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Monday 24 November 2008

Lundi 24 novembre 2008

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 24 November 2008

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 24 novembre 2008

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Please remain standing for the Lord's Prayer, followed by the non-denominational prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I would like everyone in the House to welcome two of my constituents from Orillia: Betsy Gross and John Armstrong. They're in the members' gallery.

Mr. Joe Dickson: We're going to welcome in just a couple of moments two grade 5 classes from St. Francis de Sales school in Ajax, with their teachers Jeff Shaw and Rob Fortin. The bright young students are from my Ajax-Pickering riding and have come to Queen's Park for a tour today. I must mention that St. Francis de Sales school is located next door to St. Francis de Sales church where my parents were married almost 70 years ago, and I just received this morning from the wonderful minister Gerry Phillips a history book, on St. Francis de Sales of 125 years, and he has family who live adjacent to that.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to introduce the mother of page Sara Maltese, from the riding of Eglinton-Lawrence, Cathy Maltese; the father of page Sara Maltese, Frank Maltese; and the sister of page Sara, Francesca Maltese. Welcome to the gallery at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): On behalf of page Tess McGurn, I'd like to welcome her mother, Karen McGurn. She's sitting in the east members' gallery this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Minister, last Thursday, I believe during a media scrum, the Premier said that Ontario's auto industry would end up with fewer jobs than it currently has. We know the Premier is briefed every day. He's not going to engage in careless speculation, so we're assuming this is based on facts from perhaps Minister Bryant's ministry. Minister, could you indicate to the House what the expectation is on behalf of your government with respect to how many jobs you expect will be lost in

Ontario's auto industry as a result of the current situation?

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

Hon. Michael Bryant: The head of the Canadian Auto Workers Union has also said that the auto industry is going to contract, and in fact, that's going to mean fewer jobs. Are we able to provide a projection right now? No, we aren't. Have we received a projection from the industry? No, we haven't.

Part of the exercise that we're undertaking at this time is to obtain from the industry their plans in Ontario for the medium and long term in order to determine the viability of this industry and of the companies, and in turn, the effect it will have on the suppliers. As we receive that information, I'll certainly share it with the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm not sure that too many people would agree with the Premier of the province speculating with respect to job losses in an industry that is currently facing such challenges.

I want to talk about ways that jobs can be created in this province, and we've raised these issues with you over the past number of years without much success. You have two programs in place: the advanced manufacturing investment strategy and the Next Generation of Jobs Fund. We're told there's at least \$1.5 billion in those funds unutilized, unallocated, to date. Will you commit to taking the money that's left on the table and use it for a real and meaningful jobs plan that will help unemployed Ontarians put food on their table?

Hon. Michael Bryant: Yes, the member is right, and I too want to talk about job creation. That is the purpose of the Next Generation of Jobs Fund and the purpose of the advanced manufacturing investment strategy.

I also want to say that the long-term future of the auto sector—we obviously expect and want that to be one that is going to grow over the long term. Obviously, in the short and medium term it's going to be facing particular challenges, but without the half-billion-dollar auto strategy that the Premier brought forward, we would not be in the situation where in fact we have some of the most competitive and productive manufacturing plants in the world. It is through the advanced manufacturing investment strategy, which has generated almost \$900 million in new investments—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I think there are many people in the province who would question the wisdom of some of those investments today.

We're not the only ones saying that the current jobs plan is a flop. People on the ground, people on the front lines—Cammie Peirce of the Chrysler Action Centre in Brampton told CBC Radio on November 10 that the second generation jobs plan was “arduous” because applicants had to prove they had no skills and couldn't get any type of job. The changes that were announced recently by the minister responsible don't seem to have done anything to address the situation.

Minister, the job losses are coming. Your current plan is not working. When is your government going to show some vision with respect to this area, real leadership, and put a jobs action plan in place that really works?

Hon. Michael Bryant: In fact, what the government did in the last budget was put in place—not in the midst of the current crisis, but in advance of that—a number of incentives: the tax incentives and also the spending incentives, the investments. Dalton McGuinty put that into place, the finance minister put that into place, in the spring budget. They are there now.

The retroactive elimination of the capital tax for the manufacturing industry was put in in the spring. It was of enormous assistance to that industry. The investment of \$90 million has transformed into 4,000 jobs under the manufacturing loan program. I would say, and I'm sure the member would agree, that those are good jobs, important jobs, and that is a success. The automotive investment strategy has brought into place \$7.5 billion in investments in Ontario.

We didn't wait for the crisis to take place—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: One hundred and forty thousand lost jobs in four years is not a success story by any definition.

1040

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: To the Minister of Transportation: As you know, Bill 126 has raised and continues to raise a lot of questions about how much thought and consultation went into the drafting of the bill. Under the bill—and I want to give you just one example here—a young soldier driving an armoured tank carrying an entire platoon in Afghanistan would be prevented from driving on Ontario roads with more than one unrelated passenger. I think that's an accurate analogy, Minister. Does that situation make any sense to you?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think the people you should talk to in this regard are the safety partners in the province of Ontario who unanimously—I'm talking about people such as the police, and I know you have a great deal of respect for the Ontario Provincial Police and for local police services. I can't think of a member in this House who has more respect for those individuals and the

advice they would provide to us. They certainly were among those who provided this advice.

I should tell you as well that the Perry family, with whom I met, who lost a son who was one of five killed during the daytime in a van—and there was, to my knowledge, no drinking involved or anything of that nature, but it was young people driving with people together. That was one of the reasons we brought this forward. We look forward to the reaction and to the input of the entire province on this issue, and I think the member draws to our attention—

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'll draw another example to the minister's attention. Under this bill—and you may be aware of this as well—a 19-year-old can qualify for a commercial pilot's licence. So in essence, an individual can fly a plane full of unrelated passengers, but under your bill, he couldn't drive more than one to the airport on Ontario's roads. Again, Minister, I ask you, does that make any sense to you at all?

