenue when you’ve had a tire tax in the past. You’ve been very open to burning tires; maybe that’s the ultimate plan—just put on a tax, and then pay for the shipment to cement kilns in who knows where. Are you in fact going to do what you say you’re going to do? Your history on this, the history of your government, is extraordinarily poor. People from Hamilton and people from all over the province know that you can’t be trusted on this file.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It’s a pleasure to join the debate today. I think I’ve heard a variety of opinions. It might help if we started dealing with some of the facts around just what has been done and what maybe are some of the things all members of all parties could agree with.

The concept of environmental stewardship has become an accepted concept within the environmental movement and, I think, in society at large. That simply states that when you manufacture a product, you have a plan in place to cover its safe disposal, so that you have stewardship over the entire life cycle of that product. The reason for that, of course, is that in the past that hasn’t been done. Some of the young people who are in the chamber today—their future hasn’t been guaranteed by any form of environmental stewardship, so we’ve got products that are in circulation today that we’re just developing plans to deal with.

If you look at what we’ve been able to do—in the very short years, from the McGuinty government, you’ve seen a hazardous waste plan introduced, you’re seeing an elec-

tronics waste plan introduced; and I’ve consulted with the tire recyclers myself. I’ve toured Canadian Ecorubber in Brampton. It’s a wonderful operation owned by Halton Recycling, of all places.

Now, 10 million to 12 million tires are generated every year in the province of Ontario that we need to deal with. Some of them currently are recycled; some of them are exported for use as tire-derived fuel; some are retreaded; some are exported for use as tire-derived fuel; some are retreaded; some are exported for sale and some are used for landfill cover, but the sad fact of the matter is, a lot of them are just stockpiled and a lot of them are dumped. What we and the Minister of the Environment are saying is that we need a plan to deal with that. He’s consulting with the industry as to how that plan should be implemented and what it should look like.

What I find confusing about the motion that’s before us today is that the Minister of the Environment has been very clear that he does not want a tax. What he wants is for the industry, under the concept of environmental stewardship, to cover the cost of the program. The motion before you today from the member from the Conservative Party from Halton is saying that he wants a tax. It says, “That, in the opinion of this House, the McGuinty government should agree to define its proposed tire tax as a tax....” We on this side of the House, and certainly I as a private member today, are saying we don’t want a tax; we want the industry to cover its own costs. We want the industry to take responsibility for the products it’s producing and the products it makes a profit from.

We’re very, very, clear. I don’t think we need to take any lessons from the other party. Their record on the environment is clear. Look at what the Conservatives did to the Ministry of the Environment, how they cut staff, fired hundreds of ministry staff, fired water inspectors. Take a look at Walkerton.

If you look at the NDP record, they, too, when they had the opportunity, cut the budget of the Ministry of the Environment. They voted against bringing back energy conservation programs, voted against the Clean Water Act. I could go on and on. I don’t think we need to take any lessons. The past record of your party, Michael, speaks volumes.

Mr. Michael Prue: You were a member of the NDP then.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: That’s when it was a decent party. That’s when you had a leader.

It’s quite clear that we have an option before us today as members: If you want to vote for a tax, you support the private member’s bill; if you don’t want further taxes, vote against it.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I just want to thank my colleague the member for Halton, Mr. Chudleigh, for bringing this motion forward. For once, maybe we’ve caught the government before they brought in a tax. Mr. McGuinty obviously said he wouldn’t be raising our taxes, and then he brought in the health tax. You just had a budget. You said you weren’t going to be raising taxes, and now you propose to bring in another tax. Mr. Chudleigh is doing the people of Ontario a favour.

Don't try to hide it in the guise of the industry covering its costs. It's a tax. You'd need to be an idiot to think otherwise.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member from Halton has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: "There will be no tire tax." Did everyone get that? "There will be no tire tax." Mr. McGuinty, June 3, 2005. The minister says the discussions with the industry are starting, but he's already got the number out there: \$4, \$5, \$6—maybe it's going to be \$10 or maybe it's going to be \$12. The number is already out there. They can't wait to get their hands on that tax. If this debate this morning turns the corner on that desire from this government to feather their nests and get that \$5, \$10 or \$15 tax into the general coffers—

Hon. John Gerretsen: Oh, now it's going up. I see.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Oh, it's going up like a sky-rocket. When you start measuring the dollars it's going to attract, I'll be amazed if your government can hold itself back from reaching out for that money. Basically, we don't have a plan yet, but the money is out there, the \$5, the \$4, the \$6, the \$10.

We've heard a lot of very good ideas this morning. The solution to this problem is to work with the industry, to work with the manufacturers. Before you put the tax on tires, you should work with these people, first importers and manufacturers, and come up with a transparent system that will allow the industry to solve the problem. You don't need a tax to do that. You don't need a fee to do that. You don't need a levy to do that. You don't need anything out of the taxpayers' pockets to do that. All you need is some well-thought-out and cooperative standards for the use of the industry when they come to implement government regulations. The only thing you really need is regulations, along with industry cooperation, and you're only going to get that through discussions.

1100

VISITORS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek advises that we have some guests in the members' west lobby today. From Environment Hamilton, Linda Lucasik, executive director; from North Hamilton Project, the manager, Brenda Johnson; and we have Lorna Moreau and grandson Nicklaus Moreau from Concerned Citizens. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

NOWRUZ

Mr. Reza Moridi: I would like to thank you for the opportunity to move this resolution today: that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario must demonstrate, in its promotion of diversity, the acknowledgement of the first day of spring, which may be anytime between March 20 to March 22, as Nowruz.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Moridi has moved private members' notice of motion number 20.

Pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Reza Moridi: Nowruz is the ancient Iranian festival of spring. In harmony with the rebirth of nature, the celebrations begin at the exact moment of the vernal equinox commencing the start of spring. Nowruz is the new year among Iranians and always begins on the first day of spring, which may be any time from March 20 to March 22, at the exact moment when the sun enters Aries.

Nowruz ceremonies are symbolic representations of the ancient concept of rebirth. At the beginning of spring, the festival of Nowruz signifies rebirth, hope, peace and prosperity, and is a time of great joy and celebration. The name comes from Avestan, meaning "a new day," and it was officially acknowledged and named Nowruz by the mythical Persian emperor Jamshid Shah. Its non-ethnic and non-religious characteristics are the precise reason for the fact that Nowruz is still prominent outside the political boundaries of modern Iran and is widely celebrated in various central Asian countries, such as Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and the republic of Azerbaijan; in parts of Pakistan, India and China; and in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

Nowruz is the beginning of the official calendar of Iran and Afghanistan and is the official new year in Iran, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. It has also been adopted as the official new year feast by the Baha'i faith, due to their roots in Iran. Ismaili Shiite Muslims, who trace their origin to Iran, also celebrate Nowruz.

Nowruz, with its uniquely Iranian characteristics, has been celebrated for at least 3,000 years and is deeply rooted in the traditions of the Zoroastrian belief system. The main characteristics of Nowruz involve such specialties as feasting, visiting friends and relatives, the giving and receiving of gifts, wearing new clothing and, most importantly, the Haft Sinn table. The Haft Sinn table, which represents the arrangements of seven items, begins with a special piece of cloth of the highest quality draped over a table, upon which lays a mirror and seven specific items whose names all start with "s" in English—"sinn" in Persian.

The number seven has been considered as sacred in Iran since antiquity, and the seven dishes stand for the seven angelic heralds of life, rebirth, health, happiness, prosperity, joy, patience and beauty. The symbolic dishes that are displayed on the Haft Sinn table consist of sabza, which is sprouts of wheat or lentil, representing rebirth and life. Samanu is a pudding made of wheat sprouts and transformed to a sweet, creamy pudding that represents the ultimate sophistication of Iranian cooking because of its complexity. "Seeb" means apple and represents health and beauty. Senjed is the sweet yet dry fruit of the wild olive and represents love and passion. Seer, which means "garlic" in Persian, represents medicine and good health.

Somaq, which is a berry, represents the colour of sunrise with the notion that the god sun conquers evil. Serkeh, or vinegar in Persian, represents age, patience and wisdom.

To reconfirm the symbolism of Nowruz expressed by the traditional foods of the Haft Sinn table, I must represent the other elements and symbols that are also placed upon the Haft Sinn table. Books of tradition and wisdom are essentially laid out with great pride. These tend to usually be a copy of the holy Koran and/or scripts or a book of the poems of Hafez, the great Persian poet and philosopher. A few coins of gold colour, representing wealth, and a basket of painted eggs, representing fertility and rebirth, are also placed on the Haft Sinn table.

Goldfish swimming in a bowl of water represent the great Anahita, the angel of water and fertility, which is the main purpose of the Nowruz celebrations. The fish also represent life and, most importantly, the end of the astral year associated with the constellation Pisces.

A flask of rosewater, known for its magical cleansing power and wonderful scent, is also included on the Haft Sinn table. Pots of flowers or willow branches, figs, pomegranates and/or olives are all significant in representing time. Nearby is a brazier for burning wild rue, a sacred herb whose smouldering fumes are said to ward off evil spirits.

On either side of the mirror are two candelabras holding a flickering candle for each child in the family, representing enlightenment and happiness. The mirror represents the past, present and future and is a reflection of creation as we celebrate the first day of spring, or Nowruz.

Typically on Nowruz, family members gather together around the Haft Sinn table and await the exact moment of the arrival of spring. At that time, gifts are exchanged.

One of the most important rituals celebrated during Nowruz is that people are expected to pay house visits to all their family members, friends and neighbours, and to complete this ritual before the 13th day of spring. Typically, the youngest visit their elders first, and elders return their visits later. The visits naturally have to be relatively short, otherwise one will not be able to visit everybody on their list. Every family announces in advance to their relatives and friends which days of Nowruz are their reception days. Some Nowruz celebrants believe that whatever a person does on Nowruz will reflect on the new year. So if a person is warm and kind to their relatives, friends and neighbours on Nowruz day, then the year will be a good one. On the other hand, if there are fights and disagreements, the year will be a bad one.

Also, many people do a significant amount of spring cleaning prior to Nowruz to rid the house of last year's dirt and germs in preparation for a good new year.

1110

The 13th day of the new year festival is celebrated and called Sizdah Bedar, meaning "13 out"—of doors. It often falls on, or very close to, April Fool's Day. People go out into nature in groups, spend all day outdoors and celebrate in the form of family picnics. It's a day of festivity in nature, where children play and music and

dancing are abundant. On this day, it is customary for young, single women to tie the leaves of the sabzeh, prior to discarding it, symbolizing their wish to be married before the next year's Sizdah Bedar. When tying the leaves, they whisper their wishes for the coming year.

Nowruz is an all-encompassing national ceremony which many nations feel emotionally attached to. It's considered to be the unveiling of the gates of happiness and the strings that bind many nationalities—more specifically, all Iranians—to a lovingly observed feast of a new beginning, a new season and a new year.

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

Mr. Peter Shurman: I am pleased to rise in this House, on behalf of the diverse residents of my riding of Thornhill and of the Progressive Conservative Party, to speak to the issue of recognizing the first day of spring as Nowruz.

The first comment I have is: what a civilized idea. For most of us in this chamber, our idea of celebrating the new year is popping a bottle of champagne at 12 o'clock plus one second on January 1, looking outside into the dead of winter and saying, "Let's celebrate." I find that rather hard.

This is a refreshing idea—the first day of spring as the new year—because I think most of us feel renewed at this time of year. And it's indeed civilized because, as my friend from Richmond Hill has said, this dates back thousands of years, so it's built into a civilization.

It's an interesting holiday. It is a tradition of Persian people to celebrate the new year in this way around the world. Iranian and Turkic peoples of all kinds attend—in fact, I myself had the opportunity to attend Nowruz celebrations earlier this week, and I thank the member from Richmond Hill for his hospitality extended to me in his riding. This event was attended by people from Richmond Hill, which features a prominent Persian community, as well as people from my own riding of Thornhill and other ridings, primarily in the northern 416 and the southern 905 regions, where a lot of Persian people live. I met Persians, particularly from Mr. Moridi's Richmond Hill riding. They made me feel particularly welcome. I even had an opportunity, which I politely rejected, to dance with a belly dancer. I didn't think it was appropriate, but I had a nice chat with her, thank you very much.

Each year, this country welcomes over 250,000 newcomers. Most of those individuals choose to settle within the greater Toronto area, which makes us rather amazing and rather special, and that is no more evident than in ridings like Richmond Hill and Thornhill, in the near 905.

I can tell you from personal experience and from a bit of a count that in Thornhill alone there are approximately 145 different languages spoken. What a refreshing thing it is when a member of this House can rise and say, on behalf of a community, "Let's be inclusive, as opposed to exclusive. Let's not find a reason to reject the culture that

exists. Let's find a reason to offer a culture that we bring and make it inclusive."

It is my job, and indeed it is my pleasure, as official opposition critic for citizenship and immigration, to now be actively involved in a growing number of communities within the greater Toronto landscape. In fact, it surprised me to find that, in my opinion, it's one of the best parts of being a member of provincial Parliament. You find out things you would otherwise never have a chance to know.

Let's be direct and honest about who we all are. It doesn't matter who you are in this House, and it doesn't matter who you are in Ontario; we all come from immigrants. If any of us looks at our family, we can't trace more than 200 or 300 years at most, and usually a lot less than that, to discover what our roots are, and these are things to be celebrated. Canada is an amazing country in that way, and no more so than in places like Thornhill or Richmond Hill.

Statisticians tell us that the GTA will become a megalopolis of over 10 million people within the next 20 years or so. That growth is being driven by newcomers.

Mr. Moridi, the member for Richmond Hill, and I had a chance to have dinner at a recent event one-on-one. His own particular case, which I'm sure he is too modest to discuss—and I hope I'm not embarrassing him by saying this—speaks to what I am discussing today. Mr. Moridi immigrated to Canada in 1991 from Iran, and 17 years later, this gentleman joins us as a member of provincial Parliament in this House. What does that say about the openness of Ontario and the ambition and ability of a new immigrant, now fully integrated in our society as a member of this august body?

Indeed, for the first time ever, the number of visible minorities in Canada has surpassed the five-million mark and now accounts for 16% of the country's population. Furthermore, over 70% of us—of us, I say—will be visible minorities. Think about that. It means that a snapshot of the average Canadian is the face of anyone anywhere in the world. You can't say that anyone looks like a Canadian any more or any less than anyone else.

Let's think about people in other lands considering making Canada their new home. That requires self-reliance and it requires courage. Integrating requires even more courage, because it says, "Let's reach out to the broader community and ask them to come inside and take a look," and it invites us to do the same in return. That makes us better and it makes us all Canadians. Actually, making the move demands exceptional strength of character, determination, and the love and support of family. For them, failure can never be an option.

We believe that most people want less intrusive government, a chance to retain more of what they earn, a strong support system that rewards success, and a well-woven net to catch those who occasionally need a hand. I believe these values are shared by all of our newcomers.

It makes sense, in an Ontario where the face of the average citizen is changing, that we would recognize the celebrations of cultures now calling our province home. That is why I support this resolution brought forward by

the member from Richmond Hill. He doesn't ask for a provincial holiday; we already have one of those. He just asks for recognition, and it is worthy of the support of all people in this chamber.

As a society and as a nation, we are continuing to grow. We're continuing to develop, and we're continuing to deepen our understanding of one another. This is a place where people of very different backgrounds, languages and religious beliefs come together. We try very hard—with some bumps in the road, admittedly—to build unity from our diversity. We share our values, we share our traditions with one another, and in doing so, we learn much, much more about ourselves.

When I'm outside of Canada, people often say to me, very notably in the United States—and I'm very pro-United States—"You would be a citizen of the United States if you could, wouldn't you?" And I say no. And their answer to that is, "But this is the greatest country in the world." And my response is, "Well, I think my country is the greatest in the world, and I admire you for thinking the same of yours."

I wouldn't be a citizen of any other place, and I'm sure that everyone here would agree with me that, given the opportunity, anybody anywhere in the world other than Canada would become a Canadian.

This is a place where we can participate in each other's traditions without losing a sense of our own. Indeed, the traditions of other Canadians become our own.

For thousands of years, the people of Persia and beyond have celebrated the important holiday of Nowruz, regardless of religious background or affiliation. The tradition of bringing family and friends together for joyous celebrations to mark the start of a new season and new year is a good one. Nowruz, Farsi for "new day," is a celebration of all that is good in life. It promotes belief in the hope for a better tomorrow. This is the Canada that I know: one that can welcome newcomers. This is the Canada that I want.

The sense of hope embedded in Nowruz is very important for newcomers, as we're still a long way, as a society, in Ontario—this is an emerging society, in a very different way than we speak of when we look at countries around the world. Newcomers to our province continue to face discrimination when it comes to accessing employment, educational opportunities and housing opportunities, and it is the business of all parties in this House to address these inequities on a daily basis, as we all try to do from our separate vantage points.

1120

As I stated in the House this week, ethno-racial minorities or non-European-origin families make up 37% of all families in Toronto but account for 59% of poor families. Between 1980 and 2000, while the poverty rate for the non-racialized European heritage population fell by 28%, poverty among racialized families rose by 361%; and 32% of children in racialized families and 47% of children in recent-immigrant families in Ontario live in poverty. We can't allow that to go on. Our demographics are changing, they're changing rapidly, and it is

time for us to decide to work harder at the business of living together.

This resolution presents an invitation as opposed to a rejection. This is not someone from another culture coming into our culture and saying, "You have to do this." This is someone bringing a piece of his culture to us and saying, "Can we integrate this into the fabric of this great province of Ontario and this great land of Canada?"

It's time for our shared beliefs in family, responsibility, community concern, success through hard work and being socially involved and responsible to return Ontario to the unstoppable and productive core of Canada that it once was, thanks to the remarkable immigrant builders of years gone by.

Our newcomers bring fresh perspectives to our communities and energy to us with their new ideas—new to us—and their new ways of thinking, and we need to listen. I am proud to live in a country and a province where individuals from many different cultures can pass their traditions to future generations. The diversity of Ontario brings joy to our citizens and strengthens our province, during Nowruz and throughout the year.

As Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Afghani, Pakistani and Turkic Canadians of Thornhill and Ontario set Haft Sinn tables, which symbolize health and happiness and prosperity, I wish them all Nowruz Mobarak and the best for the year ahead.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I hesitate to interrupt debate, but some of our visitors are here with us for just a short time. In the public galleries, the member for Toronto—Danforth advises me, we have students from the Duke of Connaught elementary school. Welcome.

We also have in the members' gallery Mr. Hassan Zerehi, editor-in-chief of the Shahrivand publication, and Dr. David Farmani of the Farmani law office. Welcome to the Ontario Legislature.

Thank you for your indulgence. Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: Salam. The oldest of Iranian traditions, Nowruz, also referred to as "eyd-i sar-i sal" and "eyd-i sal-i now," recalls the cosmological and mythological times of Iran. Its founder is the deputy of Ahura Mazda on earth, a position that imparts to him the celebration of a spiritual dimension and a particular sense of secular authority. The celebration is organized according to the dynamics of love between the creator and his creation—the material world.

The annual return of the spirits of the departed to their homes is celebrated by their offspring according to ancient rites, of which only a faint trace remains among the Persians and Parsees of today. But that in no way diminishes the importance of the bond which is refreshed at every Nowruz.

The word "Nowruz" is a compound of two Persian words—"now," which has the same root as the English word "new" and means new, and the word "ruz," which means both day and time, literally meaning the new day. Nowruz is usually translated as "new year." The Persian Nowruz begins on the first day of spring, usually March

21. March 21, therefore, is equal to the first day of Farvardin of the Islamic solar calendar.

In the mind of Iranians, the word "Nowruz" invokes colourful images which are sumptuous, elegant and opulent, as well as delightfully simple, refreshing and cordial. Although coloured with vestiges of Iran's Mazdian and Zoroastrian past, the Nowruz celebration is neither religious nor national in nature, nor is it an ethnic celebration. Jewish, Zoroastrian, Armenian and Turkish Iranians and central Asians celebrate the Nowruz with the same enthusiasm and sense of belonging. Perhaps it is this very universal nature of the message of Nowruz that speaks to its wealth of rites and customs as well as to its being identified as a unique fount of the continuity of the Iranian culture.

It is indeed an honour to rise today to speak to this motion. Nowruz, as we know, is a joyous celebration of renewal and a hope for the future, bringing family, friends and community members together to mark the new year and to mark spring. After the winter we just experienced, I'm more than happy to support this.

Nowruz is the beginning of the year for the people of Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Tajikistan and a few of the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. Also, the Kurds in Georgia, Iraq, Syria and Turkey celebrate Nowruz as the new year festival. In Iran, Nowruz Day celebrations are a symbol of resistance, as celebrations were banned for many years.

Many communities where people from these countries have settled get to join in the celebrations. It is this rich history, diversity and tradition of these people that makes our province strong and vibrant.

New Democrats are committed to ensuring that all Ontarians have the freedom and opportunity to benefit from the possibilities we have here. This includes maintaining good jobs, a healthy economy, protecting publicly funded, high-quality health care and education systems, and fighting for a living wage.

We hope that Nowruz marks a renewed effort to work hand in hand to make positive changes in our province, with our government and with our opposition.

To all those observing this day, New Democrats extend their best wishes for a healthy and prosperous new year. Nowruzetan Mobarak.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member—well, she's the Minister of Education, but—

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: She's the member for Don Valley West.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Don Valley West. I was kidding.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is with much delight that I take this opportunity to extend my support to my colleague Dr. Reza Moridi MPP, the member for Richmond Hill—my parents' member; he represents my family—to support his motion that the House resolves that the first day of spring be proclaimed as Nowruz, the Iranian new year. I think this is a wonderful initiative and I so appreciate his bringing it to us.

I am so pleased to speak to this motion because I'm certain that there are so many constituents in my riding of Don Valley West who have just completed the festivities of Nowruz and would join me in supporting this motion. So it's with their energy and their support that I come forward today to speak to this.

Nowruz, as the member opposite has just talked about, is the new day. It's one of the oldest seasonal celebrations of the world. Being a resident of a country that is relatively young, it is always fascinating to me, having been born here. I can only trace my roots in Ontario back four generations. We are a young nation and I come from a family that has not got a long history here. So to know about a society and celebrations that go back 2,500 years, which is the archaeological record for Nowruz, I think, back to the Achaemenian period, it's really very profoundly interesting to us as Canadians to see the mix of cultures and to understand the different celebrations.

The people of Iran, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan collectively celebrate Nowruz as their new year. In Iran and Afghanistan, March 21 marks the beginning of the official calendar in both those countries. Nowruz is also widely celebrated in various central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, part of Turkey, Pakistan, India, China and the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Syria.

I think it's important for us, watching our culture enriched, to know where these celebrations come from and how broad they are. Nowruz has also been adopted as the official new year feast of the people of the Baha'i faith. Due to their roots in Iran, Ismailis also celebrate Nowruz worldwide.

1130

In Ontario this year, where we are, Nowruz celebrations included the fire festival, which is called Chahar Shanbeh Souri, the magnificent Nowruz party at Queen's Park—where there was no standing room; it was just packed; it was wonderful—and the outdoor celebrations of Sizdah Bedar.

The member for Richmond Hill talked about the Haft Sinn table. I don't know how many people in this chamber have actually seen a Haft Sinn table, but it is beautiful and inspiring. At the celebrations that I have been so privileged to attend over the last few years, I am always drawn to the Haft Sinn table, just because it's usually cold—this year it was particularly cold outside—and there's a light, sparkling warmth and life that comes from the Haft Sinn table: the fish swimming in the water, the beautiful decorations, the flowers, the white tablecloth and the mirror that lets the candlelight glance off it. It's just a beautiful, beautiful thing to behold. I know that people who celebrate Nowruz have a version of the Haft Sinn table in their own homes. It's like, in our celebrations, a beautiful Christmas tree or other decorations—symbols of our faith and culture that we put out to celebrate. But this is a particularly beautiful symbol of life and I hope that everyone will have a chance at some point to see a Haft Sinn table.

In 2003, the Honourable David Caplan introduced legislation to recognize the first day of spring as Nowruz,

and MPP Mario Racco, a couple of years ago, introduced the Nowruz Day Act. So I think it's very fitting that the first Iranian-Canadian parliamentarian elected to this Legislature would be bringing forth this motion. It's an important day for MPP Reza Moridi and for those Ontarians who celebrate Nowruz, and I congratulate him on his initiative, and on his election, I think, as the first Iranian actually elected to a Legislature or a Parliament in North America.