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's interesting, what emerges from this. When there's an accident that takes place in the province, when young people are in a car and there's a race to the train tracks and four or five of them are killed, when there are some serious accidents where young people in our society are killed or maimed badly, or are involved in a huge damage accident—the first two being the most important—I would expect from the opposition that I'm going to get a question demanding, “What is the government going to do about that?”

Indeed, when you talk to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, when you talk to the Ontario Safety League, when you talk to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, when you talk to those who, on an ongoing basis, are concerned with these items, they provide this kind of advice. I say to the member, however, I'm certainly open to the kind of input that I always am on every bill.

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

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I suspect there are elements of this bill that at the end of the day we can support, but there are others that are clearly ill-considered. It makes you wonder just who the minister and his colleagues consulted with in drafting this and how broad that consultation was. Did you consult, for example, with the young parent who under your bill would be prevented from carpooling his or her child with other youngsters in a vehicle to and from daycare?

Clearly, this bill was rushed, with limited consultation. So I ask the minister—and given the track record of this government, it's a legitimate concern—will he stand here today and assure us that this bill will have extensive public hearings across the province before final passage?

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member opposite was a House leader at one time, and a member of a government that—I hate to be provocative in this case, but unlike the previous government, which seldom allowed for public hearings, we in fact invite those kinds of public hearings and input from the public.

I would like to know whether the member feels that those parents who have had these difficult times, the many thousands, or hundreds, at least, of people who wrote to me about this specific issue, and all the safety partners out there who gave recommendations, including the Perry family, who on the day the announcement was made were really not interviewed to the same extent that some others were—yes, we want to hear from everyone who is in favour and opposed to get the best possible legislation.

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton: My question is to the Acting Premier. On Friday, 22 mayors from across Ontario met to urge the McGuinty government to take action to assist the auto sector. They're very worried about the potential loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs and they are very worried that, for at least a few months now, the McGuinty government hasn't been sure of what it's doing. Since one Ontario auto job supports seven spinoff jobs, and hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake, can the McGuinty government tell those worried mayors and worried workers what its strategy is?

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

Hon. Michael Bryant: Indeed, the member is absolutely right that the suppliers in the North American integrated auto industry that we have today are in fact being harmed substantially by all the activity taking place with respect to the automakers themselves. That is one of the reasons why we put into place the advanced manufacturing investment strategy. It was to provide assistance to the very companies that the member is speaking of, to allow them to make those upgrades and changes so that they can be even more competitive. That is to the benefit of those companies and to the benefit of the economy, as we increase the jobs through this important investment strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government continues to talk about some kind of strategy that was announced over three years ago. Since then, we've witnessed the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs and, these mayors are now saying, the potential loss of hundreds of thousands more.

Obviously, what the McGuinty government is talking about hasn't worked and isn't working. As Oakville Mayor Rob Burton put it, and I want to quote him, "We're on the cusp of a really bad place in economic history if we don't act."

What these mayors are asking and what literally hundreds of thousands of workers around this province are asking is, what is the McGuinty government's strategy for the auto sector now? Don't tell us about what you were thinking three years ago; obviously that didn't work. What's the strategy now?

Hon. Michael Bryant: I totally disagree with the member. The member seems to be suggesting that history will record that the current global economic crisis was caused by action or inaction by a Canadian provincial government. I think the member knows that that is non-sense.

This is affecting China, this is affecting Germany, this is affecting the United States and, yes, this is affecting Canada. It is because of the strategies that we've put in place that we already have the mechanisms to provide assistance and to provide investments. If the member's asking, "Are we creating greater flexibility with these programs in light of the current economic crisis?" the answer is absolutely yes, and that is to the benefit of those communities that the member speaks of, those companies that the member speaks of and of course the jobs created and the people of those communities, most importantly.

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: I guess I have to remind the McGuinty government that what these communities see is tens of thousands of jobs disappearing, in some cases thousands of jobs every week disappearing. So when the McGuinty government talks about a strategy that it announced three years ago, they're not impressed.

But equally, they're having a hard time figuring out what the McGuinty government's real position is. One day, the Premier boasts and says that the auto sector is worth investing in, and then this weekend he said, "Well, gee, you know, further investment in the auto sector might increase the deficit of the McGuinty government."

What is the real message here: Let jobs go because the McGuinty government's worried about the deficit, or invest in these jobs to sustain these jobs in these communities? Which is the real McGuinty message?

Hon. Michael Bryant: When the government made investments in these communities, I certainly didn't hear the member complain about those investments. In fact, but for those investments, we would not be in the position we are in and we would not have the programs and the dollars in place to provide this assistance. That led to an investment of \$100 million in Ford in Oakville that retained 4,000 jobs; the Ford Essex engine plant—investing \$17 million to reopen the plant with a more fuel-efficient engine production; and Chrysler Canada in Brampton and Windsor. These investments created jobs and they created programs that allowed these companies to access them.

Obviously, a reduction by a third to the sales of all cars in North America has had a negative impact on the industry, but this government has been there for them in the past and this government will continue to work with them in the future.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Howard Hampton: Again to the Deputy Premier—and I think people out there are wondering what

the McGuinty government's position is now, since you can't seem to get your message straight from one day to the next. What is also now clear is that the \$6.5-billion shortfall in the General Motors pension plan is only the tip of the iceberg, as pension plans across Ontario are in trouble.

1050

My question is this: People who have worked hard and followed the rules all their lives in this province are very worried about their pensions and about the security of their retirement. The McGuinty government has talked for five years about pensions. Can you tell us what assurances the McGuinty government can give to all those hundreds of thousands of people who are worried that they may not have a pension, or a much-diminished pension? What's the McGuinty government going to do to help those people who've—

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

Hon. George Smitherman: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan: A number of initiatives have been undertaken by our government, including looking at long-term issues around pension reform. Mr. Arthurs presented his report last Thursday. There are some 142 recommendations that deal with a whole range of issues. This has been subject to a very extensive consultation over the course of the last year and a half involving employers, employees, members as well as pensioners themselves.

In terms of the short term, the issues are subject to discussions that are ongoing not only within fiscal, but finance ministers from across Canada will be discussing these as part of their meeting in December. There is a range of issues to look at.

I think the member wants to be careful that he doesn't unnecessarily cause alarm with people by torquing up his language—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: I think the headline in the *Globe and Mail* speaks for itself—a \$6.5-billion deficit in the General Motors pension plan. All you have to do is look at any of the business pages to realize that hundreds, perhaps thousands, more pension plans are in trouble. I think all those people who are worried deserve a real answer from the McGuinty government. I welcome Professor Arthurs's paper. New Democrats have advocated many of those longer-term changes for some time.

But the question is this: There's a real short-term problem. Is the McGuinty government going to present a short-term plan for these pensions which are in trouble before we recess for Christmas, or are you going to simply push that issue off until some nebulous time in the future as well?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: I would caution pensioners in Ontario not to listen too carefully to the member opposite, who is trying to stoke fears unnecessarily. There is no doubt that pension funds, like all other funds that

invest in various markets, have seen substantial hits this fall. That does not necessarily imply that there are solvency issues. It does require that governments look at a range of alternatives with respect to managing through these difficult circumstances.

But I would caution the member opposite not to unduly and unnecessarily inflame fear in people when in fact pension regulators across the country and around the world are looking at these—

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

Mr. Howard Hampton: The McGuinty government now wants to talk about fear. I'll tell you what people are worried about. At a time when literally hundreds of pension plans are potentially in trouble or are already in real trouble, and they're expecting some leadership from the McGuinty government, do you know what this Legislature is going to debate for the next four days? A partisan motion from the McGuinty government attacking the official opposition—no attention to pensions, no attention to pension plans that are potentially in trouble, but a very partisan motion from the government for the next four days. People have known for some time that the pension system was in trouble, for at least the last five years—no action from the McGuinty government. Are we going to see some action before Christmas or just more partisan motions attacking the opposition from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: Just so the public understands that motion, the government wants the economic standing committee to travel Ontario to hear submissions on the economy, and both opposition parties are going to vote against that. Six weeks ago they were calling for a select committee; now they won't let the committee travel the province. I'm travelling the province. I have been and will continue to. The member opposite—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Leader of the third party, you just had the opportunity to ask the question. I would appreciate that you listen to the answer. Minister?

Hon. Dwight Duncan: The member opposite doesn't have to worry about pensions, I'll say that. The member opposite is irresponsible in what he's saying. There's no question that there have to be short-term initiatives undertaken. Canadian and provincial finance ministers are working on—

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

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a question for the Minister of Labour. Last week you told an independent operator that, "Judith Andrew of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business never asked for a named insured system," but for many years now, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has asked for a named insured system to deal with people cheating the WSIB system, so I don't know why you'd make that statement.

In fact, in a CFIB election questionnaire, when asked if you would refrain from expanding mandatory WSIB coverage to include independent operators and direct the WSIB to implement a named insured system to deal with cheaters, Mr. McGuinty replied, "The WSIB is in the process of establishing a working group to examine the feasibility of a named insured system."

Minister, why aren't you doing what you said you would do and direct the WSIB to proceed with a named insured system to attack the cheaters, instead of your flawed Bill 119?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I've got to say to the member, he's got the wrong information. To that independent operator: The proposed legislation that we're putting forward, actually, would allow for named insured. We've been working with all stakeholders—with the CFIB, with labour groups, with employers, with employees—looking at a way that named insured could work within this proposed legislation.

The main thing we want is that all those who are on a construction site are covered. We want to make sure that if that independent operator—yes, that independent operator—is on that construction site, that they are covered by WSIB. But in regards to the named insured, we've had a working group over the year. I believe they've met about eight times. It has included labour, it has included employers, associations, different stakeholders working together to see what we can do within this proposed legislation. I say to the member again, yes, and to the CFIB—

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

Mr. Norm Miller: Minister, you know that you don't need your Bill 119 to bring in a named insured system. In truth, since you've been appointed, you have not really bothered to consult with business. In fact, you left a voice mail for the CFIB saying that you were looking forward to working with them, but before your first meeting even took place, you announced to a union audience in Windsor that you intended to go ahead with mandatory WSIB coverage, contrary to your election promise. Judith Andrew, vice-president of the CFIB, wrote, "Cheating becomes much more difficult with named insurance. Regrettably, Bill 119 will help the cheaters prosper."

So Minister, this is contrary to what you've been saying about levelling the playing field. All you need to do to catch the non-participants is to bring in a named insurance program and have your auditors do their job. It begs the question: Why didn't you listen to anyone in business before you introduced Bill 119? Why did you only listen to union bosses?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I say to the member, maybe you didn't hear it the first time, but the proposed legislation does allow for named insured. But within this proposed legislation, this government feels strongly about the WSIB. It's a system that has been in place, a safety net to protect our construction workers and many other workers, for close to 100 years that we are steadfast on. We will work with stakeholders, work with employers, work

with labour groups, work with associations to see if we can strengthen the legislation and make sure that we strengthen that safety net. That's what we're here for, to make sure that those workers, when they go on to that construction site, are taken care of and that they're safe. Also, that businesses are playing on a level playing field and that everybody is paying their fair share.

1100

PUBLIC HEALTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Why has the minister allowed one third of Ontario medical officer of health positions to remain vacant, part-time or led by a temporary acting physician?

Hon. David Caplan: I want to thank the chief medical officer of health for his annual report. In his report, Dr. Williams generally praises Ontario's health protection branch, the Minister of Health's three-year action plan to revitalize the public health system and the resulting improvements to Ontario's system.