I urge everyone in this House to support this resolution, and I think we will have that support.

As the Minister of Education, I want to talk just for a moment about how critical it is in Ontario, this pluralistic province of ours, that we work to understand each other's cultures, that we pay attention to the meaning of the various symbols of different cultures and that we help our children to understand those differences. We've just come through an election that made it crystal clear that people in this province expect that our publicly funded education system will be the place where our children weave together a common value system. I think with the kind of initiative that Mr. Moridi is bringing forth today, and the fact that in our publicly funded schools many of the celebrations that we talk about in our various cultures are celebrated, children learn about the various cultures and celebrations. That's one of the ways we can help each other to understand the value system and start to understand how we celebrate and what we celebrate.

I honour Mr. Moridi for bringing this forward—thank you so much—and look forward to unanimous support of the House.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Just briefly, one of the great privileges as an MPP is to learn about traditions like this from around the world, other cultures which you may not otherwise learn about. It's interesting that we have the opportunity in Ontario to weave them into our traditions and, by doing so, create a very inclusive society. We're reading petitions almost every day about the removal of the Lord's Prayer from this place, which ignores the tradition of this place and creates an exclusive society. In this case, with this motion, we are creating an inclusive society which weaves into our own strong traditions.

There's an interesting fact that I came across the other day. The diversity that Ontario has, with the number of people and the number of different countries that are represented and the volume of those people who are represented in the GTA, and indeed Ontario and Canada—particularly in the GTA and Toronto, that diversity is greater than any other city in the world. The only other city that even comes close—it does not surpass it—was New York City in the 1910 era, when they had the same kind of diversity that we have today. I must say that the atmosphere, the openness and the inclusiveness of our society in Toronto far exceeds that of New York City or, indeed, any other city you would like to compare it to around the world. I'm very proud of our tradition in that area.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to rise in support of this resolution by the member from Richmond Hill. There's no question that expanding our cultural heritage,

expanding our recognition of the celebrations of all the peoples who have come to be part of modern Ontario, is in fact an advantage for us, a pleasure for us and an honour for us. So I'm glad that the member has taken this initiative.

It is kind of extraordinary to me that we in Ontario have benefited both from the triumphs and the difficulties of cultures from around the world. Iran, since the 1950s, has gone through many upheavals: the overthrow of Mohammed Mossadeq, the revolution against the shah, the war with Iraq. In each instance, we have had people come from Iran of talent, of ability, who have built this society, who have enriched it and who, in this motion today, are introducing another part of their culture into the larger mainstream culture of this province.

We've benefited tremendously, and I think it's to our advantage here in this Legislature to support this resolution and make this part of Ontario's fabric.

Mr. David Zimmer: I really want to thank the member from Richmond Hill for asking me, and indeed I'm honoured, to speak in support of this resolution.

I can tell you that this motion to recognize the first day of spring as Nowruz Day is something that is sorely needed here in Ontario. Ontario citizens of Persian descent have made huge and significant contributions to enhance the social, economic and cultural fabric of Ontario.

In my riding of Willowdale, there's a very prominent Iranian-Canadian community. They've graciously invited me in and involved me in their various activities in the community, along with my other colleagues here in the Legislature.

Within the community, Persians are making significant contributions in the area of academia and science, business and arts. In fact, many businesses in Willowdale are owned by Iranian Canadians, and they are engineering businesses, importing businesses and manufacturing businesses. I've attended many Iranian-Canadian business networking sessions.

There's also a very significant presence of Iranian-Persian-Canadian scholars, professors trained at the master's levels and Ph.D. levels. They're at York University, the University of Toronto, Ryerson and other universities throughout Ontario and Canada. In my years, from Willowdale, I've come to know these professionals on a very intimate basis, and they do make a tremendous contribution to our economy.

In that regard, I do want to take a moment and just point out and demonstrate that the distinguished member from Richmond Hill, Reza Moridi, is an example of that. He's a qualified physicist. He's a qualified architect. He has a Ph.D. in nuclear physics. He's been honoured by nuclear engineering societies in the United Kingdom and Canada; in the UK, he's a fellow of those organizations. He's participated in many ways in the nuclear business and the nuclear academic world. He's the author of over 150 articles on that subject.

Nowruz in Persian means "new year's day." It's a celebration of the equinox at that time of year. You've heard from previous speakers about what a significant

event this is. Members, by supporting this motion to formally recognize the significance of this event and the contribution of the Iranian community in Ontario—it's a tremendous contribution to recognizing our multicultural society.

1140

Acceptance and recognition of cultural holidays enables citizens to keep their identities and take pride in their ancestry. It creates a deep, deep sense of belonging. That deep, deep sense of belonging and that deep, deep recognition of Nowruz will provide to the Iranian-Persian community that we are recognizing the contribution they make to our society.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I too want to join my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus in congratulating the member for Richmond Hill for bringing this motion forward. I certainly intend to support it. I think you're going to get unanimous support.

I just want to say, on a personal note, following up on what the member for Willowdale has just said, that we are very, very fortunate to have Mr. Moridi come to Canada and come to Ontario.

In addition to having a Ph.D. in physics, the member for Willowdale forgot to mention that Mr. Moridi is vice-president and chief scientist of a Canadian independent organization that promotes radiation safety in the health care sector, in industry and in the environment; a member of the advisory council of the medical physics program at Ryerson University here in Toronto; a member of the council of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario; editor of *Health Physics*, the radiation safety journal; a member of the Richmond Hill intercultural committee; and, of course, when you're my size, a member of the Taste of the Hill committee, which I'm sure is one of his more enjoyable events. Congratulations to you.

I've learned a lot—sometimes in these private members' mornings, you don't learn too much. I didn't know much about Nowruz until the motion came forward and I was forced to do some research, and I thank you for that. I thank you for bringing your culture to our province.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: First of all, congratulations to Mr. Moridi, MPP for Richmond Hill. He has a motion today, as we all know, which says that we acknowledge the first day of spring as Nowruz.

Members have already very eloquently expressed the meaning of Nowruz, but there is something that needs to be added to information that has already been expressed, and I recommend to members that they also look at the interesting book called *Toronto's Many Faces*.

The book says this about Persian culture: "Hints of ancient Persian culture can be unearthed around Toronto: Persian musicians playing the santoor, and theatrical troupes' regular performances at Toronto's theatres. The Persian traditional art and cultural foundation of Ontario has organized a number of events, including international folk song concerts, a Persian traditional concert to commemorate Ontario's bicentennial, arts exhibits and cultural seminars, and an international congress on Persian heritage to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the birth of

Saadi, Iran's and Persia's greatest poet. The foundation now has a library, and is going to open a community centre."

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Who's the author?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: The author is Tony Ruprecht. But I'm not going to tell you that, because I'm not supposed to. I'll put the book down right now.

I want to make a few points in addition to the members who have eloquently expressed Nowruz.

Nowruz is really something much bigger. While we think of spring, we think of newness. But we also know that that spring and newness—and Nowruz—are connected to the great religious symbol of fire.

When we look at the old temples in Persia, we find that the old priests who were celebrating Nowruz were also trying to ensure that the grand flame in the temple was never extinguished. That's the connection between the flame, expansion, newness and spring, and that, of course, is part of the Zoroastrian religion. It presented and represented power. It represented expansion.

The Persian priests, the Zoroastrian priests, knew something that is very important, which we're just rediscovering today. They said, and I checked this with Mr. Moridi already: "Look into the smallest part of a particle, the smallest part we can identify, and you will discover a brilliant sun. The atom was thus born 3,000 years ago."

What is just as important is the realization from this very fact of the atom—the realization that the Newtonian mechanical universe has come to understand that it is only one part of reality; there's another spiritual reality to life, and that's what we should be looking at today as well, when we celebrate Nowruz. It is a spiritual reality.

Who talks about this? I am very surprised. The people who talk about Nowruz and the spiritual reality are: Max Planck, the German physicist who was a Nobel Prize recipient; Sir Arthur Eddington, from England; and Sir Jeans, also from England. A lot of physicists are discovering right now that it isn't just a question of looking at the material Newtonian world; it's also a question of looking at the spirit. They say, for instance, that when we celebrate Nowruz, we should always also think that there is a spiritual reality that is just as powerful as when we look at our reality through our senses. So there are two ways to look at the world: Nowruz when we think of spring; Nowruz when we think of fire expansion; Nowruz when we think of newness in life; and Nowruz when we think of newness within ourselves. Nowruz: It's a great principle of the ancient times of Persia.

So, my friends, I say today that as we celebrate Nowruz, we must not only look at the physical world alone, but we must also look at the spiritual foundation, which is just as real, because we, through consciousness—Persia talked about this—are bringing as much to reality as is out there by itself. When the two come together, the physical and the spiritual, we have a great feast called Nowruz. On that, we want to congratulate the 200,000 people in Ontario who are celebrating this great feast. They remind us that we are not only physical, but we also have a spiritual dimension to our lives.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? There being none, Mr. Moridi, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Reza Moridi: I would like to thank all the honourable members, from Thornhill, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Don Valley West, Halton, Toronto–Danforth, Willowdale, Simcoe–Grey and Davenport, who spoke about this resolution today.

The Iranian community in Ontario is relatively young. Members of the community began immigrating to Canada in large numbers starting in the 1979 revolution in Iran. Since then, the community has established itself in Canada. Today, the Iranian community is a dynamic and vibrant part of the fabric of Ontario, contributing to every aspect of our society.

The Iranian community is proud of having distinguished individuals who have been making significant contributions to our province of Ontario in areas including, but not limited to, the following: journalism, law, law enforcement, academia, research and innovation, arts, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, manufacturing, engineering, export and import, construction, real estate, restaurants, small business, trades, community services, civil service and, of course, politics.

This resolution is a very significant symbolic initiative for the Iranian community, as well as other Ontarians from various ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds who celebrate Nowruz every year. Despite its Iranian characteristics, Nowruz actually can be easily celebrated by all the people of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for private members' public business has not yet expired, so we will suspend proceedings until 12 of the clock.

The House suspended proceedings from 1149 to 1200.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

TIRE DISPOSAL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 11.

Mr. Chudleigh has moved private member's notice of motion number 24. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those in favour, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

After dealing with the next ballot item, we will call in the members.

NOWRUZ

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 12.

Mr. Moridi has moved private member's notice of motion number 20. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Agreed to.

TIRE DISPOSAL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Chudleigh has moved private members' notice of motion number 24. All those in favour, please stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Barrett, Toby	Jones, Sylvia	Shurman, Peter
Chudleigh, Ted	Klees, Frank	Sterling, Norman W.
Elliott, Christine	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	Savoline, Joyce	Yakabuski, John

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

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia	Dombrowsky, Leona	Naqvi, Yasir
Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Pendergast, Leeanna
Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Balkissoon, Bas	Gerretsen, John	Qaadri, Shafiq
Best, Margaret	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Brotten, Laurel C.	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Smitherman, George
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sousa, Charles
Carroll, Aileen	Mangat, Amrit	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Dickson, Joe	Moridi, Reza	

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 15; the nays are 44.

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

Negatived.

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

The House recessed from 1209 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Mrs. Christine Elliott: April 11 marks World Parkinson Day, the day when the global Parkinson's community asks us to consider the plight of our citizens diagnosed with this debilitating neurological disease that robs them of their independence, their mobility and their livelihood.

Parkinson's is a complex neurological condition affecting 40,000 Ontarians and their families. This number is expected to double in the next 10 years, and it is therefore an issue that we must concern ourselves with urgently. Parkinson's is often thought to be a disease of

the elderly, but we now know that simply isn't true, as more and more are diagnosed in their 20s, 30s and 40s, when people are most productive in building careers, raising families and contributing to our communities.

Parkinson's strikes randomly with no preference for gender, race or lifestyle. We don't know how to predict, prevent or cure Parkinson's, but we can work to keep those battling the disease as healthy as possible for as long as possible.

Over the past year, some of us have had the pleasure of meeting with Ontarians living with Parkinson's in our ridings. They have educated us about the Parkinson's experience so that we might consider their needs as we develop policies.

In preparation for World Parkinson Day tomorrow, I commend these Ontarians with Parkinson's who are working to educate their fellow citizens, and I commend Parkinson Society Canada for the work it does to educate, advocate and invest in the research that will discover new treatments and, one day, uncover the cure for this insidious disease.

LAKESHORE LIONS ARENA

Ms. Laurel C. Brotten: Residents in my community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore should take great pride in the groundbreaking ceremony for our new Lakeshore Lions Arena that was celebrated two weeks ago. The first arena to be built in Toronto in the last 25 years, this 260,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art community facility will encourage active lifestyles, make hockey accessible to youth, and support the growth and development of one of Ontario's favourite sports.

The new four-pad arena will have 1,000 spectator seats, a full-service public restaurant and community meeting rooms, and will also provide 500 hours of free rink time for Toronto District School Board students. Reaching new levels in youth outreach programs, the Toronto Maple Leafs will also be using the arena to run hockey development programs like the Toronto Maple Leafs Hockey School.

Not only is the new Lakeshore Lions Arena beneficial for the active health and well-being of Ontario's youth and community members, it's energy-efficient. With a heat recovery central piping system exchanging energy from heat pumps, the arena is designed to significantly reduce utility costs.

I want to take the opportunity to recognize the project's alliance between the not-for-profit Lions Club, with the hard work of members like Bob Harris and Brian Hoskins, Giffels Design-Build, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, and the Toronto Marlies. I want to recognize the efforts of our Toronto District School Board trustee, Bruce Davis, and our councillor, Mark Grimes.

I stand today as a proud member of my riding, not to mention the mother of the two boys—potential future hockey players—to applaud and engage Ontario's youth in healthy sports-based lifestyles, which in this case will bring hockey one step closer to home.

TEACHERS

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Last night, I had the honour of attending the Greatest High School Teacher awards ceremony at Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning. Three teachers were chosen from essays written by Humber students. Each student wrote about how their teacher influenced them and made positive changes in their lives.

Tom Lewis from King City, Tina Rowe from Toronto and Lindsay Lemaire from my riding of Dufferin–Caledon should be congratulated on receiving this prestigious award.

Lindsay Lemaire teaches at Orangeville District Secondary School in Dufferin county. In addition to working as a guidance counsellor, Lindsay teaches computer science and business courses. The student who wrote the winning essay, Amber Kuliszewski, was also thanked at the award ceremony.

As part of the award, Lindsay will be asked by Humber to choose an ODSS student who has been accepted to go to Humber this fall to receive a tuition scholarship for the first two semesters. I would like to acknowledge Amber's willingness to take the time and effort to write the essay, which now gives one lucky ODSS student free tuition for their first year at Humber.

As Michael Hatton, vice-president, academic, at Humber College, said, "To be nominated by one of your students as a great teacher, someone who made a significant difference in the life of that student, is the best recognition in the profession."

Again, congratulations, Lindsay Lemaire, on achieving this outstanding accomplishment, and Amber Kuliszewski, for writing the winning essay.

ORVILLE KERR

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I rise today to pay tribute to a legendary figure in Hamilton's history. Orville Kerr was a prince of a man, and he passed away this past winter at the age of 96.

Right until the end, Orville Kerr remained a stalwart, a devout activist and fighter for social justice, as well as a good friend to me, my party and the community of Hamilton.

A very thoughtful, old-school gentleman who was the consummate friend of working people, Orville Kerr was a lion-like figure in the founding of the historic Steelworkers' Local 1005. He championed better wages and working conditions that continue to benefit Hamilton workers to this very day, and he was a titan in the infamous Stelco strike of 1946.

Life was very difficult for those hard-working men and women on the picket line, as scabs were being driven in and brought in by boat to do their jobs. Some of the strikers were arrested on frivolous charges, but thankfully, Orville was there, and his outstanding reputation for integrity was easily enough to convince the judge to dismiss all charges against the strikers.

People trusted Orville, and he never let them down. Though life brought him his share of personal tragedies, losing two wives and a daughter, Orville was always like sunlight breaking through the clouds. His presence was illuminating and enlightening.

He will be very much missed by all those who knew him. He will always be one of the heroes of Hamilton and of our very rich labour history.

PETERBOROUGH LIFTLOCK
ATOM HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

Mr. Jeff Leal: I'd like to recognize and congratulate past and present organizers of the Peterborough Liftlock Atom Hockey Tournament as they celebrate their 50th anniversary this year. This peewee tournament, which began in 1958 with only eight teams registered for a one-day event, has grown to become a 128-team tournament which spans five days, utilizing the arenas in the city and surrounding county.

On the tournament's 35th anniversary in 1993, a Greatest Hockey Legend game was played in Peterborough. That included such greats as Maurice and Henri Richard, Frank Mahovlich and Norm Ullman. The tremendous success of this game has resulted in a repeat performance each year at the opening ceremonies.

Over the years, this tournament has changed to accommodate more teams and changing rules, but one thing has remained constant: the hard work and dedication of hundreds of volunteers needed to put on the world's largest weekend atom hockey tournament.

From the first chairman, Mr. Neil Clark, to Jack Guerin to Howie Eastman to Alvin Philips and to our current chairman, Mr. Steve Casey, this tournament continues to receive international recognition in excellence. None of it would be possible without the enthusiasm of the volunteers who come back year after year to make the Peterborough Liftlock Atom Hockey Tournament a fantastic experience for the children who compete each year.

Congratulations to everyone involved. My son, Braden, who's 10, actually participated in the tournament this year.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: If you're a Liberal member, a Liberal donor or even a blogger for the Liberal cause, then you might be entitled to your entitlements.

Perfecting the now famous phrase from ex-Liberal cabinet minister David Dingwall, the McGuinty Liberals have managed to ram through several of their best supporters onto the province's ABCs, including eight who have, together, contributed close to \$10,000 to the Liberal cause, and one even ran as a Liberal candidate—all this in just four weeks.

Who, you might ask, are these eight entitlements? Well, I'll share them with you:

—Sivam Vinayagamoorthy, a pal of the Minister of Small Business and a GTA Liberal blogger, rang in at \$3,817;

—Mina Grossman-Ianni, a buddy of the Ministers of Finance and Economic Development, \$2,568.58;

—Karen Lowe, a booster to the Huron–Bruce Liberal MPP, \$1,560.01;

—Yusra Siddiquee, a supporter of Gerard Kennedy, 500 bucks;

—Gemma Salamat, a Liberal supporter who, according to her, was told by the Minister of Health to apply, \$218.99;

—Lynn Graham, a supporter of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Liberal MPP for Ottawa Centre, \$210;

—Erica Curtis, a supporter of the Minister of Culture, 200 bucks; and

—Joan Lougheed, a former Liberal candidate in Burlington.

In just four weeks, I can say, eight entitled Liberals is enough.

1340

SAINT-PASCAL-BAYLON

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Cette année est le 100^e anniversaire du village de Saint-Pascal-Baylon. Saint-Pascal-Baylon is where the current Florida Panthers' hockey coach, Jacques Martin, was born. It is also the town where I was born.

Cette petite paroisse a une histoire riche de folklore franco-ontarien. À compter de 1908, nos ancêtres arrivèrent de la région de Montréal, de Vaudreuil et de Deux-Montagnes. Dès 1854, dans les registres du comté de Russell, on retrouve des noms francophones sur le territoire The Lake : les Guindon, les Durocher, les Richer, les Pilon, les Lalonde et cetera. Ces Canadiens français achetèrent les terrains des anglophones, qui les ont obtenus de le Couronne et qui les considèrent sans valeur et non cultivables. Ces terres, riches en minéraux laissés par l'eau lors de chaque débâcle printanière, sont égouttées et transformées en terres fertiles grâce aux labeurs et à l'acharnement de nos ancêtres.

Au milieu du 19^e siècle, quatre fromageries et quatre écoles faisaient partie du village. Aujourd'hui, les paroissiens se rendent à l'extérieur pour gagner leur vie et ils sont heureux de revenir à leur patelin, jouir du calme et de la tranquillité de la campagne.

This Sunday, April 13, is the launch of the souvenir book on the parish titled *Histoire autour du lac*. It tells about the worry of our ancestors to come and live in an anglophone province.

In closing, I wish to thank a wonderful lady from Saint-Pascal-Baylon, Madame Jeanine Pilon, who provided the information to allow me to present this statement today. Merci, chère Madame Pilon.

VAISAKHI

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: It's a privilege to rise and recognize an important annual holiday coming up this weekend on Sunday, April 13. On Sunday, Sikh families in my community will be coming together to celebrate the 309th anniversary of Vaisakhi.

To celebrate this special time, families across Ontario will partake in celebrations organized by their local gurdwara. In my riding of Brampton–Springdale, the Sri Guru Nanak Sikh Centre has organized a community parade on Sunday, April 20.

Last year, more than 55,000 individuals attended the Vaisakhi parade. Today it is my pleasure to recognize the leadership of the gurdwara. These gentlemen work to ensure that seniors, youth and new immigrants feel connected to our community. I'm proud to have them as my guests in the east members' gallery.

This past summer, this group helped organize an Akhand Paath in the atrium of the new Brampton Civic Hospital prior to its opening. I learned that an Akhand Paath is three days of prayers which mark the beginning of something special in the community. Nearly 15,000 people attended this Akhand Paath and helped raise in excess of \$160,000 for the hospital.

On Sunday, I will attend ceremonies at my local gurdwara, and I encourage all members of this House to join me in celebrating this important religious day and the enormous contribution of Sikh individuals in building and strengthening communities across Ontario.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Bob Delaney: Commuters on the Milton GO line's six eastbound and six westbound trains from Mississauga into Toronto each working day are getting a break.

Effective immediately, GO Transit is using its new, more powerful locomotives on the Milton line, adding two new cars to two eastbound trains and two westbound trains. Those two new 12-car trains eastbound in the morning depart from Lisgar at 6:56 and 7:46. Meadowvale commuters know them as the 7 o'clock and 7:50 trains, and at Streetsville, commuters know them as the 7:05 and 7:55 trains. Coming back to Mississauga, the new 12-car trains leave Union Station at 4:30 and 5:10. Soon, all trains on the Milton line will have 12 cars instead of the current 10.

Until a longer Streetsville platform is built, also later this year, all trains will only open certain doors at the Streetsville GO station. As well, at Meadowvale, when you're heading home, board the train at the very west end of the platform at Union Station, at the opposite end of the locomotive.

Ontario's infrastructure public transit investments are now getting western Mississauga residents to work and back home more effectively. We're not making public transit better with a tax cut; we are doing it with real investment from the Ontario taxpayer.

WEARING OF SHAWL

Mr. Randy Hillier: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: This afternoon, we are privileged to have hundreds of Tibetan Canadians at Queen's Park asking this government to represent them in their call for freedom and justice in Tibet. I have with me a traditional Tibetan scarf, called a kata, which is a Tibetan symbol of welcome and greetings and a show of respect for friends. I seek unanimous consent that I wear this kata and demonstrate my respect for those who seek to end oppression.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member seeks unanimous consent to wear the symbolic cloth. Agreed? Agreed.

Applause.

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We welcome all our guests here to Queen's Park, but just to remind everyone that they shouldn't be partaking in the applause. But you are more than welcome here today.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Hon. John Milloy: I think everyone in the chamber knows that the key to Ontario's success in today's competitive global economy is our skilled and highly educated workforce. That's why our government is so committed to investing in the skills and knowledge of our people, so we can continue to attract the kind of jobs and investment to Ontario that will keep our province and our people moving forward.

We've been getting great results. Today, 100,000 more students are going on to college or university compared to five years ago. About 60% of Ontarians aged 25 to 64 have completed a post-secondary certificate, diploma or university degree program—a higher rate of post-secondary education than in any Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country. And about 110,000 apprentices are learning a trade today, nearly 50,000 more than five years ago.

But we know there's more to do, especially for students who face extra challenges to getting a post-secondary education, such as those students who live in rural and remote areas of Ontario, far away from colleges and universities.

A Statistics Canada report found that students who live more than 80 kilometres away from a post-secondary institution are more than one third less likely to get a post-secondary education, and that this effect is strongest among low-income students. We want to help those students get where they need to go.

Today, in North Bay, the Premier announced that we will invest \$27 million over three years in new distance grants. These grants will help college and university students who must commute long distances every day, such

as the biotechnology student who lives in Horton and must commute to Carleton University in Ottawa.

It will help also post-secondary students who must move far away from home to go to school, such as the IT student from Blind River studying at Canadore College in North Bay who has to travel by bus to visit his family at home. These grants will be available to all qualifying students who are enrolled at an OSAP-approved college or university. We estimate that these grants will help over 24,000 students across the province.