The member raises an issue, which is a long-standing one in the province of Ontario, about the ability to attract, recruit and retain physicians to hold chief medical officer of health positions. I can tell you that quite recently, through the arrangements we have with the Ontario Medical Association, we've been able to negotiate one of the issues that has been identified, which is the compensation for particular physicians to assume these positions. That has been addressed. It's our hope, in working collaboratively with the Ontario Medical Association, to be in a position to attract, recruit and retain physicians to these—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Last week in his annual report, the province's acting chief medical officer of health pointed to the 13 vacancies as a serious problem in public health. The Ontario Medical Association has said that the lack of full-time, permanent, fully-qualified medical officers of health poses an enormous threat to the health of Ontarians, in that a single dysfunctional health unit could incubate a national epidemic—another SARS or another Walkerton. Is the minister absolutely sure that six years after the Walkerton inquiry recommended that vacant medical officer of health positions be filled expeditiously, the problem is simply salary, and that nothing more needs to be done to ensure that all public health units in the province are properly staffed?

Hon. David Caplan: In fact, it's not entirely salaries, nor have I ever made that claim. The member well knows that this is not an area that it is often a choice when physicians come out and practise in the medical profession. Oftentimes, they make a choice between some of the different areas of speciality that are available to them. That's why we have enhanced funding and revised the funding parameters for cost-shared educational bursary programs for perspective medical officers of health, in

order to make it more attractive to physicians who would want to practise in this particular area. The bursary program is designed to increase the supply of medical officers of health by attracting interested physicians. Back in March last year, my predecessor offered dedicated funding for up to five physicians who wished to pursue specialty training in community medicine or a master's in public health or equivalent. Part of HealthForceOntario, our group dedicated with—

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

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Our government has proposed legislation that, if passed, will extend Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, WSIB, coverage to a broader group of the construction industry. I don't need to tell the minister that Bill 119 has been a popular topic of discussion of late, as well as an important issue for the construction industry for many years.

The critical question I have been asked in my community is: Why does Bill 119 make it mandatory for all executive officers to have the same insurance coverage as construction workers? I would ask the minister to respond to this question.

Hon. Peter Fonseca: I would like to thank the member for the question and for the work she has been doing to promote health and safety in the construction workplace.

We have heard from a wide variety of construction associations, small businesses, and labour and employer groups during the development of this proposed legislation. Through those consultations, an overriding concern expressed to us was the potential misclassification of workers as executive officers. The misclassification of executive officers is currently being used as a way for employers to get out of paying coverage for their workers. We have heard about cases where an employer has gone to great lengths to misclassify construction staff as executive officers to avoid paying. We want to make sure that we close this loophole, but not unduly penalize legitimate executive officers.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Minister, some feel that executive officers and partners in a partnership who do not work on construction sites should be exempt from having to pay mandatory coverage through WSIB. There is a clear difference between an executive officer working in the office on paperwork and one working on a construction site. Can we not find a way to potentially exclude executive officers who are not exposed to the risks of construction from having to pay premiums for WSIB?

Hon. Peter Fonseca: A great question, and I'd like to thank the member as well as MPPs Lou Rinaldi and Jeff Leal, and many others who have advocated on this issue.

Bill 119 has recently finished public hearings and will be going to clause-by-clause later today. We've been

listening to what MPPs, individual groups and associations have been saying on this issue, and I'm pleased to say that we have filed an amendment with the clerk that, if accepted, would amend the proposed legislation and allow the government a regulation-making power to exempt an individual executive officer or a partner who works exclusively in the office and not on a construction site.

To be clear, the misclassification of executive officers that is currently being used as a way for employers to get out of paying coverage for their workers cannot continue.

The government will work with business and labour groups before putting forward a regulation to ensure it meets the overall goals—

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

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: My question is for the Minister of Health. There is widespread concern in this province, and there has been now for five years, at your failure, your government's failure, to ensure that the 13 vacancies in public health are filled. People are tired of your lame excuses. You failed to adopt my amendment calling for a plan of action in 2006.

I ask you today, what is your plan? And don't tell us it's more money. You've had five years and we've seen no results. The situation has gotten worse.

Hon. David Caplan: We do know the member's plan, as my colleague points out: a \$3-billion cut to health care in the province of Ontario. That's not going to be able to fill the vacancies, to provide the medical professionals we need. In fact, in the chief medical officer's report, he takes a look at the whole area of public health. He says that the ministry has done an excellent job in establishing the provincial infectious disease advisory committee; creating 14 regional infection control networks; increasing the share of funding for mandatory programs delivered through the 36 public health units to 75% from 2007—that's up from 50% when this member was in office; creating the emergency management unit to lead and support emergency management and activities for the health system; and establishing the Ontario health agency for health protection and promotion.

We have taken significant action to be able to deal with the public health challenges of Ontarians, as they would expect us to. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I am horrified that this minister fails to recognize the gravity of the situation. The reality is, when you have situations like Walkerton, SARS and C. difficile, fast action by public health experts can mean the difference between life and death, and he fails to answer the question asked and then he puts out misleading information. We are not going to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I ask the honourable member to withdraw the comment.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Withdrawn.

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

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: We are not going to withdraw \$3 billion from health. But I would ask this minister, when you're sitting in this House, Minister, perhaps you should be communicating and developing a plan of action to deal with the shortage of these health officials who can make the difference between life and death. Will you come back and give us a plan of action and demonstrate—

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

Hon. David Caplan: In effect, the mendacity of the member opposite is well known.

I can tell you that a plan has been developed and in fact is being followed. As I mentioned earlier, through our recent negotiation with the Ontario Medical Association, in March 2007, for example, we offered dedicated funding for up to five physicians with which to pursue specialty training in community medicine or a master's in public health or administration.

Part of HealthForceOntario includes establishing a one-stop centre for internationally educated health professionals to obtain the information and the ability to enter into the health care system needed right throughout the province of Ontario.

The new salary structure I mentioned earlier will be developed and communicated to boards of health that are employing medical officers of health and associate medical officers of health.

This has been, as the member recognizes, a long-standing problem, but I think if the member, fairly, would want to acknowledge the kind of work and effort that has gone in—and even the chief medical officer himself recognizes that and—

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

1110

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Since 650 Ontarians made submissions to the government's poverty website and this government has chosen not to release the submissions to the public, could this minister please share the key messages with this House.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me tell you that many of the submissions are, of course, publicly available. Those by organizations—they've posted them on their websites; they've circulated them broadly. When individuals made submissions to us, they made submissions to the committee. Overwhelmingly, people are telling us that reducing poverty should be a priority of this government, and I can assure them that reducing poverty is indeed a major priority of this government, reiterated over the weekend by the Premier in terms that were very clear and unequivocal.

We heard a number of suggestions. We heard about the importance of breaking the cycle of intergenerational

poverty. We heard about people who desperately wanted to move off social assistance into employment and they felt that the system was not there to support them. We heard a number of issues, and I'm sure in the supplementary I'll have an opportunity to talk more about that.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The minister says they are publicly available, and I guess that is true if you are willing to put down the \$150 and wait for 60 days through the freedom of information act. That's how they're publicly available and that's how the minister has chosen to do it.

Since the minister won't share the submissions and the key messages, we will, because we've been able to find out some of them. The most common recommendations were: more affordable housing; increases to ODSP and to OW; end the clawback of child benefits; raise the minimum wage above the poverty line; and affordable child care.

Those are the things people are talking about. Campaign 2000 calls for these same actions in a new child poverty report which came out on Friday.

My question: Why won't the minister commit to include these actions in the government's upcoming poverty plan?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to clarify that the member opposite does have the submissions, all of the submissions. He received them some time ago. There's nothing secret about them at all. But what I can tell you is that we are moving forward. I do understand that you're anxious to see what it is we're going to include in this strategy, and I know that people across the province are really waiting with great anticipation for the release of this strategy. We are on track to keep our commitment, which is to release the strategy by the end of the month.

I want to take this opportunity once again to thank people across the province for being engaged in this conversation and for changing the conversation. It wasn't very long ago when people were outside on the front lawn of Queen's Park trying to get in, protesting government. Today they are at the table working very hard, rolling up their sleeves in partnership with the government and others to develop the solutions that we all know we need to reduce poverty in this province.

POVERTY

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Before I ask the question, I want to thank the minister and commend her for her extremely hard work on this very difficult file, and I thank her for continuing to do the work.

Minister, addressing poverty in our province is something I continue to hear about from many of my constituents. That's why I was so pleased when the Premier appointed the province's first-ever cabinet committee on poverty reduction last year.

In my riding alone, I've held two public consultations about poverty reduction, one of them that the minister

attended. We had groups like Child Poverty Action Group, the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa, ACORN, the Anti-Poverty Project, and I can go on, who attended that consultation and gave very positive feedback.

Last week, there was another report that underscored the importance of developing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Campaign 2000's 2008 report card on child poverty shows that while we are finally making—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: First of all, let me thank the member opposite from Ottawa Centre. He's been engaged in this in a very active way. I'd also like to commend him for his dashing new look. He is sporting a moustache in support of the fight against prostate cancer. Congratulations to you; I actually like the look.

I also want to take this opportunity to clarify: I think I misspoke. We will have the strategy released by the end of the year. So we are short weeks away from the release of the strategy.

Let me thank Campaign 2000. They have been tireless advocates on this issue for many, many years. They have done excellent work. They have helped inspire us to do better. We certainly recognize there is more to be done, and that's why we have struck the cabinet committee. That's why we are committed to measuring our progress. This report shows some of the progress that's already been made. The member opposite will know that it shows the data up to 2006. And we—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'll give you more time to finish your answer, and I ask all the members of the opposition to get on with working hard with this government in making sure that poverty ends in this province instead of just yelling and screaming and making things up.

With the uncertain economic times facing both Ontario and much of the world, many children in our province are at risk of falling into poverty. How will our government ensure that levels of child poverty will continue to be reduced in the future as they have been in the past two years?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to again refer back to the Campaign 2000 report. It shows that we are really making progress. There are 49,000 fewer kids in poverty than there were two years ago, 21,000 fewer in 2006 and 2005, a decrease of 6.1%, the second consecutive year the number has gone down. Prior to that, prior to our election, the number of kids in poverty continued to grow year after year.

It's also important to remember that this report does not capture some of the historic changes that we have made since 2006, most importantly, the Ontario child benefit. It does not capture increases in minimum wage. It does not capture increases in social assistance rates. So as we move forward, we will develop ways to measure poverty, and we will report back. We will work together to reduce poverty in this province.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: To the Minister of Education: I'm really pleased to see that your government has finally stepped up to address one small part of the system that failed Katelynn Sampson and allowed her to tragically fall through the cracks. Minister Bentley's announcement today is only one tiny piece of the problem. Unfortunately, more than one ministry failed this poor child. What investigations, if any, have you conducted into that school's failure to contact authorities and report Katelynn Sampson's prolonged absence prior to her death?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite knows, I'm not going to comment on the specifics of that case. What I know the member is getting at is a question that has been raised by the party opposite a number of times, and that is on the issue of reporting.

I've been very clear that one of the reasons we re-engaged the safe schools action team, under the leadership of my parliamentary assistant, the member for Guelph, is that we wanted to be sure that given the numbers of pieces of legislation where reporting is required, there were no gaps, that personnel in schools were required to report when there was a serious incident. My parliamentary assistant is going to be bringing that report forward within next few weeks, and I look forward to getting those recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I am not asking for details of the case. I know that you can't provide them, and I would never ask. But a student on your watch, with documented behavioural problems and troubled learning, was missing from school for two months. The wounds on her body were not all fresh, and she was clearly struggling in the months leading up to her death.

You have policies in place, policy directives that principals and teachers across this province take seriously. They are disturbed by this child's death, as we are. Why have you not conducted an investigation into why Katelynn Sampson was abandoned and forgotten in this school and on your watch, and what measures would you undertake to prevent this from happening again?