We know that the road to higher education is tougher for these students. They're making personal sacrifices to build a bright future for themselves, and we owe it to them to do everything we can to help them succeed.

I'm proud of the work our government is doing to help young people in Ontario pursue higher education. About 120,000 students in Ontario receive grants from the province. Grants to students have increased almost threefold since 2004. As part of our \$1.5-billion skills-to-jobs action plan, we'll invest \$465 million to expand post-secondary student aid. And we'll invest \$970 million to build, expand and repair college and university facilities.

It's all part of our plan to move Ontario forward by ensuring that all young people in this province can reach their full potential. Together, we can build a brighter future for everyone.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Responses? The member for Simcoe-Grey.

1350

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's my duty to respond to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities' statement today. I think you'll find that all members of this House would support initiatives to enhance post-secondary education for rural and northern students. As Minister of Northern Development and Mines, I distributed millions of dollars to help provide access to education for rural and northern students through organizations like Contact North, which is led by Mr. Maxim Jean-Louis and provides a unique network of access centres, audio-conference, videoconference and e-learning technologies for students and lifelong learners in remote and rural areas.

While programs like the one the minister has re-announced today may be good for a small handful of students, I ask the minister and the government: Why not lower tuition or ancillary fees by the \$27-million cost of this program so that every student will benefit?

I hope that today's reannouncement isn't just a diversion from some of the other issues the minister has failed to address in his portfolio. The minister fails to mention that Ontario's university students receive the lowest per capita funding of any province in this country, and the average student-faculty ratio in Ontario is the worst in the country. Both are dead last, 10 out of 10, behind all other provinces and territories. Being dead last

means students have larger class sizes than any other province in Canada, while faculty have less time to spend with students, leaving the quality of post-secondary education in Ontario threatened. In some universities, class sizes are so big that some classes have as many as 1,500 students, and students have to sit on the floor. The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations reminded us this week that 5,500 new, full-time faculty are needed to be hired now just to keep up with increasing enrolments.

I reminded the House this week that in 1999 the Premier signed a pledge to bring per capita funding for universities up to the national average in his first mandate. The promise read as follows: "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." Almost four and a half years after coming to office, Ontario still ranks, as I said, dead last in Canada in per capita funding.

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

That's not all. Let's talk for a moment about jobs and training. We saw a media report last month that the city of Edmonton's campaign to lure Toronto university graduates to that Alberta city has been so successful that they plan to extend these job fairs to other Ontario universities.

We've also heard that British Columbia has spent \$400,000 in advertising campaigns at Union Station and the University of Toronto to lure workers out west. In fact, BC's economic development minister was standing in Union Station, handing out brochures and flowers to commuters.

It's nice that the minister wants to spend money on distance education, but what he's really doing is investing millions of dollars to educate our people, and now they're being poached from right under our noses because there's a brighter future for them outside Ontario. In fact, 72,000 people last year went to Alberta and Saskatchewan alone, and we can be certain that many more are leaving every month now.

To add insult to injury, BC believes they're doing your government a favour with these job fairs. Their economic development minister said that British Columbia is providing unemployed workers in Ontario with an option, rather than having them sit around, looking for work and driving up Ontario's cost of social services. How can this government be so incompetent and uncaring as to stand by and let this happen?

Let's not forget about apprentices. To become an electrician in Ontario, you have to complete a five-year apprenticeship period with a qualified electrician before you become eligible to practise your trade. To date, this minister and this government have steadfastly refused to

open up more apprentice positions. Ontario is one of the only jurisdictions in North America that requires up to as many as three qualified electricians just to train one apprentice. If the ratio were changed so that one electrician could supervise and train one apprentice, then thousands of new apprentice positions would open up in the province. No, this government won't change the apprentice-to-journeyman ratios; they're in the pockets of the unions, who don't want the changes.

You've lost over 20,000 manufacturing jobs, and yet you bragged in the budget that you are creating 20,000 new training spaces. They might have done better to invest the \$1.5 billion in lowering business taxes, like other provinces have done, and create jobs, quality of life and opportunity for employment for everyone, rather than just 20,000 of the 200,000 people who have lost their manufacturing jobs over the last two years.

Today's announcement is a reannouncement from the budget. I think they should have spent the money on lowering tuition and ancillary fees. I say to him on the training side: When did Big Brother government become the trainer for jobs in Ontario? You seem to have given up on traditional on-the-job training. Progressive Conservatives believe in creating jobs, training people on the job and helping them in that environment.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I want to put the minister's announcement in some perspective, if I can. We were number 10 in per capita funding under the Conservatives. We are still number 10 in per capita funding. Nothing has changed.

The government is so proud to say they put in \$6 billion. As they make that announcement, they clap because they're number 10 in per capita funding. How could it be that they could be so proud to be at the bottom of all other provinces in Canada? They smile and they clap and they're proud of the fact that they're at the bottom of that list. Good for you, Liberals. You have—we have—the biggest classes in all of Canada in terms of how many students end up in large, large rooms that can't accommodate those students; the largest class sizes. We are proud and we clap.

We have the highest ratio in the country between teachers and students. It's a 25-to-one ratio, and in most other provinces the ratio between students and teachers is 19 to one or 20 to one. You clap, saying, "Yeah, this is really great."

We are deferring our maintenance capital programs because we don't have the money, yet you clap because you've put in \$6 billion. We have the highest debt ratio, literally, in the whole of the country. Kids, young people, have the highest debt that they have carried, and they're carrying it over their shoulders, and you say, "That's okay, because thousands more students keep coming. If they have the biggest debt burden in the history of this province, that's okay because we keep on receiving more and more students to our university and college sector."

I'm telling you, our colleges and universities are tired of not getting the kinds of support they need from this government. We want—they want—full-time professors, yet at the college level, half of the professors are part-time; at the university level, half of them are part-time. Why? Because universities and colleges don't get enough money from you to be able to hire full-time professors so that the students can get the quality of attention they need. So we've got part-time professors doing a full-time load here and there. Students can't get that support that they desperately need. The Liberals are saying, "This is really great. We're doing fine."

You're not doing fine. You are not doing so well. You should not be so proud of yourselves. I give you credit: You've introduced a grant system, and that's good. That's good, but 90% of the middle-class students have no access to that grant; only 10% do, and it varies—it could be 200, 500, 1,000—and you might say, "Better than a kick in the teeth." You're quite right, but 90% have no access to that grant. Many of those kids end up having to go to the bank and get a loan, and when they pay that loan, they have to start paying interest right away. It's not when they graduate; it's as soon as they get that loan from the bank that they have to start paying. So students are coming out of university with an average of \$25,000 of debt. That's a lot. That's a big, big debt they're carrying on their shoulders.

Should you be that proud of your record? I'm saying no. I'm saying we should do more. I'm saying the students are paying more and more for their education than ever. In 1993, students were paying 23% of their own education. Today it's 45%, and it's increasing, and Liberals say, "It's okay." I argue that it's not okay—it's not.

We have a governmental obligation to support our students. We have an obligation to reduce their debt load and not to have them worry about how they're going to have to pay for their loans on a regular and everyday basis if they have to go to the bank to get that loan because they're not eligible for a loan from the government.

In the context of all this, the Premier announced they will invest \$27 million over three years in new distance grants—thanks very much.

1400

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a number of guests who are joining us today on behalf of the member from Kitchener Centre. We'd like to welcome Chris Locke, executive director of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance; other members of the student alliance; and a special guest, James Alexander, from the National Union of Students Scotland.

On behalf of the member from Brampton–Springdale, we'd like to welcome the governing committee of the Sri Guru Nanak Sikh Centre of Brampton, seated in the members' gallery east. Welcome, gentlemen.

On behalf of the member from Mississauga South, we'd like to welcome Anita Sebastian and Poulouse Sebastian, the mother and father of page Paul Sebastian. Welcome.

On behalf of the member from Oak Ridges–Markham, we'd like to welcome Dr. Alex Hukowich and Mrs. Lynne Hukowich, seated in the west members' gallery. Dr. Hukowich is a director of the Central East local health integration network.

On behalf of the Minister of Health and the member from Whitby–Oshawa, we'd like to welcome, seated in the west gallery, representatives from Parkinson Society Canada: Joyce Gordon, Shannon MacDonald, Harry Murphy, Charles Keary and Jean Keary. Welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Whitby–Oshawa, I'd like to welcome Mr. Kerry Flynn, a constituent and a student, in the west members' gallery.

On behalf of the member from Welland and the member from St. Catharines, I'd like to welcome students from Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School in St. Catharines.

In the west gallery, we would like to welcome students from Cardinal McGuigan secondary school in Downsview, in the riding of York West. Welcome today.

On behalf of the member from Parkdale–High Park, we'd like to welcome a number of guests in the west members' gallery: Sonam Durjee, Kalsang Tsomo, Nawang Diki, Kunga Chodak, Kidup Gyatso, Lobsang Yeshi, Tendon Dongtotsang, Sonam Dolma, Thuptan Nangyal, Chodon Chodon, Urgen Sangay, Sonam Tsering and Tenzing Jigme.

Welcome to our guests today.

TIBET

Hon. George Smitherman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: On behalf of the Premier, I seek unanimous consent to move the following motion without notice and put to an immediate vote, without debate: that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as a long-standing friend of China, express concern with the current situation in Tibet and encourage the parties to engage in meaningful dialogue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Health has asked for consent to move the motion. Agreed?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would move that this motion be passed after we have had 10 minutes of discussion per party.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Just to clarify, is the member asking for unanimous consent for 10 minutes of debate from each party?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I am.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member seeks unanimous consent for 10 minutes of debate on the motion. Agreed? Agreed. Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman: On behalf of the—
Interjection.

Hon. George Smitherman: I'm sorry. Oh, read the motion again, sir?

That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as a long-standing friend of China, express concern with the current situation in Tibet and encourage the parties to engage in meaningful dialogue.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate? The Minister of Health.

Mr. Peter Kormos: What about Tiananmen Square?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think we know who will be speaking opposite on the resolution. We certainly look forward to that, and we look forward to the opportunity that all parties will have today to express their views on this issue, which I think has captured a very significant degree of attention from all members. It's unfortunate that members would choose to heckle other members on a motion when we're seeking, as a Legislature, to present a unified face and view on behalf of the people of Ontario. Indeed, in our own individual ways, in our ridings and in our engagements with our constituents, we're all given the opportunity to learn of and to express our views on this matter.

Of course, here in Ontario we are a jurisdiction that has a long-standing commitment to human rights, and we have always been a jurisdiction abiding by the constitutional responsibility of the government of Canada to set in motion the appropriate Foreign Affairs mechanisms. Nevertheless, it is the long-standing tradition of the province of Ontario that we are a jurisdiction that enjoys a good degree of human rights and sees as necessary the expansion of these rights across the land.

In keeping with this, the motion that is before us raises very appropriately the context of the debate that's going on with respect to China and its relationship with the people in Tibet. We acknowledge, of course, as a provincial jurisdiction the limitations, appropriately so, but at the same time express our views with respect to ensuring that there is an opportunity, as is at the heart of what goes on in this place, for constructive dialogue among parties. The resolution calls for that. It encourages the parties to engage in a meaningful dialogue that can heighten the debate to a higher level than perhaps we've been experiencing through whatever we can learn from the media's characterizations of the way this issue is going.

We think this resolution that is before the House today stands as a very strong opportunity for Ontarians to be united around a resolution that has the force and effect of all members of the Legislature of Ontario. On that note, we'd encourage all members of the Legislature to support this motion.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's interesting to see that this motion is being brought to the floor today, after the secrecy and the deception of these junkets in the past.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please, I'd just ask the member to use language that's parliamentary. I would ask that he withdraw the comment.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

To pass a motion and to call it a strong motion—this is a weak, fluffy motion of no importance whatsoever. To

ask that constructive dialogue to be engaged in by the Communist Chinese party with the people in Tibet as they bring tanks in, as they use batons and beat people—and this government asks for them to engage in constructive dialogue.

You cannot have constructive dialogue when one side is so overwhelmingly powerful and the other side so overwhelmingly weak; when one side is willing to use force, when one side is willing to use violence and has no regard and no respect for freedoms, for justice, for any of our democratic values.

There is an opportunity for all western countries, all western democracies—provincial or federal—to demand that Tibet and Tibetans be treated with respect and that their human rights not be just a privilege granted by the Communist Chinese party.

For 50 years the world has sat back and watched oppression in Tibet and has done nothing. Our western civilization has spoken out in the past against other countries that did not respect human rights. We spoke out against South Africa and against Rhodesia. We have spoken out against many oppressive regimes in the past, and we took action. Those actions turned into results and helped those people in those countries. We must take action now, for when those Olympics are over, China is not going to treat Tibetans any better than they're treating them today. You can be absolutely sure, after the Olympics, that the Chinese army and security forces will take on Tibet with far more vigour than what we're seeing now.

The world spotlight is shining on the corruption and the violence of Tibet. We must shine the light brighter. We must not allow this oppression to continue. I ask this House to take further steps, to have the courage and not be fearful of China as a trading partner. Do not be fearful of China. Be a strong advocate for human rights and freedoms everywhere, for if we do not stand up and defend human rights in the free western world, then who will?

1410

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think it's fair to put on the record a bit about the process here today to deal with this very significant issue. For the people who are unaware, and perhaps they're viewing this, there was a House leaders' meeting that occurred earlier today. This issue was not brought forward for discussion by all three House leaders so that we could work out an agreement in terms of an appropriate way to deal with this very significant issue. Instead, the two opposition parties—again showing disdain for people who are not on the government benches—were approached at the last minute, I gather in response to the demonstration that occurred on the steps of the Legislature earlier today by people genuinely concerned about the oppression in Tibet. We have this surface concern with this tabled resolution today.

It's an offence, really, to all members of this assembly, but certainly an insult to the people who genuinely care about what's happening in Tibet today. If this govern-

ment was sincere and genuine about their concerns, the Minister of Economic Development would not be travelling to China. She and her Premier would not be washing their hands in terms of responsibility for raising these kinds of human rights abuses with the responsible authorities in the government of China. Actually, I think to really send a message of contempt for the actions of the Chinese government in Tibet, the minister would stand up today and say she is cancelling her trip.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Once again, I just remind our guests who are visiting that the floor can participate in clapping etc., but our guests should not. Thank you.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a great privilege to rise in this House on behalf of the Tibetan people, both in Toronto and Ontario, and around the world, along with world leaders everywhere who are speaking with one voice against the abuses that the Chinese government has visited upon the Tibetan people at home and against the silence of the members opposite that meets those abuses.

I want to share a couple of quotes here. One is: "Individuals have international duties which transcend the national"—or provincial—"obligations of obedience. Therefore, citizens have the duty to prevent crimes against peace and humanity from occurring." That's from the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal.

Another one that seems appropriate is: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing." That, we all know.

Earlier this week, to set up this discussion, we discovered—and we discovered it by rumour, not because we were told in the opposition, not because there was an announcement made, not because there was a press release, but by rumour and innuendo—that there might be a trip that the Minister of Economic Development and Trade was making to China. We asked her office if this was true. We got no response. Instead, we had to ask in the House. Then, and only then, did we get a response.

Other trips this minister has made were made with great fanfare and pomp. I remember the trip to India; I remember the trip to Tokyo. Certainly, the world knew about those trips. But clearly this government didn't want the world to know about this trip. Why, one might ask, didn't they want the world to know about this trip? Because it's a shameful trip.

I want to make very clear that we, in the New Democratic Party, are not against trade with China. We have nothing against the Chinese people, and neither do the Tibetans in our midst. We have nothing against the Chinese people and nothing against trade with China. We do, however, have something very profoundly against the timing of this trip. While innocent Tibetans are being incarcerated, while innocent Tibetans are being murdered, we do have something against the timing of this trip. And we certainly have something against the fact that this Minister of Economic Development and Trade will not commit—will not promise—to speak about human rights violations in Tibet. She will not promise to speak about human rights violations.

It's very nice that the government brought this motion forward; we are certainly going to support it. But we want more than just words on a page; we want action. Here is what His Holiness the Dalai Lama is asking for. He is asking (1) that the government of China sit down with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and negotiate; (2) that the arbitrary arrests, incarcerations and murders in Tibet stop immediately; and (3) simply to open the border of Tibet so that world journalists, so that our own Queen's Park press, so that press everywhere can go in and find out what's really going on in Tibet with the Tibetan people.

Again, did you hear anything in what I said that called for a boycott? No. Did you hear anything in what I said that was against any of our athletes? No. Did you hear anything in what I said that was against trade? No. Did you hear anything in what I said that was against the Chinese people? No. What I'm talking about is simple human dignity, simple human rights—simply the ethical, moral, right thing to do.

So we don't ask about this; we demand this. In fact, we demand it with one voice around the world. We demand that the flame of shame that is passing from country to country be accompanied with a protest—an ethical, moral protest—that says, "Stop the killings in Tibet. Stand up for human rights." and for this particular trade mission with Ms. Papatello, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, that when she is there, she promise—she promise—to talk about human rights in Tibet.

Mr. Howard Hampton: I simply want to lend some context to this motion. All week we have been asking the McGuinty government to stand up and speak out in favour of human rights. On Monday, when telephone calls went into the Premier's office and into the office of the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, asking if there was a planned trip by the minister to Beijing, the response from both the Premier's office and the minister's office was, "We don't know any details about any trip." It was an attempt by the McGuinty government to try to hide what they were doing. When a Globe and Mail reporter called the Premier's office and asked the same question, they received a reply from the spokesperson in the Premier's office saying, "We don't know the details of any trip."

Anybody in this Legislature knows that when a cabinet minister or the Premier goes to Washington or to India or to Japan, an announcement is made about the trip, what it's for and what it is to accomplish. There's a virtual media parade attached before, during and after. But in this case, at a time when it's important for people around the world to speak out for human rights, the McGuinty government was trying to run below the radar screen and say nothing.

1420

All week, we have asked this government to take a stand in favour of human rights. I say that we've been met with some of the most wishy-washy answers, some terrible answers—the McGuinty government trying to

say that they have no responsibility for human rights, that it rests solely with the federal government, when I know that this Minister of Economic Development and Trade would probably not answer her phone if the Prime Minister called her on some occasions. We have been met with some of the most terrible responses.

Yet today, at the very last minute, we're presented with a motion. I want people to be clear: This is still not a government position. This motion is not a government position. The Legislature passes resolutions all the time and the government disregards them. This is not a government position. This is not the McGuinty government coming forward and saying, "We stand for human rights. We believe there is something terribly wrong in what is happening in Tibet. We ask the government of China to address these issues." This is not a government position. This is a motion of the Legislature which, like so many other motions of this Legislature, the McGuinty government has ignored. That is the truth. That is the reality. So I am sure the McGuinty government cabinet ministers will walk from this chamber and pat themselves on the back and say, "Well, wasn't that a neat little manoeuvre?"

Here is the truth: The McGuinty government still has not taken a position in favour of human rights. The McGuinty government is still trying to weave and duck and dodge.

I simply point out the contrast again. Not that many years ago, the world was faced with the disgrace of apartheid in South Africa. You did not see state governments or provincial governments or municipal governments or federal governments ducking and weaving and dodging. People came forward and they spoke with one voice. They said, "What is happening in South Africa is wrong, and the world must do all that we can to change this." You know what? Change happened. Human rights were upheld. An incredible change happened.

But here, all week, what we have seen from the McGuinty government is a continuing effort to duck and dodge and weave and avoid taking a position. That continues today with this motion, because this is not a statement by the McGuinty government; this is simply a resolution by the Legislature which we know the McGuinty government is going to ignore, as they have ignored so many resolutions by this Legislature.

We will vote for the resolution, but I still want to hear from the McGuinty government that it stands for human rights in Tibet and that it's going to speak out for human rights in Tibet.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Smitherman has moved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as a long-standing friend of China, express concern with the current situation in Tibet and encourage the parties to engage in meaningful dialogue. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Agreed to.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Let's take this opportunity: We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the internal affairs committee of Baden-Württemberg, Germany. With the delegation are the Honourable Heribert Rech, Minister of the Interior, and Mr. Hans Georg Junginger, committee chairman. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests from Germany today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, and it's regarding her disturbing decision to travel to China, we have to assume, later this week, since she's keeping her itinerary secret. Earlier today we had a demonstration at the Legislature highlighting concerns about the ongoing violent oppression of Tibetans by Chinese authorities. Yesterday, the United Steelworkers issued a release stating that unless or until the jobs crisis in the province is properly addressed, the minister shouldn't set foot in China. Those are two very valid reasons to cancel your ill-thought-out trip. Will you do that?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do appreciate this question. It gives us an opportunity to speak to people who are working in this province and in particular in the manufacturing sector, which is facing more challenge, perhaps, than it has ever had. This is the very reason that our government has taken on a very aggressive approach around the world to address these issues of globalization.

Ontario needs to be in the world, and what that means for Ontario manufacturers and those who work in the field of manufacturing—we look for every opportunity to sell Ontario products around the world, because they are great products. We look for every opportunity to give our companies access to markets, and we believe that Ontario can do this and can do this in more ways than one, with the addition of 10 international marketing centres around the world. In particular, this former minister in this very portfolio engaged in the very same activity—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: What a crock.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd ask the member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I withdraw.

The Oxford Dictionary defines "boondoggle" as "a trivial or useless undertaking." We know that's the case here, despite the minister's empty rhetoric. What the Minister of Economic Development is engaging in is much more than a taxpayer-funded boondoggle; it's also an in-your-face insult to the Tibetan people and the hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who have lost their jobs under your watch.

Minister, once again, will you do the right thing and cancel your trip?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do know that my Premier was very clear yesterday when he quoted a former Minister of Economic Development and Trade saying that Ontario businesses have great stories to tell, good products to sell, both nationally and internationally, excellent opportunities to present them to the world—Bob Runciman, Minister of Economic Development and Trade. In fact, this same party while in government opened their last office and perhaps their only office—and where did they open that office? In none other than Shanghai, China.

Let's be clear. We can have the politics that you choose to engage in today or we can talk about the realities of the job market for the people of Ontario. What is very clear, whether talking about the steelworkers who work in our steel sector or the automotive workers who work in our automotive plants, or any of our manufacturing plants—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suspect in her heart of hearts the minister knows what she's doing is indefensible and offensive. That has to be the reason she attempted to hide the trip from the public. She claims that's not the case and her colleague claims that's not the case, but when her predecessor went to China three years ago, the trip was announced over four months in advance, with no less than 10 news releases prior to departure. This minister had no formal announcement, no press release. She knew this trip was wrong and compounded her failure in judgment by trying to hide it from the public.

Minister, with Tibetans being killed, our manufacturing sector in crisis, will you cancel this unsavoury excursion?

1430

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do wish that the opposition paid more attention to the tremendous work that goes on in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. Perhaps you should join me when I'm speaking to the chambers of commerce right across this province, identifying exactly where we're going, exactly where we're opening offices. I wish that this particular member were more interested so he could see how much greater the job is since he was in this very same chair.

The reality is, Bombardier in Thunder Bay wants those jobs that produce rail line—for where?—for China. Bombardier in Kingston provides those jobs for Ontarians to develop products for China. These are Ontario jobs that depend on our ability to be in the world, and we appreciate, and such is the language in today's resolution, that we cannot divorce ourselves from the politics in China. We will stand, as we do, with our federal counterparts, whose responsibility it is to do the right thing and—

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

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question to the Deputy Premier. While the economic development and trade minister is off on a junket to China, Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend policies have chased almost 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs from Ontario. The London area has been particularly hard hit, with some 4,600 well-paying manufacturing jobs lost in this past year alone.

Deputy Premier, is the loss of manufacturing jobs in London now in excess of the job loss record of your federal colleague and good friend Bob Rae when he was Premier?

Hon. George Smitherman: I want to thank the honourable member for his question. We've had the chance on quite a few occasions now over the past several weeks to debate the contrasting strategies. Their strategy is incoherent insofar as, on the one hand, it calls for \$5 billion in revenue reductions, and on the other hand, or in the other voice, it very regularly calls for substantial investment in spending programs. We know where that leads us. We inherited from them a \$5.6-billion deficit, and we don't think that the people of Ontario want us to go back.

Our recent budget really does strike out in favour of the people of Ontario by dramatically enhancing their capacity to have the training, skills and education that they need to be a success in the economy which is emerging, and substantial investments in infrastructure, while at the same time making targeted investments in tax reduction. These are three of five points of a very balanced plan, and I think it stands in very sharp and positive contrast to the incoherence of the opposition party.

Mr. Tim Hudak: The Deputy Premier is right. His budget has struck out when it comes to saving jobs in London and southwestern Ontario. If there's anything coherent about your economic strategy, it's that it has been a tremendous success in chasing well-paying manufacturing jobs out of Ontario.

Just today, we learned that 150 people at the CanGro facility in Exeter will lose their jobs when that plant closes at the end of this month. That's in tandem with the 150 CanGro jobs lost in Niagara around the same time. Deputy Premier, are these latest closures evidence that we should steel ourselves in southwestern Ontario for even more manufacturing job losses in the months ahead?

Hon. George Smitherman: I think it's very, very clear that there are parts of the economy that are not functioning as well as others, and that in an environment which the Premier has spoken of very often, where the dollar is at such a high level, where gasoline prices are putting so much pressure, and where our biggest trading partner, the United States, is obviously experiencing some substantial softness in its economy, the implications for Ontario are very challenging. That's why we think it's important in those times—unlike them, where they would throw people overboard and dramatically cut programs—to reach out and support our Ontarians, to

believe in them and to unlock in them all of the capacity they have to be strong and competitive in the environment that is emerging.

Our five-point action plan reduces business taxes—

Interjection.

Hon. George Smitherman: Well, if the honourable member wants to ask me a question, he should have one.

We've invested in infrastructure. We're supporting innovation. We're partnering in business. Most especially, we're investing in our people. We know that the people of Ontario are fantastic. They are strong and they are resilient, and together, we'll lead forward to an even stronger Ontario.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I say to the Deputy Premier, the only rolls that seem to be growing are those making more than \$100,000 per year, including 92 more \$100,000 positions at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., including 20 vice-president positions.

Meanwhile, Siemens in Chatham, after 62 years in business, will close their doors this June, throwing 70 people out of work in the Chatham area. The Keiper plant in London, a seat manufacturer, last month announced a further 100 job losses.

I ask you, Deputy Premier, to tell the people of London and southwestern Ontario: How much longer do you intend to keep Ontario's tax rates among the highest in North America, and how many more factories are going to close?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member wants to talk about the \$100,000 club, but in the very midst of the party that you're a front-bencher for, the chief of staff in these tough times got a 51% increase.

The biggest increase that I am aware of by any group on the sunshine list is the 124% increase in the number of nurses who were on it, reflecting a very strong commitment on the part of our government to public services.

The honourable member doesn't like the fact—you can see that he gets a little stirred up when it happens, but interestingly, this party voted against the budget, a budget that had in it initiatives that support new investment in the province of Ontario. We lured a new plant to Tilbury with new jobs for the people there, but we did it over the howling cries of the opposition, whose strategy is the same as it is was when Mike Harris ruled the roost here: cut Ontario's capacity to invest in the services that people need, and reduce taxes even if it means running a deficit and borrowing the money.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is for the Deputy Premier. At a time when Tibetan people are dying and are being incarcerated in large numbers at the hands of the current government of China, at a time when there is a mass denial of human rights in Tibet, does the McGuinty government believe it is appropriate to send a cabinet minister to China on official government business?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I'm very pleased to be able to address this issue. For some time now, and for those who would have liked to watch our ministry activity, they would know that for some time we have been planning this trip and encouraging people to talk to us about the benefits of our engagement with China. That has always been the case. We've known about this since last fall.

No, none of the members of the opposition have bothered to ask those questions or attend events where we've made that very public. In fact, historically, when we have had a trade mission that included companies that we were bringing with us—yes, we've had events where we've launched those companies coming with us, and that has become very apparent to the opposition. But they certainly didn't follow my activity this past January on a trip to India, or to Germany, and likewise, until this week, did not follow my activity to China either.

Unfortunately, I can't agree with the very premise that they are putting forward. I'm happy to answer questions again on this.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The question was, does the McGuinty government believe it is appropriate to be sending a cabinet minister to China at this time, when we see people being killed, people being incarcerated and a mass denial of human rights in Tibet? I didn't hear an answer, but I take it from the non-answer that the McGuinty government does believe that it is appropriate.

If you believe it's appropriate, can you tell us why, when a Globe and Mail reporter called the Premier's office earlier this week and asked, "Is there is a trip planned by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade?", the response received was, "We don't know any details about a trip"? Can you tell us why that was the response, if this indeed has been in the planning by the government for some time?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I do find it difficult that you would find a board of trade for the city of Toronto a secret location, or in fact a chamber of commerce—those I've been travelling to—that you would call those locations a secret. In fact, for the speech last week at the board of trade here in Toronto, the CP wire story indicated a number of items that we had talked about in that very speech. So there was, indeed, media at these events, but the members opposite didn't care to worry about the aggressive behaviour of the economic development ministry at this time that we need it the most.

The reality is that we are engaged in constructive engagement, and we're going to continue to do that. We have followed the lead of the federal government in this area. We know that that is the right approach to China. We know that it affords us the opportunity to sit down in both a private fashion and a public fashion to have these kinds of conversations that often go beyond business discussions. We've already known that would be the case at this time.

1440

Mr. Howard Hampton: Once again, the question was relatively straightforward: why the Premier's office

would even deny any knowledge of this planned trip by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade to China when the minister wants us to believe that it was well known, that it had been well known for some time.

Minister, can you tell me this: Can you tell me why, then, a government member would put forward a motion today that wants to try to address some of the human rights issues, why a government member would put it forward today, when the McGuinty government has taken no position on this, when the McGuinty government has failed to speak out, when the McGuinty government has failed to state any position on this? Can you tell us why a motion would happen in the Legislature when it's so apparent that the McGuinty government's position is not that position?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: When I stand in this House to vote on any number of issues, I mean it when I stand to vote in favour of a motion. What I'm going to take from this last question is that this very member opposite actually doesn't believe, when he stands on his feet and votes in favour of the motion—which you just did in this House. We take that very seriously.

The reality is that for us and the work we do in this ministry, we are looking at what Ontario faces in challenges around the world today—definitely challenges in manufacturing.

This is the same member who's travelled to Thunder Bay and with such doublespeak speaks at one time to workers, good CAW membership, about what he wants to do for those workers and comes to Toronto and speaks a completely different language about what he wants to say.

We are talking about jobs here. We're talking about Bombardier in Thunder Bay and Bombardier in Kingston, people whose livelihood depends on the kinds of trade they can engage in—where? In China. We are in constructive engagements, and we will continue to be.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask both sides—there are comments that are made either directly or indirectly in the heckling—that we have some respect for one another. Please, let's watch the parliamentary language.

New question.

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again, back to the Deputy Premier: I would say that the only people who want to have two positions on this are the people opposite. The McGuinty government doesn't want to take a position, but they want to present a motion in the Legislature that would make it look as if they've taken a position.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question for the Deputy Premier is this: Last night in your constituency, 500 people came together to protest the actions of the McGuinty government. Some of these 500 people were environmentalists, some represented human rights organizations and some of them aboriginal chiefs. All stated their oppo-

sition to the jailing of First Nation leaders from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation and from Ardoch First Nation, and they spoke with one voice. They want to see the immediate release of those First Nations leaders. Is the McGuinty government prepared to commit today to supporting the immediate and unconditional release of those jailed First Nations leaders?

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I've said it before and I'll say it again: The crown opposed incarceration at the time in which the court heard submissions on whether or not Chief Donny Morris and council ought to be incarcerated as a sentence that was part of a contempt motion. I've said before, and the Attorney General has made it very clear, that supporting the appeal is entirely consistent with that position. That's why we are certainly hoping that all the necessary materials will be filed by the party that needs to file them in order to bring this appeal forward so that the Attorney General can file the materials to indicate, in fact, that we support the appeal. So the answer is, I say yet again: Yes, we support the appeal, and no, we never supported incarceration.

Mr. Howard Hampton: One of the other positions that was raised by the national chief, Phil Fontaine, the former national chief, Ovide Mercredi, and many of the environmental and social justice organizations is that the Mining Act in Ontario must be rewritten to bring it into accord with the constitutional decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada that no mining opportunities, no mineral exploration opportunities, should be granted unless and until the government of Ontario has consulted and accommodated those First Nation rights and interests that may be at stake.

Is the McGuinty government prepared to do the right thing and amend the Mining Act so that more First Nation leaders are not jailed as a result of your wrong-headed legislation?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I just ask the member: Can you please relate how that supplementary relates to your initial question?

Mr. Howard Hampton: It's about the jailing of First Nation leaders. Those First Nation leaders were jailed as a result of a mining permit—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. Michael Bryant: As the member knows, the government has already committed to amending the Mining Act—a Mining Act, by the way, that has been in place for decades and decades, and a Mining Act that the member, when he was Attorney General, had an opportunity to amend, but he didn't. And the government has indicated, obviously, that we as a government will collaborate fully, in terms of consultation and drafting, when it comes to ensuring that we do make changes to the Mining Act.

I remind the member as well that in a number of regions of the province, First Nations have in fact entered

into agreements with mining companies which involved significant consultation, and agreements and memorandums of understanding that in some cases received the support of 85% of the community in ratification votes. I wouldn't want the member to pretend. In fact, First Nations are entering into agreements for the benefit of their community in order to create jobs and prosperity in those communities.

Mr. Howard Hampton: The question is this: A mining permit was granted and mining rights were granted to this company, Platinex, by the McGuinty government. There was no consultation and accommodation of the First Nation before those mining opportunities were granted. That is what resulted, ultimately, in the jailing of the First Nation leadership, because they expressed opposition to this, as I think many other people are. The question is not about what this or that particular First Nation may want to do under particular circumstances; it is about bringing the Mining Act and mining legislation and mining regulations into accord with the most recent decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada.

So I'm left to ask: When is the McGuinty government going to amend the Mining Act and the regulations thereunder so that no longer will we see First Nations leaders being jailed because they express opposition to these things?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Again, I remind the member that he had an opportunity for five years to amend it and he didn't do it. I should also say, with respect to national Chief Phil Fontaine, who is obviously showing extraordinary leadership on this issue and many issues, that he said he was in fact encouraged by his meeting with the government of Ontario in terms of our solidarity around the fact that, contrary to what the member suggests, the jailing of the First Nation chief and council was not something that ought to have happened. I say to the member that, of course, we need to amend the Mining Act. But surely the member doesn't want this government to unilaterally slam down a Mining Act that hasn't been the result of significant collaboration and consultation with First Nations.

You can't have it both ways, I say to the member. We're going to consult with First Nations, we're going to make sure that a bill is tabled before this House that amends the Mining Act, and we'll do something that that government—

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

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the government House leader, Minister Bryant: This morning, the committee on finance and economic affairs was called to discuss my private member's Bill 42. This government, with eyes downcast, refused to make a simple democratic decision.

A pattern is emerging in the careless way in which this government is playing with our democratic system. There is absolutely no harm in allowing the citizens of Ontario to participate in the democratic process, as our fore-

fathers intended. In fact, public participation is the cornerstone of the democratic ideals we hold dear.

Minister, why have you directed your government to deny the citizens of Ontario a voice in our legislative process?

1450

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock for a moment, please.

In consultation with the Clerk's table, you cannot direct a question to the government House leader. You have to direct your question to the ministry that the bill would pertain to. So do you have a minister that you would be directing that question to?

Start the clock, please.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: As the Minister of Finance isn't here, I'll direct it to the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'll refer that to the House leader.

Hon. Michael Bryant: We arranged this in a parliamentary fashion, Speaker. I would have taken the question directly.

Firstly, the budget bill is going to that committee, and the member will know that the supply and estimates process of this Legislature is an historic process that has been followed by government after government after government.

It's absolutely critical, obviously, that the many important services that are provided by the government of Ontario are in fact funded through the general revenue fund, and that has to happen by a budget bill. The budget bill is before committee. It needs to go before that committee, and I'm sure all members look forward to debating the matter and the committee ultimately deciding how the budget bill ought to fare under committee hearings.

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

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Welcome to my world, Mr. Speaker.

To whichever minister wants to answer, the intent of my private member's bill was to close a loophole in your own legislation. The minister just said that the committee can decide on its own business. This committee has no business in front of it right now. The reason that this government gave for shutting down the bill is that the House leaders should decide when the bill should proceed.

I understand that both the NDP and the PC House leaders were in agreement about sending this bill forward. The reality is that this government, not the opposition, is opposed to the citizens of Ontario participating in a democratic process. Why is this government afraid to accept the work with the legislation that did not originate in the back room of the Liberal Party?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I'm tempted to refer this one to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, but I won't.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Refer it to John Tory. He wants her seat.

Hon. Michael Bryant: I can't refer it to John Tory.

The budget bill has \$190 million in rebates for manufacturers, and we need that bill passed.

But it has to be said: That this, the party of the Magna budget, this, the party of the omnibus bills, this, the party of multiple breaking-of-the-record closure motions, would be lecturing any party or any government about the subject of democracy and following parliamentary procedure—I do believe there were a number of contempt findings by the Speaker of the day with respect to the treatment of democracy in this House by the Conservative Party.

At the end of the day, I just wish the member would let the committee decide how it's going to conduct its business.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question, in the absence of the Premier, is to the Deputy Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would remind the member not to make comments about members being present or not.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: To the Deputy Premier: Since the Premier insists on sending the minister of trade to China on this trip—this junket, as the Tory caucus calls it—will you promise to instruct her to speak in her official capacity on Tibetan human rights? Will you actually put some substance into the resolution we all just passed?

Hon. George Smitherman: Firstly, I do think it is disappointing that the leader of the third party has put his own lack of sincerity around the votes that he makes on the floor in questioning the sincerity of members on the motion.

I think that on the matter at hand, if the member who asked me the question were to just take a look at Hansard from yesterday, or perhaps it was the day before, the Premier made it very clear that in these trips, of course, come up private occasions where there will be an opportunity for such discussions.

Any of us who have been around for even a day or two have an understanding of the values and the capacities of the Minister of Economic Development and Trade on this issue, and, therefore, I think Ontarians should have strong confidence on that point.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: You know, it's amazing that there are 300 Tibetans outside and not one Liberal.

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I ask the question again, because I did not hear an answer: Will this government commit their minister of trade and development to speaking about Tibetan human rights, in her official capacity, in China? Will they or not?

Hon. George Smitherman: The honourable member knows well that the Minister of Economic Development and Trade is making a trip in her official capacity.

The Premier, in his answer to questions—as I said a second ago—yesterday or perhaps it was the day before, indicated that as a matter of course, in any such trip are the opportunities to be engaged with officials and to let them know of the viewpoints that are being expressed more broadly.

I think if the honourable members took a little bit more interest in the actual words that were expressed, or, in fact, reviewed Hansard after it's been printed, they would gain a greater degree of confidence.

We operate sometimes in a very, very public way, and our responsibilities also encourage us to work in different ways. It's not only about being able to go out and to participate in rallies. The work of government requires—

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

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is for the Minister of Research and Innovation.

In my riding, at the University of Guelph's Biodiversity Institute of Ontario, Dr. Hebert and his team are working on a world-class DNA research project called the International Barcode of Life.

Dr. Hebert invented DNA barcoding in 2003. It's a fast and efficient method used to identify plant, insect and animal life. This project involves over 100 scientists from 25 countries coming together to compile the largest DNA-based species identification system in the world.

Dr. Hebert's research will develop a unique barcode to catalogue DNA records of the world's living things. It's making Ontario a leader on the global stage.

What is the Ministry of Research and Innovation doing, Minister, to support this cutting-edge research?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank the member for her tireless advocacy, both for her community of Guelph and particularly the University of Guelph, of which she and her family are quite proud.

I had the privilege of visiting the University of Guelph's Biodiversity Institute of Ontario last February, with the member, and previous to that. At the University of Guelph, researchers are not only doing world-class research, but they're also doing world-first research.

DNA is the unique fingerprint of all life on this planet, and this technology aims to allow for virtually instant DNA identification by simply scanning a specimen with a hand-held device. So, I am proud to report that my ministry is investing some \$5 million into this project to support world-class research.

Moreover, we've invested another \$150,000 to help international collaborations. Just last month, the government of New South Wales in Australia pledged some \$1.2 million to this international project—

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'd like to thank the minister for his interest in the project. When he visited in the winter to announce the \$5 million in funding for innovative research, the researchers at the Barcode of Life were just absolutely thrilled with the news.

But, Minister, biodiversity has some implications for the world economy. One of the challenges that a lot of jurisdictions face is invasive species. In fact, the flower growers' association, which has its headquarters in my

riding, is quite concerned with what happens when shipments cross the border. If there's a pest found, it takes weeks to sort out what it is, and by then the flowers are dead. So there are implications for this for the world economy and for our economy.

1500

I'm wondering if you can explain what impact this sort of research funding will have on Ontario—

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

Hon. John Wilkinson: Thank you for the supplementary. We believe that our government can take global challenges and seize them and make them global opportunities. When we talk about the International Barcode of Life project, there are a number of benefits.

The first thing would be to facilitate trade. Dangerous biological products can cross international boundaries. So just think, if we were able, at the border, to identify the species, decide what is something that we don't want in our country and something that we need to keep out. That is a common theme with all of the countries around the world as they worry about the problem of invasive species.

It's a wonderful way for us to be able to do quicker environmental assessments, because we'll be able to quickly identify what life forms are in an area where we have an interest in doing an environmental assessment.

You can imagine the crop devastation that could be prevented by quickly scanning a fungus in a shipload of fruit or being able to identify the exact species of mosquito that may carry an infectious disease.

This is important for the world, and we're glad to be playing our—

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

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Peter Shurman: My question is for the Minister of Health Promotion. Yesterday, in response to a question from the member for Etobicoke North, the minister stated, "We are reliant on strong partnerships to achieve our goals. My ministry officials have been in regular discussions with the Ontario Convenience Stores Association...."

"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."

Just 24 hours earlier, I received an e-mail from Mr. Dave Bryans, the president of that association, in which he expressed some serious concerns, one related to the physical and financial impossibility of meeting display specifications by the May 31 deadline. He stated, "We are concerned the over 200 tobacco enforcement officers will use their heavy-hand-of-the-law approach on small business without any assistance or compassion for the timeline predicament we are in."

The minister's words, tone and content appear at odds with Mr. Bryans's message because his members are not

partners; they're victims. I would ask the minister if she wishes to correct her statement with regard to how—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I would like to refer the member to the first reading. When this bill was first read in this House on December 15, 2004, and first introduced by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, he said, "There's another component to this bill that deserves particular attention: our retail display ban. We have all walked into convenience stores and seen elaborate countertop displays promoting smoking precisely at the eye level of young children. Does anyone really believe that it is somehow acceptable for cigarettes to be mixed with Twizzlers and hockey cards for the benefit of young consumers?" The industry knew this was coming for over three years.

Mr. Peter Shurman: My experience in communications suggests to me that the minister's response and the message from this significant stakeholder group are diametrically opposed. I have irrefutable evidence in my hand that says to me she may have misled this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member knows that that's not an appropriate word. I would ask that you withdraw the word you just used.

Mr. Peter Shurman: No, I'm not prepared to withdraw that, sir. This is irrefutable evidence.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I would ask once again that the member withdraw the word.

Mr. Peter Shurman: I will not withdraw the word.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): This is your final warning. Would you please withdraw the comment that you made?

Interjection: It's accurate.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I name the member from Thornhill and ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort him from the chamber, please.

Mr. Shurman was escorted from the chamber.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to direct my question to the Minister of Labour. Yesterday, I raised the case of Gordie Heffern, who 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 employer received rebates from the WSIB totalling \$5 million, far exceeding the fine. The outrageous rebates that went to Gordie Heffern's employer following his tragic death flow from a deeply flawed WSIB program called experience rating.

I'd like an answer today. Will you announce the end to experience rating programs now?

Hon. Brad Duguid: On behalf of all of us in this Legislature, let me extend condolences to the Heffern family and all injured workers and all families who have lost loved ones to workplace fatalities.

This government and the WSIB are very committed to doing all that we can to bring down workplace fatalities. We're committed to bringing down workplace injuries as well. The WSIB, under the leadership of Mr. Mahoney, has made some great inroads, working in partnership with our Ministry of Labour, to do that. We're well on the road to reaching our goal of a 20% reduction in workplace injuries.

The incentive program that the member talks about—as I said yesterday, as I said the day before and probably the day before that—is under review right now by the WSIB. We look forward to the outcome of that review. We recognize that the incentive program has flaws, and we look forward to it being corrected.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yesterday the minister claimed that the experience rating policy had real problems. The chair of the board recently claimed, until a few weeks ago, that he didn't know about the large payouts to companies. I myself attended a rally in December with injured workers in front of the WSIB offices. The minister spoke, and that day promised action. A staff member from the OFL handed the minister's staff papers on these very issues and other issues in front of the board. We've been after this for 10 years, through the OFL, to change this.

Once again, will the minister end this outrageous experience rating program now?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I've made it clear that this government agrees that there is a need to reform the experience rating system. I think we've made it abundantly clear. The chair of the WSIB agrees with that as well, and that is why that review is being conducted.

I spoke with the chair as recently as yesterday about these matters and, indeed, the chair is eager to move forward with a solution and to potentially move forward even more quickly than he initially wanted and suggested he would.

The key here is to look at the record of this government when it comes to injured workers: an increase of 2.5% in July for injured workers, an increase of 2.5% last January, an increase of 2.5% coming forward in this January coming up. Compare that with the record of the party opposite. They brought in the Friedland formula. That is the formula—the Tories made it even worse—that created an environment so that injured workers fell further and further behind.

This government is—

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

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. I know that our government made a commitment before the last provincial election in August 2007 that we would extend collective bargaining rights to part-time college employees. Currently in Ontario, about 50% of all college employees are prohibited from joining a bargaining unit

under the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act. This means that almost 9,000 academic and almost 9,000 support staff do not have the right to be organized.

Many of these employees work in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga at Conestoga College and make a substantial contribution to the high-quality education that the McGuinty government has actively supported through the \$6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan.

Can the minister tell us when he will extend collective bargaining rights to part-time college workers, both in my riding and across the province?

1510

Hon. John Milloy: I'd like to begin by thanking the member for Kitchener–Conestoga for her question and for her commitment to post-secondary education. I'd also like to take this opportunity—and I'm sure all members would agree—to echo her praise and acknowledge the important contribution that part-time college workers make to Ontario's network of 24 community colleges.

Without that important work, we would not have been able to accomplish the many gains we've seen in that sector, as well as the university sector: 100,000 more students are attending post-secondary institutes in Ontario; 40% of 18- to 24-year-olds are participating in post-secondary education in our province; we have 110,000 more active apprentices today, 50,000 more than in 2003; and, according to a recent study, 91% of college graduates find jobs within six months of graduating, and 93% of employers are satisfied with their skills.

I want to end by saying that the government is serious about our commitment, and I want to—

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

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I thank you for the re-affirmation of our government's commitment to extend collective bargaining rights for part-time college workers. It's good news for part-time employees at Conestoga College in my riding, and all across the province.

On August 30, 2007, as part of our government's commitment on the matter, Kevin Whitaker, chair of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, the College Relations Commission and the Education Relations Commission, was appointed to conduct a broad-based review of the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, which had not been reviewed in nearly 20 years.

Is the minister able to provide members of the Legislature and part-time employees in Ontario with an update on the status of Kevin Whitaker's work?

Hon. John Milloy: I want to apologize to the member: I got so caught up in talking about the good things that are happening in post-secondary education that I didn't have a chance to reiterate our government's commitment to extend bargaining rights to part-time college workers. On February 1 this year, I was very pleased to receive the report by Mr. Whitaker. It has been placed on the website of the ministry. I want to thank him for his very thoughtful advice. I've had a chance to consult with many stakeholders involved in the issue. We're in the

process of analyzing the report, and I hope to report back to the Legislature in the near future.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. It remains unclear exactly how your government has been working with convenience store operators in this province on the retail display ban. Please tell the House exactly what action you have taken to help these small business operators, for whom you are responsible.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I refer that to the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Our government is doing all we can to protect the health and well-being of Ontarians. That is why, effective May 31, 2008, the retail display of tobacco products will be banned. The ban is about saving lives and ensuring that the next generation of Ontarians do not pick up the habit of smoking.

We are working with our partners to ensure a smooth transition to the display ban, including the Ontario Convenience Stores Association, the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association and the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, Ontario. Our Smoke-Free Ontario Act and this ban are about protecting lives. They're about the health of Ontarians.