1120

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Obviously it is of great concern to everyone in our society that such a thing would happen. As I have said, I cannot talk about the specifics of any particular case, but what I can tell you is that when a child is not in school, there are attendance counsellors, there are superintendents and teachers and principals and education assistants, who are paying attention to that issue. Whenever a child in the province is not attending school, there are people in the system for whom that is a red flag.

I can't comment on the specifics of this case, but as I said, I am looking to the safe schools action team to give me advice on whether there are any gaps in reporting, whether in legislation or regulation or in policy, that we should be addressing.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question, of course, is to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Last week, 200 grandparents and grandchildren made the long trek to Queen's Park, and 100 more rallied in their hometowns, to make sure that this minister heard their voices, heard the pain and suffering that her changes to temporary care assistance programs are causing in our communities.

When will the minister actually listen to all the voices of grandparents raising their grandchildren and reverse her ill-advised changes to the temporary care assistance program?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, let me clarify something. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has said publicly many times that all the grandparents' temporary care assistance benefits are going to be cut off. That's not true. You repeated it on CHCH. All the members of the NDP, knowing that it's not true, are sitting there without saying anything. Those grandparents out there are getting upset, and rightly so, so that scare tactic should stop right away. The benefits are there to stay.

Do you know what? The member from Niagara had visitors; no one was cut off. The member from London–Fanshawe was visited by grandparents; no one was cut off. You yourself brought five grandparents last week—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I just wonder, if she's so sure about her position, why she wouldn't debate me on TV on Friday night.

There are four prominent groups representing grandparents in Ontario. Last June, one group met with the minister, and the result was the punitive and devastating change to their meagre TCA funding.

What further devastation will this minister be wreaking upon these at-risk grandchildren after her meeting tomorrow with Minister Matthews? You're only meeting with one group of grandparents. Why aren't you meeting with them all? I don't know what you're up to.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This member is saying things that are not true. I don't know if it's parliamentary to say it's not true, but it's not true. I am meeting with every grandparent who has asked to meet with me. Tomorrow, there is a group that has been asking me; I'm meeting with them.

When this member is saying that these benefits have been cut off—let's talk about facts. In Hamilton, in July, there were 181 cases. In October, in Hamilton, there were 185 cases on temporary care assistance. Province-wide, in July there were 4,027 cases; in October, there were 4,136 cases.

If there are grandparents who are not satisfied with the decision from the municipality, they should appeal it before the Social Benefits Tribunal. That's why the—

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

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Mrs. Liz Sandals: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Minister, research and innovation is a key part of our five-point plan on the economy. We recognize why it is so important to invest in innovation. We believe that when we innovate and when we are able to demonstrate that we have the latest, the best and the safest, we will attract business to our province. The future of the agriculture and food sector in particular depends on the benefit of a strong foundation of research in developing best practices and new innovative biotech and agri-food products.

The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs was in my riding of Guelph recently where she spoke at the official opening of the Bioproducts Discovery and Development Centre. Could the minister please explain to this House what work is being done at the University of Guelph by the research chair that will strengthen the agriculture and biotech sectors?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: We hear a great deal from our agriculture partners about the importance of research and innovation. I think the honourable member brings forward an opportunity for all of us to be aware of the good work that's going on at the University of Guelph.

Now, our government has provided a \$3-million endowment to the university to establish the Premier's research chair in biomaterials and transportation. Dr. Amar Mohanty was appointed as the research chair in 2007. He's an international leader and accomplished and very respected in his field of biomaterials. Our government has also provided \$5.9 million to the bio-car project through the Ministry of Research and Innovation, as well as \$6 million from OMAFRA for the Ontario Bioauto Council. Researchers are working on those areas that have been identified by industry stakeholders as key and important. We know that farmers in rural communities will directly benefit from these new opportunities and the new markets that will result, as a result—

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Our government's innovation agenda is a fundamental part of our plan to move Ontario's economy forward. It will help us sustain the high quality of life that we enjoy today and create the high value jobs of the future. We are sending the message to the world that in my riding of Guelph, and right across this great province, we have a team of researchers and companies that are looking to export to international markets while at the same time giving Ontario farmers and companies a competitive advantage.

Our government has invested heavily in our partnership with the University of Guelph, a partnership that has yielded significant results over the many years and continues to be the central hub of agri-food research and innovation activities here in Ontario, creating jobs and increasing the productivity of the sector. Speaker, through you to the minister, could she tell this House more about

this partnership her ministry has with the University of Guelph and some of the—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Minister?

Interjections.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Perhaps members of the third party don't really appreciate the value of the very unique synergy that is in place between OMAFRA and the University of Guelph, but our industry partners value it greatly. In fact, what we have in place there is quite unique in Canada.

Our renewed partnership that was announced in April will provide \$300 million over the next five years for ongoing research and innovation in the agri-food sector. A Deloitte analysis of the economic impact of this type of partnership and investment concluded that \$54.8 million of OMAFRA funding will have an economic impact of more than \$1 billion for 2006-07. That is an investment that delivers results. The partnership is a unique combination of government, industry and academia, and some of the results that we can see in our—

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The minister will be aware of a recent Globe and Mail article in which James Rusk reveals disturbing information concerning the activities of Environmental Defence Canada, specifically its costly challenges to decisions by the Ministry of Environment as well as the Ministry of Natural Resources. Mr. Rusk's research revealed that Environmental Defence, the Innisfil District Association and two private companies, where the direct financial interests at stake share common directors.

Will the minister tell the House what steps he has taken, or plans to take, in light of this information to ensure that the more than \$1 million in provincial funding received by Environmental Defence is in fact being used for the purposes it is intended and not to further private self-serving interests?

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, I'd like to thank the member for the question and thank him for providing me with a copy of the article a couple minutes ago. Obviously, we are concerned about issues like this. We will look into it, and advise him accordingly in the future. You know, our main concern within the Ministry of the Environment is to make sure that we have the best environmental circumstances for all of our citizens—whether we're talking about clean air, whether we're talking about the best land quality or whether we're talking about the best water system in the province. That's the main concern of the Ministry of the Environment. I'll look into these allegations and get back to him later on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: I thank the minister for his undertaking. He will know, or should know, that the Friends of

the Greenbelt Foundation transferred some \$600,000 to Environmental Defence Canada. The Ontario Trillium Foundation transferred some \$537,000, and now we know, as a result of research, that Environmental Defence Canada is actually a very active participant in challenging the government before the Ontario Municipal Board. Surely, the minister will agree with us that that is irresponsible and cannot be condoned.

Will the minister agree to ask the Auditor General to do a comprehensive review of where this money from provincial coffers has gone, how many organizations it has filtered through and for what purposes it is being used?

Hon. John Gerretsen: Many grants are given to a lot of different organizations to look after the interests that they're primarily concerned with, whether we're talking about the environment or anywhere else. How they expend that money in order to further their particular cause, to make sure that, in this case, the environment is looked after in the best possible way, is up to them. If there are some inappropriate relationships there, then obviously that should be looked into. But I'm not willing to go as far as this member went, as far as making all these various suggestions or insinuations that he has made here. We will look into this matter and we will get back to him on this issue in the future.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Minister of Health Promotion: Does the minister intend to continue funding Focus Community project substance abuse prevention programs: yes or no?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: I thank the member opposite for the question and I want the member opposite to know that the Ministry of Health Promotion is certainly intending to continue to look into programs that affect the young people of our province. We will continue to address the issues relating to prevention and addiction. It is a fundamental part of the ministry's mandate, which we continue to work on.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The McMurtry-Curling roots of violence report urges more funding for programs like these. Why is the long-running Focus program still waiting to hear its funding fate from the ministry when experts want more programs like this to tackle the roots of violence?

Hon. Margaret R. Best: Again, I thank the member opposite for the question. Certainly the roots of violence report is something that is of fundamental importance. We are currently looking into and reviewing the report. We in the Ministry of Health Promotion, as well as across ministries in the government of Ontario, intend to address many of the issues that are raised in that report. We know that in addressing those issues, we will address some of the fundamental and present issues that affect people in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The Minister of Health, in response to the supplementary, I believe, in consultation with the table and with the dictionary, used unparliamentary language.

Hon. David Caplan: I will withdraw, Speaker.

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

Question period has ended. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1134 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Beginning now and throughout the afternoon, there are going to be a number of people representing different legal organizations, law commissions, bar associations and the like, and they're going to stream in. I just want the House to recognize and thank them for the hard work they do in the administration of justice.

Mr. David Zimmer: Although they haven't arrived yet, I would like to introduce Susan Thorning and Donna Rubin. They're from the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors and the Ontario Community Support Association. These individuals head up those two non-profit organizations that I just referred to, and they do great work for seniors and their residential requirements here in Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I rise in the House today in response to a request from the office of the Minister of Education. Minister Wynne's office has asked that we notify them about questions we're going to raise in question period so that she may be prepared. I rise today to serve notice to the minister that I will do no such thing, but I will continue to give a voice to those students and their families who have suffered through violence and abuse in our school system at the hands of fellow students.

When my office is contacted regarding yet another case of student-on-student violence, I will be coming to you, Minister, to demand once again that you legislate mandatory reporting in our schools. Your pat answer about increasing the number of adults or throwing money at the issue will be cold comfort to those students and families who trust you and whose families have been shattered by your failure to act.

You know the problem exists, you know that there are actions you can take to make a difference, and you choose to hide your head in the sand. Principals across Ontario should not be called out because of your failure to create province-wide legislation. They need your support. Minister, your office should consider this notice,

because our students deserve protection, they deserve justice and they deserve the fullest attention.

RADIO COMMUNAUTAIRE

M. Gilles Bisson: On a eu l'opportunité cette fin de semaine de célébrer 20 ans de succès de la radio CINN FM à Hearst, une radio communautaire qui fait partie de la communauté depuis 20 ans. Il est très important d'avoir une telle organisation dans notre communauté à Hearst et dans les environs. C'est non seulement là où on écoute de la belle musique, mais c'est aussi là où on a la chance d'écouter son député provincial quand il passe à travers les ondes faisant affaire avec les manchettes et les nouvelles de CINN FM. Mais plus important, c'est une radio communautaire, et c'est ça la clé. Ça donne la chance à la communauté de se voir à travers la radio et de s'assembler à travers la radio pour parler. Ce qui est important pour la communauté, c'est de laisser savoir aux gens de la région de Hearst ce qui se passe, quels événements vont y avoir lieu, et d'avoir une manière de rassembler les francophones de notre région.

Monsieur le président, je peux vous dire que le monde à Hearst est très content avec la radio CINN FM, comme les autres radios communautaires à travers la province, et on dit à CINN FM, bonne célébration.

CORNWALL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Brownell: My riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has always been a great place to live, with an unparalleled quality of life. It is an ideal place to raise a family, establish a business or take a holiday.

This has never been more true. With major infrastructure redevelopment and a strong sense of community, great things are happening and being recognized.

I was proud to see that the Cornwall Community Hospital recently received the Ontario Hospital Association's Healthy Hospital Innovators Award for the good work they are doing. This award recognizes the commitment of organizations to implement strategies that will aid in the development and sustainability of a healthy workplace.

The Cornwall Community Hospital was commended for its continued commitment toward its highest values, those being respect, teamwork, integrity and compassion through the day-to-day work of its staff. I would like to congratulate hospital CEO Jeanette Despatie and her team for the work they are doing to make the Cornwall Community Hospital such an outstanding facility.

As MPP for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, it is my privilege to continue working with the Cornwall Community Hospital board and staff, with the city of Cornwall and with the labour sector to ensure top-notch health care services and delivery for the people of Cornwall.