Mr. Norm Miller: The question was to the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship, to do with how he's helping out small business. I don't know why he's not answering the question. As the PC critic for small business and as a past businessman myself, I hear repeatedly about how heavy-handed enforcement officers have become. The truth is that they have no interest in helping small business comply with the new regulations, whether it's for an advertising ban, drinking water or any other regulation.

Why won't you help small business to comply by requiring enforcement officers to provide advice as part of the compliance process? Will you commit today to do this?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Again, smoking kills 13,000 Ontarians and costs our health care system \$1.6 billion every year. It is also the number one preventable cause of death in Ontario. The tobacco display ban is about saving lives and ensuring that the next generation of Ontarians does not pick up the habit of smoking. We are working with our partners, and we have been working with them for the past two years, to prepare for this ban. We will continue to work with our partners until the ban becomes effective on May 31 this year. Since January of this year alone, public health officials have visited 5,500 tobacco vendors, informed them and talked with them about our display ban.

Mr. Norm Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Doesn't the answer have to relate to the question?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Next question, please. The member for Hamilton Centre.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: That would be news around here.

HOME CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Without dancing around the issues, because I'm actually looking for a very specific number here, I ask the Minister of Health: What is the average wait time in Ontario to receive home care?

Hon. George Smitherman: The member may know that there is no measurement for waits related to home care. I can tell the honourable member that over the course of the last four years, through very substantial investments in home care, more than 80,000 additional people are receiving home care. I'm going to have announcements to make in very short order which will further enhance the resource for home care. Through our government's pioneering \$700-million, three-year plan for aging at home, we're going to even more dramatically support an array of services that can enhance the quality of life and allow more of our seniors to live on in the place they know and love, which is their home.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I can let the minister know that there's a particular person in my riding, named Dean Smith, who's really not very happy about how long he's having to wait. The gentleman is 44 years old and is in a wheelchair. He needs help, and he needs it now. He applied for home care back in December, so he has waited four months. Finally, last week he found out that he has an appointment for an assessment—no home care yet; just an assessment. Would the minister tell Dean Smith and others with disabilities and health problems why they have to wait so long for an assessment, let alone the actual home care they need, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, and what he is going to do to guarantee that the home care is going to be there when the people of Ontario need it the most?

Hon. George Smitherman: First off, I would like to encourage other honourable members, as I have encouraged honourable members in other circumstances, where you have one particular situation pertaining to a constituent. Of course you can raise it with me here on the floor, but I would also encourage you to deal with the people in my office, especially Scott and Chris, who I think are well known around this place for working to try and address those constituents' challenges that do arise.

I want to say to the honourable member that, of course, I don't have information on the particular circumstance she raises, but evidence she has presented is that care is being arranged for the gentleman, and I think it is something we can see further enhancement around.

As I mentioned, our government's budget of this year does offer substantial new resources for home care. We all recognize that this is a growing-demand service in health care—80,000 additional clients per year so far—and our \$700-million aging-at-home initiative is going to further enhance the range of supports that can be offered

to individuals who are struggling and striving to stay in the place they love and know best—their home.

GREENBELT

Mr. Reza Moridi: I have a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. One of the McGuinty government's growing achievements first was protecting over 1.5 million acres of precious agricultural land and green space in the greenbelt and the Oak Ridges moraine. I know that many of my constituents like to take their families out of the city to relax and explore Ontario's vast agricultural land and green space. I have many local residents and activists in my riding who care deeply about protecting green space for their children and grandchildren. They want to see the greenbelt protected and sustained as a vibrant part of Ontario's landscape. The world has seen many greenbelts eroded over time by leapfrog development and loopholes in legislation.

Minister, can you ensure—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing?

1520

Hon. Jim Watson: Let me begin by thanking the member for Richmond Hill for his interest in the greenbelt and the Oak Ridges moraine. We have, in fact, fulfilled our 2003 campaign commitment by creating the greenbelt, which we're very, very proud of. We're protecting a total of 1.8 million acres of green space in the greater Golden Horseshoe—bigger than Prince Edward Island.

Let me just quote a study that came out a day or so ago from the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy—an excellent article in the *Globe and Mail* entitled "Ontario's Greenbelt a Model for the World." It says, "Ontario's greenbelt is positioned to be the most successful and the most useful greenbelt in the world."

We're acting on our commitment to consider expanding the greenbelt. There is a public consultation process going on right now. We've had a number of meetings, and in fact, if individuals would like to go to the meeting tonight, it's in Guelph—over 80 people are attending—or in Markham on April 30.

Mr. Reza Moridi: I am pleased to see that the government is committed to protecting the greenbelt and even expanding it to municipalities that see the benefits of green space and farmland for their communities. But Ontarians know that once green space is eroded, it's never going to come back. It takes a government's commitment to ensure that the greenbelt is protected. The report commends our Move 2020 investments and the grades 7 to 9 Ontario public school curriculum on the greenbelt as facets in helping to protect and encourage interest in the greenbelt.

I ask the minister: How is this government going to maintain and strengthen the greenbelt, and how can we prevent Ontario from going backward to the time of urban sprawl and unplanned growth?

Hon. Jim Watson: One of the first things the people of Ontario did was on October 10, 2007, when they spoke loud and clear that they wanted a party and a government in office that is going to bring forward progressive legislation like the greenbelt.

It is really quite sad and regrettable that the official opposition, the Conservative Party, votes against every piece of progressive legislation, whether it's the Smoke-Free Ontario Act or the greenbelt legislation. I would suggest that the Conservative Party go to the office of the Registrar General, change their name and remove the word "Progressive," because they are not a progressive party. They did not support the greenbelt.

We're proud of this legislation. Let me read you one quote from a letter to Premier McGuinty: "I congratulate you for recognizing that urban sprawl represents a major negative impact on the environment, from continued degradation to wild areas to overdependence on cars, loss of farmland, and pollution of air, water and soil.... Congratulations on this initiative." David Suzuki said this.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Minister of Health. As the minister will know, the Rouge Valley Health System is being forced to make significant cuts in order to balance their books. We've already heard the minister's response to the spectre of layoffs for nurses, but equally as disturbing is the fact that the entire in-patient mental health unit at the Ajax site is being closed and transferred to the Scarborough site.

Minister, how can you possibly justify closing an entire in-patient mental health unit in Durham region, which is one of the fastest-growing areas in Ontario?

Hon. George Smitherman: The question to me is how I could possibly justify such an action, when the question to the honourable member is: How could she and her predecessor have possibly justified the diminution of an entire acute care hospital, the Whitby hospital, to the remnants of an organization? How, in good conscience, can a member who is a putative leader of that party come with a viewpoint that would eliminate the health premium and \$3 billion in health care expenditure?

What is proposed will be subject to consultation locally. I encourage the honourable member to participate in that—she has received a letter from the chair of the local health integration network on that issue.

What is proposed is a consolidation to one site of a program will have exactly the same capacity, and enhance the crisis capacity at the Ajax site.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I can tell the minister that I've heard from doctors and nurses, I've heard from constituents from all over Durham region, including this government's own member from Ajax-Pickering, who is reading a petition against the closure there. So obviously there's a very big concern about this, and there are going to be hundreds of people coming to a public meeting tonight, as the minister may know. Lakeridge Health

Oshawa is the only other place in Durham region with in-patient mental health beds. They're currently operating at 100% capacity, and they send their overflow to the Ajax hospital.

Balancing the books is important, but putting vulnerable, ill people at risk is something altogether different. This is a very big issue of concern, and to suggest that a person from Clarington is going to go to Scarborough for treatment is completely unrealistic.

Minister, fortunately, there's a solution here. Will you commit to designating funds from the population growth-based funding that you have promised to ensure that the Ajax site doesn't have to close their in-patient mental health beds?

Hon. George Smitherman: They're not closing it; they're transferring it. With respect to the member from Ajax-Pickering and indeed the member from Pickering-Scarborough East, I totally appreciate that they're speaking up on behalf of their communities, but they're in a far more powerful position to be able to do so because they're not part of a party that proposes to reduce health care spending, as we speak, by \$3 billion.

This is the incoherence in Conservative Party policy. Funding for addictions and mental health in the Central East local health integration network has increased by 84.5% since 2003. In real terms, when that member's party first came to office, Lakeridge Health Corp., just as one example, was cut by \$4.29 million—3.03%. That is where we stand different. There is an 84.5% investment in mental health and addictions on our side; direct funding cuts to hospitals on their side.

PETITIONS

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I notice that it helped to be recognized during the question period so that I could get on the petition motion. I have a petition here:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

"Whereas the Lord's Prayer's message 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 thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to present this petition on behalf of my constituents.

HOME CARE

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

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas the competitive bidding process has increased the privatization of Ontario's health care delivery, in direct violation of the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004; and

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

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

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

"We call on the government of Ontario:

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

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

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it through Ida.

FIREARMS CONTROL

Mr. Mike Colle: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas innocent people are being victimized by the growing number of unlawful firearms in our communities; and

"Whereas only police officers, military personnel and lawfully licensed persons are the only people allowed to possess firearms; and

"Whereas a growing number of unlawful firearms are transported, smuggled and found in motor vehicles; and

"Whereas impounding motor vehicles and suspending driver's licences of persons possessing unlawful firearms in motor vehicles would aid the police in their efforts to make our streets safer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 56, the Unlawful Firearms in Vehicles Act, 2008, into law, so that we can reduce the number of crimes involving firearms in our communities."

I support this petition and affix my name to it.

1530

LORD'S PRAYER

Ms. Sylvia Jones: "To the Legislative Assembly:

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

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

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

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

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

I support this petition and I'm pleased to assign my name to it and give it to Jordynne.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, amid global condemnation of China's human rights track record, witnessed by mass protests around the Olympic torch relay in London, Paris and San Francisco, many world leaders are now contemplating boycotting the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics; and

"Whereas, as Canadians and Ontarians, we believe it is our moment to put moral pressure on Chinese leaders in Beijing to improve the rights of Tibetans and to bring about a positive and meaningful respite for those in Tibet who still suffer under oppression by the Chinese government;

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

"To call off Economic Trade and Development Minister Sandra Pupatello's trade mission to China to formally open a new Ontario International Marketing Centre; and

"To condemn the Chinese government for its brutal crackdown on peaceful protests and violation of human rights in Tibet."

I give it to page Michael.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL
FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: I have a petition. The subject is that the average Ontario worker is getting \$4,000 less by

way of employment insurance than Canadians living in other provinces. The petition reads:

"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;"—that's a \$4,000 difference—"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, I am delighted to sign it as well.

LORD'S PRAYER

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a number of petitions here to do with the Lord's Prayer.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I support this and have signed the petition.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

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

"Western Mississauga Ambulatory Surgery Centre.

"Whereas wait times for access to surgical procedures in the western GTA area served by the Mississauga

Halton LHIN are growing despite the vigorous capital project activity at the hospitals within the Mississauga Halton LHIN boundaries; and

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

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

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

I agree with the petitioners, so I’ll also put my signature on the petition.

LORD’S PRAYER

Mr. Frank Klees: I am pleased to present this petition. As you can see, there are literally thousands of names that have been delivered to my constituency office. It reads as follows:

“Petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I have a petition here with hundreds of names. It comes from Pendleton, Curran and Plantagenet—

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Vankleek Hill?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Vankleek Hill is in there too, yes. Thank you.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the concerned citizens of Pendleton and surrounding area, oppose construction of an ethanol plant/biodigester 500 metres from the village;....

“Whereas concerns of water consumption, as an ethanol plant uses approximately 14 million litres per year, the hog operation uses over 20 million litres per year, five irrigation systems, and we already have some elevated nitrate levels, and there will be land erosion due to excessive corn cultivation;....

“Whereas economic development concerns for our three campgrounds, golf course, restaurant and recreation trail;....

“Whereas increased financial concerns, as we will all need a water filtration system;....

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

“That the provincial government introduce legislation requiring that all construction of mega-hog operations, biodigesters and ethanol plants be restricted to a proximity of a minimum of 3.5 kilometres from any village.”

LORD’S PRAYER

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

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

“Whereas the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer has opened the Legislature every day since the 19th century;”—I believe it was 1873—“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’m pleased to sign this and to give it to Marco, our page, to take to the table.

1540

ANTI-SMOKING LEGISLATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition sent to me by a great many people from the city of Peterborough. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

“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 ... 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 ... 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.”

It’s an excellent petition. I’m pleased to sign and support it and ask page Kelsey to carry it for me.

GO TRANSIT

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

“Whereas GO Transit:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition. I’m glad to pass it to Victoria, our page, who will take it to the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for petitions has expired.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: To the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, I understand that there is a hockey game tonight that you’re very involved with in Quebec City, and I wish you

the best of luck and that your team will become victorious in that series.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): That’s not a point of order, but good luck.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INVESTING IN ONTARIO ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 PERMETTANT D’INVESTIR DANS L’ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 7, 2008, on the motion for second reading of Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991 / *Projet de loi 35, Loi autorisant le ministre des Finances à faire des versements aux bénéficiaires admissibles sur les crédits affectés par la Législature et modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la transparence et la responsabilité financières, la Loi sur le ministère du Trésor et de l’Économie et la Loi de 1991 sur le Conseil du Trésor.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I’m pleased to rise and debate on Bill 35, An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature and to amend the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, 2004, the Ministry of Treasury and Economics Act and the Treasury Board Act, 1991. I know my colleague from Oxford will be speaking later on this bill, among some others here, on behalf of the official opposition. As finance critic, I’m pleased to respond in that capacity as well. I know my colleague Mr. O’Toole, from Durham, did an outstanding job with his critic’s response, a one-hour speech just the other night, outlining a number of concerns that the Ontario PC caucus has with Bill 35 and the way it was presented. I’ll echo some of those concerns and add others as well.

You may remember that about a week or so before the budget, Finance Minister Duncan staged a press conference with a number of municipal representatives, where he trumpeted that municipalities would be receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in surplus funds as a result of legislation he was going to table in the near future. Finance Minister Duncan, whether he said this directly or not, certainly gave the impression to the media and to members of the assembly that the surplus would be approximately \$800 million or more, and any funds above \$600 million would be distributed to municipalities on a per capita basis.

In reality, however, I think municipalities had their eyes opened—we in the opposition really didn’t have our eyes opened too much, because it’s kind of par for the course. It was not really surprising, in the grand scheme

of things, that a McGuinty minister would say one thing and then reality would be something else. We've seen that movie before. This was just the latest rerun of that program. What happened, in reality, was that when the finance minister presented his budget, he had a projected surplus of \$600 million, not the \$800-million impression that was given to stakeholders at the time, and projecting in the future, if I remember accurately, no surpluses in subsequent years.

Let me point out too that it didn't have to be that way. In reality, the finance minister had some \$5 billion more in revenue than he projected in the 2007-08 budget the previous spring—\$5 billion in revenue largely squeezed out of the already hard-pressed pocketbooks of working families and seniors in Ontario. If he intended to give municipalities funds of the surplus in excess of \$600 million, he would have had \$4.4 billion to hand out if he so desired. What the finance minister chose to do instead, however, was go on a mad-money end-of-year spending spree and shovel pretty well all those dollars right out the door, many with no strings attached, meaning that he didn't hit the \$800-million surplus that he gave the impression was about to come forward.

The other thing that was surprising to some—I guess not really surprising to us in the opposition—was that the words “municipalities” and “infrastructure” are nowhere to be mentioned in Bill 35. It's kind of surprising to those who may have been taking the finance minister at his word, because he indicated that this bill would send funds to municipalities for infrastructure. However, when you look through the bill, not once does the word “municipality” or the word “infrastructure” appear. The reality is that under this act, if it were to pass, “eligible recipient” means “a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for the purpose of gain or profit.”

It's harder to imagine a more broad definition of “eligible recipient” than the one contained in Bill 35. Granted, because of accounting principles, hospitals couldn't receive these funds. Some may say that if there were excess funds, hospitals may be a priority to many Ontarians. But hospitals now laying off nurses—the Rouge River site—could not be recipients under this definition. Similarly, under this particular definition in Bill 35, the colleges sector is not an eligible recipient of funds in a surplus larger than the one projected. As well, school boards would not be eligible for those funds.

1550

It could be a bit of an issue, I know, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, in St. Catharines, in its proposed closure of the Niagara District Secondary School, by way of example. I know that's caused quite an uproar in that part of Niagara. I think those families would be surprised to learn that, while pretty well everybody else under the sun is eligible for these funds, school boards would not be. Parents whose children go to Blessed Trinity high school, for example, in Grimsby, or St. Joseph in Grimsby, which has been overdue for a rebuild, would not receive funds from this bill.

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: However, my colleague from Halton rightly points out that the world's most famous cricket club—the Ontario cricket club—would be eligible to receive funding under the definition of eligible recipient in Bill 35. Now, you probably wonder why the member for Halton would ask about cricket clubs, of all associations.

I think all members of the assembly and the general public remember very well the infamous slush fund grant of the Dalton McGuinty government just under a year ago. It gripped this assembly when it was found out that this hidden fund had no application form at all. There was no press release. There was nothing on the ministry's website to say how to apply to these funds.

But if you knew somebody in the Liberal Party, if you were an active Liberal member yourself, you seemed to have more access than the general public. In fact, it could be fairly described that it was not what you do, it's who you knew in the Ontario Liberal Party that gained you access to those funds.

The tale of the Ontario cricket club was one of the more infamous slush fund grants. You may remember: They had put in a request for \$150,000, and the then-minister at the time—complicit with the finance minister at the time and, I suspect, other members of cabinet—decided that a \$1-million grant was more appropriate. We all know what happened at that point in time. That was more money than the cricket club could spend, and they socked away, I think, \$500,000 of it or so.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It was \$750,000.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My friend from Halton says “\$750,000” in investment vehicles, because they couldn't spend the money at the time.

Taxpayers across Ontario were absolutely outraged at this abuse of funds, of taxpayer dollars for political purposes. There were other examples, my friends here in the assembly remember, where there were grants given out where no application form was given. There were grants given out where not even a letter of request was given. The money was just sort of handed out, based on who you met with in the minister's office or the Liberal Party.

Sadly, Bill 35 basically seems to want to legalize these types of slush funds by having eligible recipients like the Ontario cricket club qualify for funding when hospitals or school boards or colleges do not.

So, if you were to take the minister at his description, you'd expect that this would be going—in the legislation, it would say “municipalities” and “infrastructure.” It says no such thing, with the broadest definition imaginable of who these funds could go to.

Furthermore, this bill, if passed, under section 3 would give extraordinary regulation-making authority to the Lieutenant Governor in Council—a.k.a. cabinet—to decide the terms of these types of grants. So, instead of saying it would go to municipalities for infrastructure, as the minister indicated, cabinet could basically prescribe eligible recipients and classes of eligible recipients for

the act, prescribe the purposes for which payments may be made under this act, prescribe a method of and basis of calculation for payments etc.

You talk about a Mack-truck loophole. That's an understatement. That's a microcosm of the broad powers that the government wants to grant itself to dole out slush funds, if this act were passed.

We in the Progressive Conservative Party believe that if you have additional funds at the end of the year—if you have a windfall, for example, that wasn't expected—it should go towards paying your debt. Average working families in the province of Ontario would use it to pay off their credit cards, for example, or help to pay down the mortgage. They wouldn't use those funds to go out and rack up even more bills.

But instead of sensibly ensuring that additional unexpected funds would go towards paying down debt and showing some constraint, the government wants to give itself the authority to spend that money after the books have actually closed for the fiscal year. We believe that is a reckless response by the government, particularly in light of the broad range of eligible recipients that they deem could receive funding under Bill 35, the way it was written. I know my colleagues opposite probably believed the minister when he said it was going to municipalities for infrastructure under the act. I know if the amendments move forward to restrict it to municipalities for infrastructure, they will surely vote for those types of amendments moved at committee, and we look forward to their support in that.

Let me also note that the government is moving away from down payments on the debt. This act would give them the ability to define any dollar figure as to when these slush funds would kick in. In reality, this bill would give the minister the ability to pay down maybe a dollar of debt at most and spend the rest, which is very unfortunate because, as you're probably aware—and maybe Liberal members have not been told this by their finance minister—the total debt under the Liberal government has increased by some \$19 billion: \$148.733 billion to \$167.844 billion under the Liberal government, or a 12.8% increase. At a time when tax revenues have gone through the roof, largely because of Dalton McGuinty's higher taxes and more generous transfers from the Conservative government in Ottawa to the province of Ontario, despite that, they go out and spend every dollar and then some. We've seen Ontario's total debt increase by approximately 13% in the first mandate of the McGuinty government.

The reality is, this government doesn't have a revenue problem; they have a spending problem. Program spending under the Dalton McGuinty government has gone up some 48%, which is absolutely phenomenal. We often think of the David Peterson Liberals as the poster children for irresponsible, reckless, runaway spending.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Oh, Tim, Tim.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I know my friend from Northumberland is upset with that because he knows, as I do, that Dalton McGuinty has left the David Peterson Liberals in the dust when it comes to runaway spending.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Good investments in Ontario, Tim.

Mr. Tim Hudak: My colleague seems to be saying that the David Peterson government made good investments in the province of Ontario, but I think Ontarians rendered a different verdict after they saw the runaway spending, the record deficits and the recession that was brought on by the Peterson tax-and-spend policies.

I think you know, Mr. Speaker, that we're seeing similar policies with the McGuinty government of tax and spend, with higher taxes on working families, seniors and businesses; in fact, the highest taxes on business investment in all of Canada and North America. But for every dollar brought in, they spend that and then some, driving up total debt and bringing Ontario to the brink of a Dalton McGuinty recession.

It was a bit ironic: Shortly after the press conference, some municipal politicians caught on to the ruse of the press conference versus what was actually in the legislation. Carolyn Parrish, a Mississauga councillor who's famous for some interesting quotes, said about the Liberals, "They are playing games with us." She spoke about Mayor McCallion, who was "willing to take crumbs. I'm not." So Councillor Parrish certainly had some very strong language about the Liberal government, which is odd considering she was a federal Liberal member for some time and has certainly seen through the charade of what the government is trying to accomplish in legalizing these particular slush funds.

The other point I want to make is that this bill is permissive on a go-forward basis. It's not time-limited. It's not simply fiscal 2007-08, nor is it simply for 2008-09. If this bill were to pass, it would mean, going forward, that it would legalize this ability of the government to create slush funds and spend them after the fiscal year had expired on March 31. The government has not expressed any intent whatsoever as to how they're going to spend future years' funding. While they pinky-swear that it will go to municipalities in 2007-08, despite the fact that the surplus came in lower than the minister seemed to hint it would, who knows what the McGuinty Liberals will come up with for the next fiscal year of 2008-09?

1600

As I described, when you see programs like the infamous cricket club, when you see—I don't know if I can use this word in the Legislature—the Flick Off campaign, for example, which I think many would agree was a tremendous waste of funds in terms of what it failed to accomplish and was rather embarrassing, I know, to many government members, you wonder exactly what the plans are in the McGuinty government, given that track record, to do in future fiscal years.

Federally, the Paul Martin Liberal government did bring forward similar legislation, upon which I think this finance minister—who I think is a strong supporter of Paul Martin, or was at the time—has based his new one. The federal bill, which was C-48 at the time, actually had much more detail in the legislation itself, indicating where those funds were going to be spent. For example, Bill C-48, in Parliament for fiscal years 2005-06 and 2006-07, said it would allocate payments:

“(a) for the environment, including for public transit and for an energy-efficient retrofit program for low-income housing, an amount not exceeding \$900 million;

“(b) for supporting training programs and enhancing access to post-secondary education, to benefit, among others, aboriginal Canadians, an amount not exceeding \$1.5 billion;

“(c) for affordable housing, including housing for aboriginal Canadians, an amount not exceeding \$1.6 billion; and

“(d) for foreign aid, an amount not exceeding \$500 million.”

If my information is correct—that was actually in the bill. So while the federal government made a similar attempt to spend surplus funds instead of putting them towards paying down debt, to spend them when there’s an unexpected surplus, at least they had in the bill a detailed allocation of how much money for what particular projects, as opposed to Bill 35 before the Ontario assembly today, which is wide open and could fund anything from cricket clubs to—what else did I use?—the Flick Off campaign, by way of example of another infamous Liberal spending program.

The other difference in the federal bill, C-48, versus Bill 35 before the assembly today was its time-limited nature. As I indicated, it was for two fiscal years, 2005-06 and 2006-07. The bill before us, Bill 35, asks us to trust the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government for the rest of their mandate with this type of spending. It’s a trust that we are not blindly, willingly about to go down.

The federal bill did finally expire. The other interesting point about this is that it was a coalition at the time. Remember, the NDP and the Liberals got together on this bill, which that was opposed by the federal Conservatives. After the 2006-07 fiscal year it was null and void.

The Auditor General here in the province of Ontario had some very, very strong comments about the Liberals’ end-of-year spending, their penchant to take money that could be applied towards paying down debt, that could be applied to lowering the tax burden for working families and businesses, and instead blowing it out the door in slush funds with no strings attached. I think the Auditor General has done that for three or four consecutive years now. I know that similar concerns will arise with this bill that, if passed, would allow the government in the summertime, when public accounts come out, to contemplate another round of slush fund funding, four months or five months after the fiscal year is closed.

For those reasons and many others, I do recommend to members of the assembly to vote against Bill 35. At the very least, I do hope government members who support the bill will support Conservative amendments on this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for his contribution to the debate. Questions and/or comments?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I think the debate on this bill highlights exactly the difference between the government

and the opposition. The opposition doesn’t believe in investing in the province. They don’t believe in investing in public services, because their track record, while they were in office, demonstrates that. Rather than invest in our public health care system while they were in office, they chose to fire nurses, to call them hula hoops, to continue to denigrate the system, to move our province to a two-tier health care system. When it came to their environmental record, their environmental record was horrible.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: No record.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: No record? Well, a very dismal record. As a parent, I have to say that I stand across the House and I think about this member, who also is a parent, and I think about the legacy that he has left his daughter when that government was in office: firing water inspectors, not protecting the environment, not tackling climate change in any way, turning a blind eye to pollution coming from our coal plants. I’m very proud of the steps our government took with respect to making sure that we took a stand with respect to the issue of climate change, implementing all of the recommendations made by Justice O’Connor in Walkerton and making it certain that you could turn on your tap in this province, have a glass of water and be assured that you, your child and your family would be safe.

Reference to the Flick Off campaign by Environmental Defence: It was a campaign brought forward by a leading environmental group in this country that has advocated for many, many years, that sought to bring the issue in an edgy, progressive fashion to make sure that the generation, perhaps younger than myself and the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, that could make a difference, that could transform the way they live their lives, would have the opportunity to do so. As a government, I’m proud that we engaged that generation of leadership.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member is interesting. She says that this party isn’t interested in investing in Ontario. She calls this bill an investment in Ontario. This bill—understand that this bill is slush fund heaven. Before this bill is finished, everybody in Ontario is going to be promised a little payout from the slush fund. The cricket clubs all across the province are going to get their share. Every group in Ontario is going to get its share.

As the member for Niagara pointed out, there’s no mention—the municipalities have been promised this slush fund, but there is no mention in the bill of municipalities. In fact, the way it’s worded, the government could designate any group they wish, other than those groups that I think the people of Ontario would like to fund such as hospitals, colleges, universities, school boards and those kinds of things. They can’t be funded by this slush fund heaven that the government is working on, but any other non-profit group in the province can be. Before this bill is finished, the government will promise this, not only to the municipalities that they’ve already promised it to—every mayor in Ontario thinks he’s getting some money out of this. In fact, every organ-

ization and pressure group in Ontario will be promised this money, whether they get it or not. It's legalizing slush funds that will flow out the door with very little control over who gets it, how they spend it, where it goes and what benefits it creates for Ontario. I think if you surveyed Ontarians, you would find that the vast majority of Ontarians would see this kind of money going to hospitals, schools or universities as a good thing. It's not happening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further questions and/or comments? Seeing none, the member for Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the member from Erie–Lincoln for the explanations on the bill. I think it's very important. I was also taken by the description from the member from Halton, who kind of capsulized the long title of the bill into a much shorter title, which is "slush fund heaven." Obviously this bill, if you read it thoroughly, does exactly that: It provides the government the ability to do what they did just before the end of the year last year. The auditor said, "No, wait a minute, you shouldn't do that, because that's not accountable and transparent. You shouldn't do that." There's no legislation in place to have this slush fund, as the government wanted to have. So the government, of course, to listen to the auditor, said, "Well, we'll fix that. We won't change what we do with the slush fund, but we will give ourselves the authority to have a slush fund." That's what this bill is all about. I think it would be very well for the members of government and everyone in the province to understand that that's what it is. It's being portrayed as something totally different, but in fact it's not.

1610

If you read the bill, as was mentioned, the word "municipality" does not appear in the bill at all. In fact, it doesn't set the parameters of how much or how little surplus there would have to be in order for it to go to the eligible people. If you read the bill, the government, by regulation, can start from dollar one and put it all in the slush fund, and of course, from past practice we would have to assume that that's exactly what the government is going to do. If it's being designed to be slush fund heaven, I expect the intention of the government is to create that slush fund so they can proceed as they have in the past. We think that's the wrong approach to budgeting.

With that, I want to commend again the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook for doing a great job on this, and he did a great job the other night—I was watching on television—explaining how they were messing up with the budgeting process in the province.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: It's a pleasure to take a couple of minutes and respond in part to the member from Niagara West–Glanbrook, as I get used to all the new riding names—you have to be quick on your feet around here or else you miss a window of opportunity.

This is yet another opportunity that presents itself for municipalities. I think we said earlier that when government has a good year in the province of Ontario and they

exceed the revenue capacity they anticipated, municipalities, as partners, should also have a good year. We certainly know about the infrastructure needs within the province. As early, I guess, as the 2006 budget under Minister Duncan—it was really an infrastructure budget, in which we concentrated our efforts on working with our municipal partners, because we know the needs they have, whether it's roads, water, sewers or other basic infrastructure in municipalities, those being among the most important, I would suggest.

This is an opportunity, when the province has a better year than anticipated, when it has an opportunity first to focus at least some portion of its surplus on debt repayment and finds itself in a position beyond that to be able to share with our municipal partners in a way that assists them, it's a very good thing for us to be doing. This is a piece of legislation that allows us to formalize that, so that when the books are finally complete and the public accounts are done and we know what the reality of the situation is, then we know what level of sharing can occur in all of the ridings throughout the province of Ontario. Not just government ridings, by any means, but each and every riding across the province of Ontario will be in a position to be a benefactor of our collective good times. We look forward to the opportunity of sharing with our municipal partners.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The member for Niagara West–Glanbrook has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I thank my colleagues for their comments. Just to make sure—I know the member for Pickering–Scarborough East understands—if the government was truly interested in supporting municipal infrastructure first, they would have a program and prioritize that before the slush funds, as opposed to making them wait until the end of the year after the books are closed and after the slush funds are all paid out, hoping against hope that they'll receive some funding. If the member does believe the rhetoric coming from the finance minister, then I know he will support any amendments at committee to ensure that these funds will be dedicated to municipal infrastructure only, as opposed to the wide-open slush fund that the bill actually says.

The reality is that provincial investments in municipal infrastructure are important. That's why the previous PC government had a record investment in that type of infrastructure through the SuperBuild program—programs that the Liberals cancelled once they got into office, except, I think, the OSTAR RED program, and have now moved to this type of slush fund funding.

Provincial support for municipal infrastructure should be planned. They should know how much money is coming in each particular year, the qualifications for funding and that any competitive-based applications are fair and transparent. I know that municipalities like Grimsby, Pelham and West Lincoln, in my riding of Niagara West–Glanbrook, are perplexed. They had applied for funding through the MIII program, which was sort of cobbled together halfway through the fiscal

year—it wasn't part of last year's budget, and municipalities had to respond quickly. Those are three municipalities that had good projects, important projects in the communities, that did not receive funding, and I know other colleagues here did not receive funding. Those municipalities really have not been given a good answer, those in West Lincoln and Grimsby particularly, for why some projects were funded and those were not. We support a better way to support municipal infrastructure.

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

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: C'est avec grand plaisir que je participe à ce projet de loi 35. Ce projet de loi était longuement attendu. Quand je dis «longuement attendu», c'est un projet de loi qui va autoriser le ministre des Finances à faire des versements sur les crédits affectés par la Législature.

This has been long overdue. The opposition at the present time do not believe or do not listen to the message that the municipalities are passing on to all the members of the Ontario Legislature. Ever since the downloading, the municipalities haven't been able to afford the upkeep of the roads. Every municipality in Ontario is looking for money to fix their roads.

This is why the McGuinty government and the Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan, this year came out with two projects. How did we arrive at those two projects? Very simple: In the past, and today it is the same until we pass that bill, the province did not know what surplus or deficit they would have before the month of July, until the Auditor General came out with his report, and the standing committee had to meet before it was introduced in the House or brought to the attention of the members of the Legislature.

Well, let me tell you, if this had been in place last year—we ended the year, I believe, with a \$2.2-billion surplus, but we only found that out in July. The law at the present time does not permit the government to transfer that money to the municipality. It has to go towards the debt of the province.

I can't believe that the opposition would not support this bill. If this bill had been in place in 2007, there would have been \$2.2 billion less \$600 million—\$1.6 billion—transferred to the municipalities so they could fix the roof of an arena, for example, fix the roads or fix social housing complexes.

But the McGuinty government is smarter than that. They look at every angle possible. They said, "We know that since the downloading to the municipalities, every single municipality in Ontario is looking for additional funds; otherwise they would have to increase the municipal taxes." They haven't done it because people, in rural municipalities especially, cannot afford an increase of 10%, 12% or 15% of their municipal taxes.

Out of that \$2.2 billion, \$1.6 billion would have been transferred to the municipalities. This is why this year we came up first with the MIII, with \$300 million, and it looked pretty good at the end of February. In March, we said, "The surplus is going to be a little higher." At the

ROMA conference, the Premier announced that we would add \$150 million to the MIII. That brings us up to \$450 million. Then, by the end of March, in the last three weeks of March, they realized that we were going to have a larger surplus after the Auditor General gave his report in July.

1620

We reviewed everything. The Minister of Finance, with his staff—we have to remember that the staff did a good job on this one. We have to thank our people working in the offices for all the good work they did. So they found out that, yes, we could come up with another billion dollars to help municipalities with roads and bridges. I think every one of us has seen what happened in Chatham this week, the big truck that went through the culvert on a highway. I forget the name of the truck; it's a large truck. If that bill had been passed last year, probably this wouldn't have occurred. The municipality could have had money to fix that road or to fix the bridge. At the present time, they didn't have the money.

Just to show you: The previous government had downloaded a lot of services to the municipality; social housing, for example. I have all the figures here with me, because I remember sitting on the other side, and a good friend—I shouldn't call him Ernie; I should call him by his riding—came across to me and said, "Jean-Marc, what are you doing? Are you preparing your hockey budget?" I said, "No; I had to figure out really what you people have done to the province of Ontario, to all the municipalities, in the downloading. I'm looking for the social housing in Prescott and Russell." The downloading gave us a shortfall of \$4.9 million just for social housing in the community of Prescott and Russell. I looked after that for the police services. The downloading occurred in 1998. The shortfall was \$10.3 million. In total, the municipality of Prescott and Russell had a shortfall of \$21 million that was caused by the previous government, and today they are going to tell us, "Don't do that." What are they going to do? I'm happy that they are not in government at the present time, because all they are looking for—everybody has to remember here that when there is a tax reduction, there is a service reduction, and we need more money all the time in health services; we need more money in social housing; we need more money for roads. How would the municipality be able to fix all those needy places?

Social housing: The Premier said we have to take care of low-income families. We came up, not too long ago, with \$100 million just to fix those social housing units. You might say it's not enough. It's better than nothing. In Prescott and Russell we got \$381,000. Let me tell you the benefits of the announcements of a good administrative government, what they have done lately.

Just in my area, my area alone, in the MIII, Casselman got \$450,000; the Champlain municipality, \$324,000; Clarence-Rockland, \$750,000; East Hawkesbury, \$495,000. I have to read a quote here that was given by the mayor of East Hawkesbury. He was talking about me when I made the announcement. They called me "the

banker” when I came. They said, “The McGuinty government becomes a banker”—en français it’s Le Banquier, a program on television—Deal or No Deal. And, really, it made all the news down our way. They are so pleased, every single municipality—I have 10 of them in my riding—about the actions taken by the McGuinty government, you could rest assured that if there was an election tomorrow, don’t even think of putting a candidate against us down there. You would spend the money for nothing, because the money they got, \$60 million, which I announced a week ago last Friday—they couldn’t believe it. The guy says, “You are like Barry Bonds in our town. You hit a home run every time you come,” and every time the McGuinty government is announcing something. He stood up and said, “I’m lucky I’ve got cowboy boots here, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to stand up.” So the people were very pleased.

In North Glengarry, we knew that the roof of the arena—as a matter of fact, they are in the final for the Junior B championship, and they have a good hockey team over there. They got \$595,000 to fix their roof.

In the municipality of Russell, they need a new fire hall. It’s an old building. We gave them \$750,000. The Nation Municipality asked me, “Jean-Marc, do you have any”—they say in French “une rancune”? The mayor over there ran against me in the last election. You know what we gave them? Over \$2 million.

I am there to serve the people. The McGuinty government doesn’t look at the colour; they look at what the needs are for the community. And that’s what we did.

Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry: They had to fix the main road, Highway 34, right in Alexandria. They got \$3.5 million.

This is just to show you that the McGuinty government has done something very, very good for all the people, in the rural sectors, especially, but for the whole province, and they should know that.

When I look at what this former government did for businesses in Ontario, why was it that in the Parry Sound area, where they used to have the Minister of Finance—that was the Minister of Finance’s riding, in Parry Sound. The business value taxes there, for a \$500,000 assessment on a building, were \$4,700. But why, in Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, was it \$16,969? The McGuinty government is going to fix that up. Everybody should be paying the same price for the commercial tax or the business tax.

In Prescott and Russell, for example, we are paying \$15,315 per \$500,000 assessment. Why is that? Why is it in Barrie that they pay \$12,430?

I’m looking at the 2000 provincial figure. It hasn’t changed much. But the McGuinty government says, “We want to be fair with every business in Ontario. We want to create jobs.” This is exactly what the McGuinty government is doing right now. They want to look at the future. We don’t want to wait like they did south of here. We know that they’re talking about a recession over there. We’re not talking about a recession because we’re taking every step possible so that the GDP will continue

to be favourable, and it’s with the McGuinty government that we can do it.

That’s what it is. I want to thank you very much for listening to what I have to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions or comments?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: The member talks about Bill 35 as if it’s going to be a great saviour of Ontario. I say again: This bill is slush fund heaven. It is going to legalize slush funds. It’s going to allow the government to hand out taxpayers’ money without taking due account of where that money is going to go, without ensuring that there is a long-term program associated with that money, without ensuring that the money is going to be well spent in the areas of which taxpayers of Ontario want that money to be spent: on projects that are important to the taxpayers of Ontario, projects like health care issues, universities, colleges, school boards—those areas that make Ontario the great province that it is today.

This money is going to go to the four corners of the province in a willy-nilly manner without due process, and without the careful adjudication of ensuring the money is well spent in the best possible way. I think that’s a shame.

We saw the money in the federal arena that the Liberal government under Paul Martin, when he was Prime Minister—we saw that money flow out the door, hundreds of millions of dollars going to the Adscam process, which was kind of like a slush fund. We saw under the McGuinty government, about a year ago today, as was pointed out by my friend from Niagara during his comments in the House, that that money flowed out without due process—\$1 million going to the Toronto cricket club.

This money is just the legalization of a slush fund, and it creates a slush fund heaven. I think it’s a sad day for Ontario.

1630

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Let me tell you, it was interesting to listen to my colleague from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell in his vigour in the good work he does for the people in his riding. He’s certainly committed.

I made some comments the other night when we were debating our budget, and they’re worth repeating.

But before I do that, it irks me a little bit when I hear the members from the opposition, when they, too, benefited. Their municipalities and their communities benefited from this past budget. I just have no idea how they can go back to their ridings and face those folks, especially if those folks are watching us here tonight. Obviously, there is a disconnect, and that disconnect showed on October 10. They just don’t get it. They’re carrying on down that same path.

In the riding of Northumberland-Quinte West, I have the pleasure to have eight municipalities and one county. I visit those municipalities on a regular basis to meet with the mayors and council, and we’ve been able to remove the word “downloading” from their dictionary. I was there during the downloading days when it became a

common household word. Today, our government gets praise for the uploading.

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: You just need to look at the results from October 10—the biggest margin in my riding ever.

All I'm saying is, I just want to encourage my good friends opposite—

Mr. Peter Kormos: You should be thanking John Tory.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: John who?

So, I just wish they would understand—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for his presentation. I just wished it was somewhat related to Bill 35, because obviously he was talking about things that are not in Bill 35. There is nothing in the bill that says that any funding is going to municipalities. In fact, the word “municipality” is not mentioned in Bill 35, nor any amounts that they might give them. It speaks about some money they may have left over and that the minister can then make up his mind to spend it. What this bill really does is, it changes the fact that they no longer have to have their slush fund completed by the end of the year. In fact, they can move it on into mid-next year in order to spend the slush money and give it to whomever they deem appropriate. It may or it may not be the municipalities.

I expect, if past experience is an example, that in the year when there is no surplus, that will likely be the municipalities' turn, and that year they're going to give what isn't there to municipalities, and then in the years where there is some money, because their budgeting was done wrong and they have more money left over than they had figured on, that they will, as was mentioned earlier by the member from Halton, activate their political slush fund and give it to the areas that the minister deems are the most expedient places to spend government money for political purposes—and I think that's the main thing that's wrong with this bill.

I think if the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell had looked at that part of the bill and saw the concern that would be there from an observant reading, he would be concerned about that and he would tell his municipalities that this is not a good way to fund their needs.

What we need is budgeted money for municipalities to help with infrastructure, not the hope of someday getting—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. We have room for one more question and/or comment.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'll have some more to say about this bill, but I did want to respond to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, because what I found interesting was that during the entire time of his speech, which should have been related to Bill 35, what he waxed eloquent about were the multi-millions of dollars that he, as an MPP, was able to deliver to the several muni-

cipalities within his riding, but not one red cent of the money that he delivered had anything to do with Bill 35.

Interjection: None?

Mr. Frank Klees: Not one red cent. The fact that he stands in this House and boasts about the fact that he's referred to as “the banker” in his riding is something that I would not want to be called, because, you see, what he is admitting is that this government, the McGuinty government, has learned the art of buying the vote. They've learned the art of how to manipulate the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order, order, order. I would just ask the honourable member if he'd want to reconsider his language there. That's pretty strong.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'll certainly reconsider it, Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Would you like to withdraw?

Mr. Frank Klees: Withdraw.

What this government has learned is the art of using the people's own money to convince them that somehow, because they've received their own money back, they owe this government something and they should demonstrate that gratitude by electing them in—

Mr. Peter Kormos: You mean they were buying votes?

Mr. Frank Klees: I would never say that. I would never say that. I would never accuse this government of buying votes. I withdrew that comment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Really, it's interesting to hear the comments from across the chamber. Let me tell you that the numbers that I have given, I could go on and on, because there are quite a few municipalities from his own riding, from the Oxford riding; there were 243 municipalities that got money. I said very clearly that if this bill would have been in place two years ago or right after you people proceeded with the downloading—they couldn't have transferred the money, because you ended up with a \$5.6-billion deficit that we had to take over. But since then, with a good administrative government, we were able to finish with a surplus, and this is the money that we distributed to all the municipalities that—

Interjection.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: No. I have to say that there were 262 municipalities that applied, and 243 got some money. So you can rest assured—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: It wasn't my application.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: What's his riding? The member from Oxford was very clear, and he understands. I sat on the other side before and I know why they're criticizing. They are afraid that the people of Ontario recognize that the administration of the McGuinty government is the best one we've seen for years.

Interjection: I don't think so.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: They know that, but they won't tell anyone.

Mr. Mike Colle: No downloading.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: No downloading. We are uploading what you people have done in the past.

Mr. Mike Colle: We're cleaning up the mess.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: We are cleaning up the mess. This is what I call a good government, and you people must be shy of what we are doing.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: I will attempt to focus my remarks on Bill 35.

I'd like to start by pointing out that the day on which the Minister of Finance announced Bill 35 in this Legislature, we had in the galleries representatives from municipalities. I believe Mayor McCallion was here. The representative from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario was in the gallery. There was great applause for the minister's announcement that when this government achieves an \$800-million surplus, then the first \$600 million would go to pay down debt and anything above that would go to infrastructure funding to municipalities. Mayor McCallion took him at his word. She believed the Minister of Finance.

1640

It must have shocked her just 10 days later when he brought down the budget—which, by the way, we all know was already printed the day he announced Bill 35. He knew full well that the surplus would only be \$600 million, not \$800 million, and he knew at the time that what he was announcing would mean zero to Hazel McCallion and the municipality of Mississauga, that it would mean zero dollars to any other municipality in Ontario. He knew it, and yet he had the audacity to stand up in this place and offer up for municipalities, with great disrespect, I would say, something that he knew would mean nothing to those municipalities the minute he brought down the budget that was already printed and was about to be delivered.

That is the underlying basis on which this government that the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell speaks about with such eloquence and applauds—the credibility of this government is declining in a tailspin with every pronouncement by this government.

Bill 35 states in its title, “Investing in Ontario Act, 2008.” When we ask the Minister of Finance, as a result of Bill 35, how much is being invested in the province of Ontario as we speak, if he were truthful, as I'm sure he would be, his response would be “Zero.” There isn't a member of this House who would stand in their place—I welcome them, in questions and comments, after I speak; I challenge members from the Liberal Party to stand up and tell me how much is being invested in this province today or over the next number of months as a result of Bill 35. They will have to admit that it is zero.

The responsibility of government is to be stewards of the taxpayers' dollars. That's the fiduciary responsibility that we have in this place. The Minister of Finance has a

responsibility to administer the taxes that the people of this province pay and send in to the government in good faith.

Here's something that is being missed. I point out a question that I asked of the Premier in this place on December 6 this past year. I asked the Premier about the \$200 million that were lost as a result of the province of Ontario investing in asset-backed commercial paper. By making that investment in essentially junk investments, the province of Ontario lost some \$200 million of taxpayers' money. The Premier minimized that. The Minister of Finance stood up and said, “Well, it's not a big deal,” that others have lost much more than \$200 million, and, “We'll survive.”

I challenged the Minister of Finance that he should be holding to account those individuals in the Ontario Financing Authority who made the decision to invest Ontario taxpayers' dollars in essentially junk investments, high-risk investments, because surely we don't have to put our money and taxpayers' money into high-risk investments. In fact, they have a responsibility not to do that. Nevertheless, they minimized it.

Now, let's fast-forward to today, keeping in mind that the province of Ontario, through the Ontario Financing Authority, made some risky investments and lost \$200 million last year. If that \$200 million had not been wasted by the Ontario Financing Authority, what would the surplus have been that the Minister of Finance would have reported to the House when he tabled his budget? It would have been \$200 million more. He would have hit the benchmark of \$800 million, and the result would have been at least another \$200 million to municipalities across the province.

So the fact that there was mismanagement on the part of this government—a lack of responsibility on the part of the Minister of Finance to hold people accountable for how they do the business of government. Now we have his own Bill 35 of non-effect. There was \$200 million lost by the Ontario Financing Authority. He walked into this place with a \$600-million surplus, and, by the way, Hazel McCallion, you get zero. Now, what did Hazel McCallion say in the media? She said that this is wonderful and what they will now be able to do is go back to their own books at the city of Mississauga and they'll be able to reassess as to whether or not they have to charge the 5% of additional taxes to the taxpayers of Mississauga. She left here, no doubt reporting back to her own council the great news that perhaps they won't have to add that surcharge to their tax rolls because of the McGuinty government's gift to them that afternoon. The gift is zero. The gift was short-lived.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What about infrastructure? You really have a great sense of humour, Frank.

Mr. Frank Klees: I'm looking at the Minister of Education, who must be terribly embarrassed by what we're debating here today. She knows full well, if she were the Minister of Finance, she would never, ever have attempted to pull the wool over taxpayers' eyes the way the Minister of Finance did. So rather than bringing into this

House a bill that we're now debating—we're taking important legislative time—that means nothing, has no benefit to the taxpayers of Ontario—but I'll tell you who it will benefit down the road.

Interjection: Friends of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Frank Klees: It will benefit people like the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, who will in fact be able to dig even further into the slush fund that's being created by Bill 35 and bring more of the spoils back to his riding.

Because of what Bill 35 states very clearly—that it's up to the minister to make the decision as to where those funds go—there's no obligation in this legislation to distribute the funds that will be distributed on the basis of any fair formula that makes no difference between a Liberal-held riding and an opposition-held riding. It will be strictly on the basis of, "Where do we need to shift the funds to gain the biggest traction for our Liberal members?"

That's the very kind of politics that the people of Ontario reject. I believe that by the time we get to the next provincial election, they will have had their fill with the kind of politics that is being played with their own tax dollars. This will haunt Mr. McGuinty. This will haunt this Minister of Finance. The Minister of Municipal Affairs will rue the day when he supported this legislation. The Minister of Transportation will regret the day that they allowed this legislation to come forward.

1650

Do you know what it's done? It actually has taken the veil away from the intention of this government to use taxpayers' dollars in a way they were never intended to be used. No one minds paying taxes as long as we can be assured that those funds are going to be used fairly, they're going to be used prudently and they will be put into areas of priority as is determined in an objective and unbiased way. But what they don't want to see is a repeat of the kind of slush-fund politics that this government played that was so very obvious as we came to the last fiscal year-end.

They haven't learned. There's a minister of this House who was forced to resign because of a lack of transparency in how taxpayers' dollars were being transferred throughout the province. This government has not learned. In fact, what they're doing now is giving the Minister of Finance licence to do exactly the same thing, only they're legitimizing it by legislation.

It's a sad day for the province of Ontario. This is not the way you build credibility with taxpayers. It's not the way that you convince taxpayers that you are prudent in terms of how you manage the affairs of this province.

Bill 35 will be passed. The official opposition will vote against it for the very reason that I have just stated, because all it does is legitimize the illegitimate use of taxpayers' dollars. Instead of being transparent and instead of investing in Ontario, what the title should say is "investing in Liberal ridings" or "advancing the chances of Liberal candidates in certain ridings in the province of Ontario." The longer title would be "giving

the Minister of Finance the authority to direct funds, taxpayers' dollars, into ridings where we believe it can do the best political good." Now that's the long title of this legislation if, in fact, the government wanted to be transparent about what it intends to do.

What this government should be doing is putting forward a comprehensive, long-term plan for infrastructure in this province. We have yet to see that. We have one-time announcements. We're going to see much more of these one-time announcements.

For example, I have here five letters. Yes, they went to municipality of Newmarket, the municipality of Aurora and the region of York announcing, one-time funding, one-time funding, one-time funding. What they're asking the municipality to do is, "By the way, we want you to pass a bylaw, a resolution, that you accept these funds." So these were not funds that were transferred from the province of Ontario to municipalities because of identified needs for infrastructure projects that had been developed over time, that the municipality can then appropriately, in a reasonable and planned way, apply to their infrastructure projects. No, they were one-time announcements, last-minute, year-end announcements that the government then can use in its dog-and-pony-show type of press conferences to make the big splash and to be seen to be delivering some benefit.

While municipal politicians will never turn down any grant that is transferred from any level of government, here is what they're telling us behind the scenes: They're telling it us they see through this government's approach. They resent being used by this government.

Hon. John Wilkinson: Name names.

Mr. Frank Klees: The member across the way says, "Name names." Let me do that. The region of York: I don't have to go far behind the scenes. This is a newspaper article that talks about what York region thinks about the approach of this government.

Hon. John Wilkinson: They're not appreciative?

Mr. Frank Klees: Well, you're going to find out right now what is being said by Mr. Fisch, the regional chair. He's referring to the Bradford bypass, which is an infrastructure plan that had been identified as a necessity and a priority by the provincial government a number of years ago and has been undergoing environmental assessments; now not even on the infrastructure plans of this government, nowhere to be seen as a priority or a project—lots of letters announcing one-time funding, but nothing about these important plans. Mr. Fisch says as follows: "Long delays in planning for the construction of the bypass have led to increased traffic congestion on arterial roads and a constant overburdening of concessions, side roads and other rural routes that were never designed to handle high volumes of traffic they now must accommodate on a daily basis.

"The route is more of a necessity now than ever and one that can't afford to remain in legislative limbo much longer." He goes on to talk about the fact that what they need is the provincial government to identify these projects, to work with the local levels of government, the

municipal level of government, and to work on a long-term plan so the municipalities can put in place, implement and get on with constructing these infrastructure projects, not just be told to show up for another press conference where yet another amount of money is dribbled out, and the municipalities are basically left with but a few weeks to determine how they are going to be able to use these funds. The major projects are left untouched.

It's irresponsible on the part of this government to treat municipalities this way. When the Minister of Finance made his announcement of Bill 35, he said it was intended to reach out to municipalities as true partners. Well, if that's the way this government is going to treat partners, I can tell you that it's not a very good relationship. More and more, those partners will expect respect, and they're not being given that by this government.

As my colleague has said, the end result of this legislation will be to create for the McGuinty government a slush-fund heaven, and while it may have some very strong appeal at the outset, the collateral damage will be significant.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and/or comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I look forward to speaking at length on this bill, but I'll just quote a couple of lines from the Toronto Star article. It says:

"Duncan's Bill Is Flawed

"A close examination of its contents shows no mention of municipalities or infrastructure. Nor does it set out the threshold or formula for distributing the surplus money."

I challenge the Minister of Education across the way—she's a very able woman—to try to find municipalities or infrastructure in this bill and to highlight them and send them over. But even an able woman like the Minister of Education cannot perform magic.

1700

I look forward to speaking about what this bill is really about. It's been, of course, elucidated well by the member from Newmarket–Aurora: This bill is about slush funds. This is about getting rid of extra money to your friends or somebody. The definition, by the way, in the bill is "'eligible recipient' means a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for the purpose of gain or profit." I look forward to elucidating all of the recipients of last year's slush fund, and we look forward to seeing who gets money this year.

Again, I'm looking forward to my time.

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I also want to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for what, I would say, is a very interesting speech. But I also want to ask him two things. I think he forgot two key things. The first thing is, you talked about transparency. Well, why is it that the opposition voted against the Fiscal Accountability and Transparency Act? That's something that I

think we all voted for, except for you guys. I don't know why. Second of all, you're an opposition member who also left this government with a \$5.6-billion deficit—\$5.6 billion.

Let me tell you what the investments are going to be for my community. First, I want to tell you about the \$12 million that has been invested by this government in Hamilton for social services. Second, let me tell you about the \$33 million that's coming to Hamilton for transportation, and also the \$16.5 million that has come to Hamilton for the McMaster-Mohawk bachelor of technology program. Those are just some of the things that are coming to Hamilton.

I appreciate your comments.

Mr. Jeff Leal: It's always a pleasure in this House when I get the opportunity to listen to the member from Newmarket–Aurora, a very experienced member who has been here a long time, but he always misses a few key facts.

I remember when we were given the privilege of forming the government in October 2003, and then we found the \$5.6-billion deficit on our hands. It's an interesting backdrop there, and I just wanted to highlight to you that backdrop. They had an economy that was producing a lot of new jobs. They had a 60-cent dollar. But what they did during that period of time, through reckless tax cuts, reduced their fiscal ability to respond to a number of crises that they faced. SARS—and I hear a number of their members say, "That's why we got the \$5.6-billion deficit." But they destroyed their fiscal structure, so they couldn't respond to emergencies as they came up.

The budget that we've just presented is a very prudent one. It makes strategic investments and has us in a balanced position, the third balanced budget in a row that we all take great pride in. We've also made some key end-of-the-year investments to help our municipalities. We're not the government that had the famous Who Does What committee; in fact, while I was at municipal council, we used to refer to that as the who-got-done-in committee, because municipalities in Ontario got done in. They were advised against going down that street by David Crombie, who did a marvellous study. I suggest the opposition should re-read that study, the kinds of things that should be handled by municipalities in order to finance things.

I have a quote here from Cam Jackson. What did the mayor of Burlington say? He said, "We have a priority list and this will allow us to get to some projects. It will allow us to catch up and harmonize regional city projects. This will be less inconvenient for residents" and save our taxpayers money. Where was Cam Jackson? A few years ago, he was across on the benches.

What did the person from the town of Minto say? It's time that we had John Wilkinson Day in Minto on April 25 because he delivered us \$400,000 to meet our infrastructure needs—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further questions and/or comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the member from Oak Ridges—I'm not sure that's the total title, but

anyway—my colleague, who made a recitation on this Bill 35. I thought he did a very good job of sticking to the bill and the impacts of the bill, or the lack thereof, because obviously, the impacts, as they were promoted when the bill was introduced, are far from the impacts that would be felt by municipalities in the future as this bill is in place.

As was mentioned, the intention the minister put forward was to find a way to give stable funding, shall we say, or predictable funding to municipalities. Obviously the bill does nothing of the kind. In fact, it doesn't speak to municipalities and it doesn't speak to stable funding. All it says is, "Every time I make a mistake in my budget and have a large surplus, we will put it in a fund, and I will decide where we are going to spend it. We might consider municipalities because they do fit the wide definition of who might be eligible for funding through this bill."

I think it's very important that the member opposite in his comments mentioned that Mayor Jackson from Burlington said he could do so much, but obviously he left out the part, "with so little," because the bill is going to give Mr. Jackson nothing—nothing, in the end, to do the things he said he could do. What the mayor was talking about was what the minister was purporting to give him. As this member pointed out, that was not forthcoming because at the time the bill was introduced, the Minister of Finance already knew what the surplus was going to be. He knew that would not be enough to trigger municipalities getting money. They were getting nothing, and that is what this bill will give them when it's finished.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. The member for Newmarket–Aurora has up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House who responded to my comments.

I am ever amazed at how easily we sidestep the issues here in this House. We are debating Bill 35. It does not take very long for Liberal members to slip into other discussions. Even the member for Hamilton Mountain, who is relatively new to this place, has learned very quickly to talk about all of the benefits that are coming to her riding, and that is good. But the point is that we're debating Bill 35 here.

Bill 35 is nothing short, as has been proven in the course of this debate, of enabling legislation that gives this government the ability to legitimately deal illegitimately with taxpayers' dollars, to essentially transfer, in slush-fund format, taxpayers' dollars into ridings and to places and entities and whatever the minister may desire. There is nothing further from transparency than what is contained here in this legislation. I cannot see how members of this government can in good conscience stand in their place and even pretend to support this kind of dealing with taxpayers' dollars, at a time when what we need is credibility in government. There is none in this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further debate? The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a privilege to speak on behalf of the people of Ontario to the slush-fund bill, because that's what it is. I'm going to pick up where the member for Newmarket–Aurora left off.

I want to give kudos, where kudos are due, to some of the comments, particularly to the new member for Hamilton Mountain, who is doing a very good job defending the indefensible. I want to speak about partisanship for a minute, as it relates to the slush-fund bill. For those who are watching at home, all they need to do is to go to their computers, look up Bill 35, read what's in it—it's a very brief bill—and you will very quickly see that what we've been pointing to is absolutely true. There is no mention of municipalities, there is no mention of infrastructure; I read what the beneficiary is described as—basically a non-profit organization.

I'm going to take great pleasure in walking down memory lane and talking about some of the non-profit organizations, the recipients of the last slush fund. Interestingly enough—I stand here in a chupa, in Tibetan dress—none of them were Tibetan. We had 300 Tibetans out on the front lawn of Queen's Park. I doubt very much whether the beneficiaries of this year's slush fund will be Tibetans either. You pretty well have to be a Liberal or have Liberal connections to be a beneficiary. That was made very clear, and I will prove that in a minute.

1710

Again, we've had some rare examples in this House of bravery and courage, where people do vote against the party line, actually vote for what's ethical, move toward what is right, stand up for themselves, aren't whipped, so to speak. I would certainly encourage every backbencher who really takes the time to read Bill 35, who sees what it's about—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Order. The honourable member for Peterborough.

Mr. Jeff Leal: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to ask—the words "slush" and "slush fund" have been used by the member for Parkdale–High Park. Standing order 23(h) in section VI talks about, "Makes allegations against another member." I'm not sure that that is parliamentary. I would just like to hear your ruling on that, sir, in terms of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. I've been present in the House when previous Speakers have ruled that the terminology is parliamentary enough.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and that's what I'm talking about—a rare non-partisan moment when people make the right call, do the right thing, actually read the bill that they're debating, don't take it as an opportunity to talk about something else, like Tibetans, and actually focus on Bill 35. We're talking about Bill 35, the slush fund bill, and I thank you for allowing me to say that, to share that with those who are watching at home.

The slush fund bill: Where will the money go? Well, unfortunately, it will probably not go to the municipalities. We've already had an indication that there's not going to be a surplus above the magic \$600-million mark

anyway. But, just if there is—of course there's nothing in the bill that says it should go for infrastructure and there's nothing in the bill that says it should go to municipalities—let's look at where the money went last year.

First of all, an Iranian-Canadian Community Centre with multiple Liberal ties got a \$200,000 grant. One director is former policy adviser to Health Minister George Smitherman, who has given patronage appointments to four centre directors. A former director was a Liberal candidate for Richmond Hill in the October 10 provincial election. Another former director is president of the Liberal riding association in Richmond Hill. A current director is a long-time acquaintance of Finance Minister Greg Sorbara and is also chairman of the Liberal re-election effort.

Another of the beneficiaries last year: Chinese Professionals Association of Canada—\$250,000. Remember, none of those grantees under that \$32-million-some-odd slush fund money that went out the door last year filled out an application form. There was no due process of any sort. Anyway, onward: the Chinese Professionals Association—a \$250,000 grant; a former director, Michael Huang, is a policy adviser to the then immigration minister. The Bengali Cultural Society—a \$250,000 grant; a director is a member of the Ontario Liberal Party. Ontario Khalsa Darbar—a \$250,000 grant; several directors are Liberal donors. Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services of Peel—\$23,000. They held back on that one. The executive director is the common-law partner of Mississauga West MPP Bob Delaney.

I didn't make this stuff up. I'm reading from the Star. This is pretty egregious, and I think that those who watch from home will remember back to those incredible announcements, the best of which, of course, was the \$1 million to the cricket club, that had not, again, filled out an application form, had never done anything so prosaic as that. In fact, it asked for \$150,000 in some way, shape or form—we never saw the paperwork, of course—but all of a sudden received a \$1-million cheque in the mail. I mean, wow, it pays to play cricket, I guess.

The very sad reality, though, is not so much who got the money but who didn't get the money, of all the deserving groups out there. They didn't even know there was money to be had, didn't know that they didn't have to fill out an application form, that all they had to do is phone up their friends in the Liberal Party, and hey, a \$1-million cheque is in the mail. So kudos to the cricket club. The Star article goes on to say what they did with the money, which they never asked for. They spent about \$360,000 of the grant and put \$500,000 into a five-year guaranteed investment certificate at a bank.

The Iranian-Canadian Community Centre has put its \$200,000 grant in the bank until it can raise money to build a community centre.

If I were a taxpayer watching this, I'd think, "Why didn't they put it in my bank? It's my money." Why didn't they put it in the bank of all of those taxpayers in Ontario who would like to see some of that money—

those hard-working small businesses, those people who are getting hit right now, those people who need housing, all 170,000 households of them? They wouldn't mind instantly being granted some money so that perhaps they could, hey, pay their rent. Or what about those one in eight children who live in poverty? A little bit of that trickle-down effect might have helped them as well.

I suppose the problem is that they didn't understand how things work around here, don't you think? My friend from Oxford nods. People who are watching don't get that by passing Bill 35—and again, look it up on your computers, write to your MPPs. Once you've read it and you've seen what's not in it and what is in it, express your outrage. Express your outrage that at the end of the year this gives carte blanche to the government to give money to whomever it pleases as long as they're non-profit—no application forms again, I gather; this will be the new way of doing things with year-end extra funds—and then check back.

Sometimes it's difficult to remember history, but really this was not so long ago. What came out of that was the resignation of the minister who administered the end-of-year slush fund. This resulted in a cabinet minister resigning over \$32 million-odd last year.

There were some pretty sharp words too from the Auditor General. Let's see, what does he say? "But ... Auditor General Jim McCarter had some questions...."

"We asked the minister"—at that time; he's now resigned—"point blank how did it get to a million dollars?" the straight-talking accountant recalled, noting the group had been unable to spend all the money.

"The minister's response..."—I guess this is what taxpayers should hear too—"I had to make a decision fairly quickly but in my opinion \$150,000 wasn't enough. Cricket is a sport that brings together a number of, basically, ethnic peoples and I felt it was the right decision to make.""

There you go. So now we know how to get \$1 million from this government: You ask for \$150,000, you have members of the Liberal Party on your side working for your organization, and, lo and behold—better odds than the lottery, way better odds than the lottery—you might receive \$1 million in the mail. Again, remember no application form necessary, no due process required; simply a phone call to the right person will do—the member for Oxford nods—at the right time, at the right time of year.

Bill 35 makes it so. This puts into place that missing piece that they didn't have last year. Last year they just doled out the money; this year they decided to bring in a bill to say, "We can dole out the money." This is what this bill accomplishes.

I particularly feel badly for the municipalities across this province—again, other members have alluded to this—that didn't get a copy of the bill in advance, I'm sure, but heard the spin all right and trusted—not a good thing to do sometimes in politics, I'll admit—that their needs would be looked after. After all, that was the spin, that was the announcement that was made, and then they

get the paltry few pages that Bill 35 represents and they see, lo and behold, no mention of municipalities whatsoever.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Oops.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Oops; exactly. Remember, these are municipalities that come begging. I talked in this House about the Oliver Twist budget, and certainly municipalities are in that state, begging, "Please, sir, just a little more, sir." They're begging for crumbs from the master's table. No doubt they need it.

It's interesting, looking back, that \$1 million went to a cricket club. Tonight, I'm going to a rally at the Toronto District School Board because we don't have enough money to keep pools open for our children, but we did have \$1 million last year for a cricket club and maybe this year—who knows? It won't go to children's pools or the schools in Toronto, though. That much we can be pretty well assured of. There's not enough money for them, but there's still enough money to be invested—interest-bearing investments from the beneficiaries of last year's slush fund. They've got those funds invested; they're making money on them.

1720

I never heard the finale of that story; I don't think anybody watching did, either. There was some talk about clawing back those funds, then nothing, right? The member from Oxford nods—nothing. Perhaps if we clawed back those funds, I could go to this rally tonight and report, "Do you know what? That extra half a million dollars the cricket club didn't need might keep your pool open for another few months," or, "The extra \$250,000 that's just sitting in the bank might keep your pool open." Those would be the ethical and logical steps to take.

It's too bad the Minister of Education is leaving, because I think the pool issue is a particularly telling one.

It would cost so little to keep the pools in Toronto open, and it could have been accomplished last year, quite frankly, with the slush funds. That was enough to keep all the pools in Toronto open. Isn't that wild? The money they sent out through the door would have kept our children in pools from here on in. If you're listening there—and we're receiving lots of e-mails about the pools—note that, and then ask yourself, "I wonder what's going to be happening once this bill has passed"—because it will be; there's no doubt about that, because they're a majority and they can do what they want despite our protestations—"I wonder what will happen to this year's slush fund."

Will it go to the pools, we ask. Will it go to education? Will it go to poverty reduction? Will it go to housing? Will it go to breaks for small business? Will it go to infrastructure or municipalities?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I doubt it.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My friend from Oxford says he doubts it. I somehow doubt it, too, since they're not mentioned by name. I suppose it depends, though. When you look at who got the money last year, it really does depend on political orientation, doesn't it? It's sad when this place is so partisan that one has to say that out loud.

But it really does depend, doesn't it? It absolutely depends on what distance you have from the Premier's office. If you're very close—good luck; if you're very far—not so much.

So, I suggest to those of you who want to keep your pools open that maybe you should offer to become riding presidents in the Liberal Party, and then maybe we'll get some action. What do you think, member from Oxford?

It's fun to stand here, but the downside is that for the real world—the people who are actually watching this debate—out there it's not so much fun. It's not so much fun for the people who could have used that \$32-odd million last year. They would like to see something we haven't seen in the House this session: substantive legislation that would actually address the needs of those who need it most. Wow. Imagine that. That would be something—instead of what passes for legislation, really substantive legislation.

It's wonderful to go to jurisdictions where this happens around the world—where people actually build housing, where they have a line in the budget for housing, where people actually raise things like ODSP rates, where people actually don't claw back federal money called the national child supplement destined for the poorest children in the province, where people actually invest the money they get from the federal government for housing instead of letting it lapse and letting it be rescinded.

It's nice to go to jurisdictions where there's proactivity around things like manufacturing job loss. That would be nice. It would be nice if there were extra money, and we all know how tight money is. It would be nice if there were extra money, if it went to those most in need instead of those most in greed, right? Those most in need, not those most in greed, but unlikely to happen under the McGuinty Liberals.

Based on history—is it Dr. Phil's line?—if you want to know what people are going to do in the future, you look at what they did in the past. What has this government done in the last five years and what are they going to do in the next three? We pretty well get the gist of it, and this Bill 35 solidifies that. It solidifies it; it makes it so. It makes it legitimate to have a year-end slush fund. Well, that's progress, I guess.

One would only ask—

Interjection.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Truly.

One would only ask, this time at least, when the slush fund comes due, that we have what the Auditor General called for, some transparency, so that at least everyone who is a non-profit entity, so defined by the bill, can apply; so that you don't have to join the Liberal Party this time—so you can actually be a member of another political persuasion and get some of the money; so that you see how to apply and where to apply and whom to apply to for the funds. That would be a step forward. That would be what we in the New Democratic Party would call progress.

I would like to put in a couple of early bids for that extra money:

(1) Pools; let's keep the pools open in Toronto. That's better than \$1 million for a cricket club.

(2) If you're going to give it out to groups, racialized minority groups, Tibetans could really use a hand, you know, now that the trade minister seems to be destined to go on this junket to China at the worst possible time and, by going, really add her voice to the voice of one of the most tyrannical governments anywhere and be used as a kind of stooge, might we say, for the Communist Chinese government in their propaganda efforts. Just to alleviate the suffering of the Tibetan people, who are suffering because they haven't heard from relatives and they don't know what's happening back in Tibet, maybe some of the money could go to them.

Of course, there are so many voices out there who could use that money: children, the one in eight who live in poverty; 170,000 households who wait for housing; small businesses that are hurting and will hurt more if there's a downturn, which we predict. There are many people who could use this money. All we ask is a fair shot at it; and

(3) Finally, a fair shot, which is not in this bill, for exactly what the bill purports to do: municipalities and infrastructure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Questions and/or comments?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: I was listening very closely to what the member for Parkdale–High Park brought to the House here. Let me tell you, when we say that we have to speak on Bill 35, I don't know what she really meant about the pools or any other activities that go on in a community. I want to make sure we get serious about the debate tonight.

People are watching their televisions, and I think they don't know what the debate is at the present time. If I was to tell your whip that at the present time you are against this bill, I believe that he, the member from Timmins–James Bay, would be very disappointed, because from this, what you call a slush fund, he has received over \$20 million. He has received over \$20 million for his riding alone.

When I listened to the member for Newmarket–Aurora, his riding has received over \$3.3 million. If you people don't want it, we will tell your constituents that you don't want that money. I've never forgotten the day the minister came down, from the opposition, and he thought the province of Ontario stopped at Ottawa. I said, "You still have to travel 110 kilometres before you get to the Quebec border." This was when the former government had completely forgotten Prescott and Russell, and the McGuinty government recognized the needs of the area.

1730

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to commend the member from Parkdale–High Park for the presentation on Bill 35. In fact, I would point out to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell that if one were to make a measurement of which one of the two—obviously the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell spoke earlier.

If he were to measure the two presentations as to the score on who talked to Bill 35 the most, it would be: Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, zero; Parkdale–High Park, 100%, because it was all related to the money that the minister was talking about, what's supposed to be money left over, money that he took from the taxpayers when he shouldn't have and how he was going to spend it.

In the past, he has spent it in slush funds, as we found out last year. This bill makes it so that from now on he can spend it the following year, six months later than the year it was collected in, and still do it in exactly the same way.

There were also some comments made from across the aisle about the name of the bill. In fact, there was some question as to whether the bill was actually the slush fund bill. I believe it is. It's just that the Minister of Finance, who introduced the bill, has a way of describing a slush fund slightly differently than the plain way to do it. The minister described it as An Act to authorize the Minister of Finance to make payments to eligible recipients out of money appropriated by the Legislature. I think that's really how he says that the Minister of Finance should decide on his own, along with, I'm sure, his colleagues in the Liberal government, how the money that was taken from the taxpayers should be spent to the best advantage of the people who are doing the expending.

So I very much commend the presentation because I think we hit the nail right on the head.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's a pleasure to rise. Bill 35 is a framework; it's permissive legislation that allows some predictability around the way that surpluses will be managed. I think it's highly surprising that the member from Parkdale–High Park would not be able to grasp that. I think when we look at the amount of money we have invested in publicly funded education over the last four years—the member talks about looking at our record: \$4 billion in publicly funded education, with \$360 million alone every year to the Toronto District School Board and, of that, \$5.4 million is directed at sports programming. So in fact the whole tangent that the member went on about the pools and the money that the Toronto District School Board has really bears no relationship to the reality of the situation.

But the most disturbing thing about what the member opposite did was the tone; the sanctimonious cynicism that was absolutely underlying everything she said made it seem as though she really doesn't take what goes on in this House seriously. It's like she's operating in a different plane, on a different reality, because what we do here is that we put legislation before this House that makes government run well. That is our object. That is why Bill 35 is before us: so that municipalities will have an understanding of how surpluses are going to be dealt with. That is why we've invested more than \$4 billion in publicly funded education, including \$360 million a year more for the Toronto District School Board. That's the kind of government we are, and the people who are on the front lines of education and in our municipalities know and respect that.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: It's always amazing to me how much I agree with the NDP. Although we're on different ends of the political spectrum, I certainly respect the member's point of view. It's also interesting that, as the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell pointed out, there's a bunch of money going up there. This guy had better get outside, or we'll pull it back. That's called "greasing the wheels." The Minister of Education talks about greasing the wheels and how things can get going. That's exactly what you talked about.

There are some people in the province who aren't influenced by money that flows. They're influenced by what is right and what is wrong. It's called integrity. It's something that is totally lacking in this government today. Fiduciary responsibility is something that the member from Newmarket–Aurora talked about, and fiduciary responsibility is something that you also have no concept of because it goes hand in hand with integrity. When you are handling someone else's money, you have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that you do what is right with that money. Creating a slush-fund heaven isn't living up to the fiduciary responsibility of a government, and that will come back to haunt you.

The integrity of this government is so lacking that the future of this government is in serious jeopardy because of the road that you are going down and the lack of fiduciary responsibility that you're showing for the hard-earned taxpayers' dollars of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The honourable member from Parkdale–High Park has up to two minutes to respond.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's always sad, after an Equal Voice event, when women in this Legislature attack other women here in that particularly partisan way.

Let us talk about what she said, not who she is. She said—the Minister of Education, I'm referring to—that this bill allows flexibility, to quote her. Yes, that's what slush funds do; they allow flexibility. What she didn't say was—the challenge that I gave the Minister of Education was to point out where in this bill infrastructure or municipalities are mentioned. That, she didn't say anything about, and she didn't say anything about last year's \$32-million slush fund. She didn't say anything about that.

It's interesting in this House what's not said, as well as what is said. I'm sure that the people tonight at the rally at the Toronto District School Board will be assuaged by her words that, despite the fact that \$32 million went out the door last year and none of it to school pools, they can rest assured that this government will save the school pools this year and will spend surplus funds on the school pools, which fit very handily into the definition of "recipient" in Bill 35.

Again, those who are listening at home: Read the bill; read the bill and see what's in there and what's not in there for yourself. And then, if you are a non-profit entity, start writing out an application form. Oh, wait; they didn't have those last year, did they? But you never know; you live in hope. You live in hope.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you for your contribution to the debate.

Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 35. As I start, I just want to talk about the process of the introduction of the bill and—shall we say?—the inaccuracies of the statements made by the minister to leave an impression with people who would then praise the bill and the contents of the bill when, in the end, that's not what the bill was.

I just want to start off with a couple of quotes from the announcement that the minister made when he spoke about what he was going to do. When he introduced the bill, he said, "If the province were to achieve a surplus in excess of \$800 million, the first \$600 million would be used to reduce the province's accumulated financial deficit, and the remaining amount would be provided to municipalities for capital purposes. This means that municipalities could receive a minimum of \$200 million in additional capital funding..." But when I look at the bill, the word "municipality" is not mentioned; there is no mention of \$800 million, \$600 million, \$200 million or "capital funding." There's no mention of any of that in the bill.

1740

It goes on: "The proposed bill, which would be called"—and this is before he introduced the bill—"the Investing in Ontario Act, would direct a portion of provincial surpluses to municipalities for infrastructure needs, such as improving roads and bridges, expanding transit and upgrading social housing." Again, that's what he said the bill would be called and that's the only part of that statement that is true, because the rest is not in the bill.

It's pointed out that this is a piece of permissive legislation. Well, it's very permissive, to the point that it allows the minister to do—

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Permissive with taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Well, it's permissive—yes, exactly—with how we spend the taxpayers' dollars, and it really goes to one person, who gets to make that decision.

In his announcement, he suggested that it was going to go to deal with the problems that exist with municipalities. I just want to speak a little bit about that, because I think municipalities for a number of years have been very actively pursuing the idea that we need more stable, predictable funding for municipalities to help pay for their infrastructure so they can plan ahead. Up to now, we've had nothing in place other than the infrastructure program, which is a lottery program. So everybody keeps applying and spending a lot of money to apply, and then when the time comes, some people get money and some people don't. In fact, in my municipalities I have more people who keep calling my office and saying, "What are the criteria for this program? This was the third time we applied for this, and again we missed it and we didn't get any funding." Other municipalities, for whatever reason,

sent in a similar type of application and they got it the first time. There seem to be no criteria to deal with it; it just seems to be a lottery system as to where the ministers decide this money should go.

But the municipalities wanted something that would be stable and predictable funding so they could plan for the future. They were told that this bill would do that, and in fact it does nothing of the kind. This is really a bill to talk about how we are going to legalize—or institutionalize, I guess, is the right word—the process of slush funding. The government last year did it, and I expect it's been done before, but last year it became an issue. It was found that a lot of money went out with no application, and it went to—what should we say?—mysterious places that people couldn't understand, as was said by a lot of other members who spoke about the bill. The fact was mentioned that the cricket club of Ontario got \$1 million when they only asked for \$150,000.

The auditor said that that was not accountable and that was not transparent, so they obviously shouldn't be doing it—and, incidentally, that they shouldn't do that because of the Fiscal Accountability and Transparency Act. Incidentally, this bill—another wrinkle to it, I suppose—does change that act too, so they can do things that they weren't allowed to do before. The auditor said that they shouldn't do that anymore, so the government introduced this bill so they could carry on and do it. It legalizes what the auditor said was an inappropriate process.

I just want to point out that there's been some discussion about what the bill actually does. I think the people who are listening and—I was going to say “the people in the Legislature who are listening,” but I'm not sure that there are any more than you and I. But I just want to point out that the bill, when it comes out—it's not really part of the bill. It comes in the schedule prior to the title of the bill. It's called an explanatory note. I'll just read it to you, because I think it's rather important. This explains what the intent of the bill is. Obviously, Speaker, you will be aware that the role of the Queen's official opposition is to point out where the government meets their commitments and where they don't, based on the legislation; whether the shortcomings in the bill are being explained by the government, and you will know they don't always do that. They don't always explain where the bill doesn't meet their goal, and I think that's the role of the loyal opposition.

I just want to point out what the explanation of the bill is:

“The Investing in Ontario Act, 2008 authorizes the Minister of Finance to make payments out of money appropriated by the Legislature to certain persons and entities that do not carry on their activities for the purpose of gain or profit.

“The total payments made under the new act in each fiscal year shall not exceed the lesser of,

“(a) the amount appropriated by the Legislature; and

“(b) the amount that would otherwise be the annual surplus for that fiscal year less the prescribed amount, if

any, of that surplus allocated to the reduction of the accumulated deficit.”

I guess I take it back that I should read it to the people of Ontario, because I'm not sure that many of the people in my community understood what I just read. But what I do want to say, and I think the people of Ontario will understand, is that that there was nothing in that explanation that would say there was money going as stable, predictable funding to municipalities. There was no mention of municipalities in that statement. Obviously, this was just the explanation of the bill, not the bill itself.

It goes on to say:

“The Lieutenant Governor in Council is authorized to prescribe by regulation the recipients to whom payments may be made, the purposes for which payments may be made, the method of and basis for calculating the payments, the activities in which the Minister of Finance may engage in furtherance of the purposes of this act and the amount of the surplus, if any, for a fiscal year that must be allocated to the reduction of the province's accumulated deficit.”

That says that the Lieutenant Governor would do it, and you and I would know—but I'm not sure the people of Ontario would know—that that is in fact the cabinet, and the documentation is just signed by the Lieutenant Governor. By regulation they can do that, but what's interesting about that explanation is that that part of it gives the minister total authority, not only as to who gets the money but how much they get and how the minister will decide the allocation formula. So it doesn't even have the requirement, if it was going to municipalities—and there's nothing in here that says it would be. There's nothing in here that says he has to find a fair way, that everyone would get their fair allotment based on some type of criteria.

It says the minister can, by regulation, set any criteria in place that he wishes to set in place, and then we go from there, and he can allocate the money. He can also allocate this at some time after the public accounts. The bill does point out that the surplus money that they're talking about would in fact not be identified until the public accounts are tabled, which is usually somewhere mid-year. By then it is six months past the end of the budget year before the public accounts would be—that would be the first time that the minister would deal with these funds, long after the surplus had been accumulated. At that time, he can then decide whether they're going to get the money.

Remember, it's going to be too late, at that point in time, for the municipalities to be planning what they're going to use that money for in that fiscal year. Obviously, most of the contracts for the infrastructure have been let. In fact, the decision of where the surpluses are going to be—where the money is going to be used in the municipalities—needs to be known sometime, to be fair, around the time that they're doing their budget. These infrastructure projects that the municipalities need to do are not totally funded by the province. In fact, they're primarily funded by the local municipalities, and they

have to do that through their budget process. Obviously, if they don't know at budget time how much money they're going to get, this really doesn't achieve that goal of stable and predictable funding.

Just quickly on the "eligible recipient": I think we've heard some discussions about it. The government—and in his announcement, again going back to that, he speaks to the municipal—would "direct portions of the provincial surplus to municipalities for ... infrastructure needs." That was mentioned from the government side. This is permissive legislation. "Permissive legislation" means that the minister can, by regulation, make some of the decisions to implement the act.

1750

One of the things one would expect is that, even in this permissive legislation, if the act is being put in place to direct stable, predictable funding to municipalities, the word "municipality" would appear at some point, that that is where the money is being directed. We could have a debate about how much money there would be or where the money would come from, but if it's a municipal funding bill, you would think it would talk about municipalities. But in the definition of the act, "'eligible recipient' means a person or entity, other than an individual but including a partnership whose members may be individuals, that does not carry on activities for the purpose of gain or profit."

It would seem to me that if the intent was to make this a municipal funding bill that they could count on, that definition of eligibility would at the very least include "a municipality." You could then have regulations defining types of municipalities: the upper tier, the lower tier, the large urban, the small urban, the rural municipalities. You could define types of municipalities, but you would think that the direction of the funding would include the word "municipality" in the bill. Obviously, it doesn't do that.

The other part of the bill I just wanted to touch on quickly was:

"2(1) The Minister of Finance may, out of money appropriated"—this is part of the act—"therefor by the Legislature and in accordance with this act and the regulations, make payments in respect of a fiscal year beginning on or after April 1, 2007 to eligible recipients on such terms and conditions as the minister considers advisable." In fact, this allows the minister to carry on with the slush fund as he did in the past. In the bill, there are no conditions, so obviously the minister thought that that was an appropriate way to expend the surplus last year. I've seen no evidence that would suggest that he wasn't going to do it this year. I guess those would be his conditions:" Take the money, and don't send it back if you have more than you need; just put it in the bank and draw interest on it." I think that's very important.

I said that I was going to stick with Bill 35, but at the same time, I think it's important to realize the problem we have. Earlier in my presentation, I mentioned the fact that municipalities need predictable, stable assistance with their infrastructure. This has been an ongoing debate

and has been mentioned by some of the members of the government side. Ten years ago we had a review—and I had the privilege of serving with municipal representatives on that review; at that time, we called it the Who Does What process—to realign municipal services. Ten years later, everyone has agreed that that review and those changes need to be reviewed again because conditions have changed since then. Obviously, the costs of the social services that the municipalities are responsible for have grown much faster than their ability to raise taxes from the property tax base. Generally, that is the only revenue stream that municipalities have. I'd be the first to say that what we need is a stable revenue stream.

The government promised, at an AMO conference a year ago last August—so we're now 20 months or so past that—that they would do a review of the provincial-municipal relationship. They said they would have that review completed in 18 months. At the time, we had some concern that that didn't need to take that long; that review could be completed more expediently. I introduced a resolution in this House—it was passed by the House—that they look at the timeline and shorten that down. That would have directed the ability of government and municipalities to get together and decide if we're going to realign some of those services so it would require less money going from one to the other and more services being looked after by the province.

One of the things that has been brought up many times is that it's hard to accept that social services, such as Ontario Works, should be a responsibility of the property tax base. That's an income distribution program that municipalities suggest should be part of provincial funding, not municipal funding. If it all became provincial funding, then we wouldn't need to be as vigilant about getting extra funding for infrastructure, because they would have a lot more tax room on their present tax base to deal with the hard services if they weren't responsible for so many of the soft services.

One of the things we found was that in almost two years now, we've had a lot of announcements from government of some of the changes they're making, but we have not yet seen any indication, other than a couple of announcements, that it's going to take longer. We've seen no indication of whether they're ever going to finish that review and come back with some recommendations as to how we can fix the problem with the alignment of services between the municipal and provincial governments. I'm hoping they are getting close to the end of that. That would help municipalities to budget for the future and to build and plan for their infrastructure needs, if they didn't have to look after such a large part of social services. I'm hoping they will get that done.

Incidentally, I mentioned a resolution that this House passed. I sent it to all the mayors and the municipal councils of every municipality in the province of Ontario. We got back 150 resolutions from local councils who supported that initiative, who agreed that it did not need to take 18 months to get the job done. Since that time, of course, we have passed that 18 months and we are still, at

this point, no closer to getting that job done than when it started a year ago last August.

I don't think the government is moving on these things as they told us they were going to. That's why I'm convinced at this point that it's quite evident from what's in the bill—incidentally, it was mentioned earlier that the bill is only two and a quarter pages long. It's a very short bill. It says very little except that the minister be authorized to set up a slush fund—well, to set up a fund to spend surpluses six months into the next year, and he gets to decide who gets the money, how much they get and how they qualify to get it. So far, if the track record of the government is any example, that is not the kind of authority that this House should grant the Minister of Finance, because he has not proven with last year's surplus that he is in the position, as the Auditor General said, to have transparency and accountability in dealing with money he has left over at the end of the year.

It's very important that we realize that the budgeting process surpluses are exactly the same mistake as deficits. They're both the miscalculation of either revenues or

expenses, and all of it, if there is a surplus, belongs to the taxpayer. I think that money should be used to pay down the debt, and services, such as funding to municipalities, should be based on budgeted funding, not on making them wait for the lottery or for a surplus that may or may not appear. The government has an obligation to be upfront with municipalities and not tell them they are going to get funding when they know full well that this year there wasn't enough surplus for them to qualify.

I think they should have funding in their budget to fund municipalities at the level that both agreed to, and then I think surpluses should be put to the debt, because that's owed by the people of the province of Ontario, and they—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): I thank the honourable member for his contribution to the debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday, April 14, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Steve Peters

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman, Tonia Grannum

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Aggelonitis, Sophia (L)	Hamilton Mountain	
Albanese, Laura (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (L)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L)	Sudbury	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L)	London West / London-Ouest	Attorney General / procureur general
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Best, Hon. / L'hon. Margaret R. (L)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Bisson, Gilles (ND)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L)	St. Catharines	Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Brotten, Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, government House leader / ministre des Affaires autochtones, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Carroll, Hon. / L'hon. M. Aileen (L)	Barrie	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for seniors / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the committee of the whole House / Vice- Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (L)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L)	Windsor–Tecumseh	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L) Fonseca, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (L)	Oakville Mississauga East–Cookville / Mississauga-Est–Cookville	Minister of Tourism / ministre du Tourisme
Gélinas, France (ND) Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Nickel Belt Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC) Hillier, Randy (PC) Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Oxford Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Third Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hoy, Pat (L) Hudak, Tim (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (L) Jeffrey, Linda (L) Jones, Sylvia (PC) Klees, Frank (PC) Kormos, Peter (ND)	Oak Ridges–Markham Brampton–Springdale Dufferin–Caledon Newmarket–Aurora Welland	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L) Kwinter, Monte (L) Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L) Leal, Jeff (L) Levac, Dave (L) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Mangat, Amrit (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton York Centre / York-Centre Glengarry–Prescott–Russell Peterborough Brant Nepean–Carleton Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (ND) Martiniuk, Gerry (PC) Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (L)	Trinity–Spadina Cambridge London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Minister of Children and Youth Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (L) McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (L)	Ancaster–Dundas– Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
McNeely, Phil (L) Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Orléans Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (ND) Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L) Moridi, Reza (L) Munro, Julia (PC) Murdoch, Bill (PC) Naqvi, Yasir (L) O'Toole, John (PC) Oraziotti, David (L)	Huron–Bruce Richmond Hill York–Simcoe Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre Durham Sault Ste. Marie	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pendergast, Leeanna (L)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Speaker / Président
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	
Ramsay, David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader of the Official Opposition, Opposition House leader / Chef de l'opposition officielle, leader parlementaire de l'opposition
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Minister of Revenue / ministre du Revenu
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Greg (L)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Wilkinson, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Perth–Wellington	Minister of Research and Innovation / ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Estimates / Budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Tim Hudak
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Garfield Dunlop
Gilles Bisson, Kim Craiton, Bob Delaney,
Garfield Dunlop, Tim Hudak, Amrit Mangat,
Phil McNeely, John O'Toole, Lou Rinaldi,
Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Finance and economic affairs /
Finances et affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Pat Hoy
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Jean-Marc Lalonde
Sophia Aggelonitis, Ted Arnott, Wayne Arthurs,
Toby Barrett, Pat Hoy, Jean-Marc Lalonde,
Leeanna Pendergast, Michael Prue, Charles Sousa
Clerk / Greffier: William Short

General government / Affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Présidente: Linda Jeffrey
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: David Oraziotti
Robert Bailey, Jim Brownell, Linda Jeffrey,
Kuldip Kular, Rosario Marchese, Bill Mauro,
Carol Mitchell, David Oraziotti, Joyce Savoline
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Government agencies / Organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Présidente: Julia Munro
Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Michael Brown, Kevin Flynn, France Gélinas,
Randy Hillier, Lisa MacLeod, Julia Munro,
David Ramsay, Liz Sandals, Maria Van Bommel
Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

Justice Policy / Justice

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Jeff Leal
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Christine Elliott, Peter Kormos,
Jeff Leal, Reza Moridi, Yasir Naqvi,
Lou Rinaldi, John Yakabuski, David Zimmer
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

Legislative Assembly / Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Kevin Flynn
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon, Bob Delaney,
Joe Dickson, Kevin Flynn, Sylvia Jones,
Norm Miller, Mario Sergio, Peter Tabuns
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Public accounts / Comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Jerry Ouellette
Laura Albanese, Ernie Hardeman, Andrea Horwath,
Phil McNeely, Jerry Ouellette, Liz Sandals,
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel, David Zimmer
Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle, Kim Craiton,
Gerry Martiniuk, Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch,
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht, Mario Sergio
Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Social Policy / Politique sociale

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Vic Dhillon
Laurel C. Broten, Vic Dhillon, Cheri DiNovo,
Helena Jaczek, Dave Levac, Shafiq Qaadri,
Khalil Ramal, Laurie Scott, Peter Shurman
Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Continued from back cover

Manufacturing jobs	
Mr. Tim Hudak	949
Hon. George Smitherman	949
International trade	
Mr. Howard Hampton.....	950
Hon. Sandra Pupatello	950
Aboriginal rights	
Mr. Howard Hampton.....	951
Hon. Michael Bryant	951
Committee business	
Mrs. Joyce Savoline.....	952
Hon. Michael Bryant	952
International trade	
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	953
Hon. George Smitherman	953
Research and innovation	
Mrs. Liz Sandals.....	953
Hon. John Wilkinson	953
Tobacco control	
Mr. Peter Shurman.....	954
Hon. Margaret R. Best.....	954
Workplace safety	
Mr. Paul Miller	954
Hon. Brad Duguid	954
Community colleges collective bargaining	
Ms. Leeanna Pendergast	955
Hon. John Milloy	955
Tobacco control	
Mr. Norm Miller	956
Hon. Margaret R. Best.....	956
Home care	
Ms. Andrea Horwath	956
Hon. George Smitherman	956
Greenbelt	
Mr. Reza Moridi	957
Hon. Jim Watson	957
Hospital services	
Mrs. Christine Elliott	957
Hon. George Smitherman	957

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Lord's Prayer	
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	958
Home care	
Mme France Gélinas.....	958
Firearms control	
Mr. Mike Colle	958

Lord's Prayer	
Ms. Sylvia Jones	959
International trade	
Mr. Michael Prue	959
Federal-provincial fiscal policies	
Mr. Tony Ruprecht	959
Lord's Prayer	
Mr. Norm Miller	959
Hospital funding	
Mr. Kuldip Kular	959
Lord's Prayer	
Mr. Frank Klees	960
Environmental protection	
Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde	960
Lord's Prayer	
Mr. Ted Chudleigh.....	960
Anti-smoking legislation	
Mr. Bob Delaney	960
GO Transit	
Mr. Ted Chudleigh.....	961

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Investing in Ontario Act, 2008, Bill 35, Mr. Duncan / Loi de 2008 permettant d'investir dans l'Ontario, projet de loi 35, M. Duncan	
Mr. Tim Hudak	961
Ms. Laurel C. Broten	964
Mr. Ted Chudleigh.....	964
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	965
Mr. Wayne Arthurs	965
Mr. Tim Hudak	965
M. Jean-Marc Lalonde.....	966
Mr. Ted Chudleigh.....	967
Mr. Lou Rinaldi	967
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	968
Mr. Frank Klees	968
Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde	968
Mr. Frank Klees	969
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	971
Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis	971
Mr. Jeff Leal	971
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	971
Mr. Frank Klees	972
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	972
Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde	975
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	975
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	975
Mr. Ted Chudleigh.....	976
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	976
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	979

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 10 April 2008 / Jeudi 10 avril 2008

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉS	
Tire disposal	
Mr. Ted Chudleigh	925
Hon. John Gerretsen	926
Mr. John Yakabuski.....	927
Mr. Peter Kormos	928
Mr. Khalil Ramal.....	928
Mr. Toby Barrett.....	929
Mr. Michael Prue.....	929
Mr. Tony Ruprecht	930
Mrs. Joyce Savoline.....	931
Mr. Peter Tabuns	931
Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn.....	932
Mr. Jim Wilson.....	932
Mr. Ted Chudleigh	933
Visitors	
The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier)	933
Nowruz	
Mr. Reza Moridi	933
Mr. Peter Shurman.....	934
Mr. Paul Miller	936
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	936
Mr. Ted Chudleigh	937
Mr. Peter Tabuns	937
Mr. David Zimmer.....	938
Mr. Jim Wilson.....	938
Mr. Tony Ruprecht	938
Mr. Reza Moridi	939
Tire disposal	
The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier)	939
Nowruz	
Agreed to	939
Tire disposal	
Negated.....	940
MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS	
Parkinson's disease	
Mrs. Christine Elliott.....	940
Lakeshore Lions Arena	
Ms. Laurel C. Broten	940
Teachers	
Ms. Sylvia Jones	941
Orville Kerr	
Ms. Andrea Horwath	941
Peterborough Liftlock Atom Hockey Tournament	
Mr. Jeff Leal	941
Government appointments	
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	941
Saint-Pascal-Baylon	
M. Jean-Marc Lalonde.....	942
Vaisakhi	
Mrs. Linda Jeffrey	942
GO Transit	
Mr. Bob Delaney	942
Wearing of shawl	
Mr. Randy Hillier	943
STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES	
Student assistance	
Hon. John Milloy	943
Student assistance	
Mr. Jim Wilson	943
Student assistance	
Mr. Rosario Marchese	944
Visitors	
The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters)	945
Tibet	
Hon. George Smitherman	945
Mr. Randy Hillier	946
Mr. Robert W. Runciman	946
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	947
Mr. Howard Hampton.....	947
Agreed to	948
Visitors	
The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters)	948
ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES	
International trade	
Mr. Robert W. Runciman	948
Hon. Sandra Pupatello	948

Continued on inside back cover