With the work being done at all three hospitals in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, whether it be in Cornwall or Winchester, we will shortly have some of the finest health care facilities anywhere in Ontario.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Laurie Scott: I would like to share some comments and e-mails I have received since the introduction of Bill 126, the Road Safety Act, 2008.

From a 17-year-old resident: "I'm not sure why or how this part was thought up, but someone did not think it through. Is there not a climate crisis right now? Teenagers who planned on carpooling are now risking their licences. I will not be able to pick up my friends on the way to school in order to save them gas ... I now cannot volunteer to be the designated driver."

From a mother in rural Ontario: "Out here we drive 80 to 120 kilometres to play a game of hockey. In the city you have buses, taxis and the subway. Here we have nothing and everything is a drive. Pull your heads out of the city and don't make another law that hurts rural Ontario."

Another e-mail: "I understand the frustration behind the bill but this is the wrong way to handle this situation. Much consultation needs to be done before acting in haste."

We, in this Legislature, can all agree that the lives of young people are precious, and we should do what we can to learn from and help prevent further tragedies on our roads. But legislation needs to be sensible, reasonable and enforceable, as well as take into account the practicalities of living. The official opposition requests that the Minister of Transportation and the Premier ensure that a full slate of public input hearings is enabled, and this must include rural Ontario.

In my experience, I know that most young drivers take that privilege very seriously. They take their driver education and improvement courses, and they do their part to be responsible and safe young citizens. Bill 126 is a serious piece of legislation that will drastically change the law for Ontario's young drivers. Please let them be heard.

STARDUST BALL

Mr. Reza Moridi: On November 7, 2008, I had the pleasure of attending the Stardust Ball, organized by the York Central Hospital Foundation. Over the past 20 years, this event has raised more than \$4.5 million for capital improvements. This includes a new digital mammography unit and leading-edge surgical equipment, as well as construction that helped triple the size of the emergency department.

This year, the foundation has been able to raise over half a million dollars to purchase a safe intravenous infusion pump system, which will be installed in early 2009. Smart pumps are intelligent pumps programmed to ensure that patients receive the correct drug at the correct dose and at the correct infusion rate. Patient safety will be dramatically increased with the use of this equipment.

I would like to extend my congratulations to Nancy Coxford, chair of the York Central Hospital Foundation, along with the countless volunteers who have worked

tirelessly to make the Stardust Ball such a success. On a personal note, I offer my sincere thanks to Farsad Kiani, honorary chair of the gala, and Julie Fuda, chair of the gala, for their fine work.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Like many members, I have been receiving e-mails from concerned parents and youth who will be seriously disadvantaged by Bill 126 if it is implemented. The new restriction that drivers under the age of 22 are allowed only one passenger at a time in their vehicle does not take into consideration the impact on work, sports and even safety, such as teenagers acting as designated drivers. Especially in rural communities where public transportation is not always available, driving is a necessity.

One young driver wrote to me and said, "As a teenager myself, I can tell you that 'DDing' is a very common thing in Oxford county. A 'DD' is a person that drinks absolutely no alcohol, brings his/her friends to a party, stays there and drives their friends safely home."

With this bill, the likelihood of drinking and driving increases immensely. I'm sure this wasn't the government's intention.

1310

Another constituent of mine wrote: "I believe that it makes no common sense whatsoever to make drivers 21 and under drive in separate vehicles and eliminate carpooling. How are young people supposed to get to work, have designated drivers or travel with their friends?"

People are also pointing out the hypocrisy of this bill. The McGuinty government wants to cut down on carbon emissions, but this will increase the number of vehicles on the road.

This bill targets youth and punishes them without making our roads safer. Preventing carpooling, vacationing and designated driving, while creating more pollution, will be the result of the McGuinty government's poor planning that went into this legislation.

PROSTATE CANCER

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: For a few weeks now, I think some of my colleagues are wondering why I decided to sport a moustache all of a sudden. Some have the view that I'm trying to emulate the Speaker's good, charming looks; others are just too afraid to tell me that maybe that's not the look for me. But I want to share with the members of this Legislature that I'm participating in a charity event called Movember, the month formerly known as November. The idea behind this whole event is to grow a moustache in order to raise awareness about prostate cancer and to raise funds for prostate cancer research.

As we know, prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men. One in seven Canadian men is diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime, and 4,300 Canadian men will die of prostate cancer this year alone. Some of our colleagues themselves have fought, quite bravely, prostate cancer.

I'm very proud of my team, called Moral Support. Two good friends in my riding in Ottawa Centre, Dilip Andrade and Craig Haynes, are part of this team. We're out there in the community, raising funds and awareness about prostate cancer.

I also want to acknowledge some male staff in Minister Watson's and Minister Matthews's offices who are also growing their moustaches for this very good cause. So if you see them in the hallways and think, "Hmm, maybe a moustache is not the thing for you," thank them still for raising awareness for a very good cause.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: It is with great pleasure that I rise in the House today on National Housing Day to share with my colleagues and all Ontarians what the McGuinty government is doing to maintain social housing in Ontario.

In my riding and across Ontario, there are units of social housing that have fallen into disrepair. The previous government downloaded responsibilities for housing to our municipalities and provided zero funding to help maintain the housing stock in Ontario. The McGuinty government is back in the business of affordable housing. Municipalities across the province are busy allocating their share of the \$100-million investment in social housing repair funds from the 2008 budget. With this investment, Ontario municipalities are fixing leaks, repairing plumbing and ensuring units are more energy-efficient by installing new windows and doors. Toronto's share of this funding is \$36 million. Toronto's social housing tenants appreciated the government's investment in their housing stock.

On this National Housing Day, I want to congratulate the McGuinty government and the municipalities all over Ontario for investing in affordable housing. During these challenging economic times, investment in affordable housing will help our most vulnerable citizens through some tough times.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. David Zimmer: I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. It's an independent organization that has effectively represented non-profit providers of long-term-care services and housing for seniors in this province for over 85 years.

I would also like to recognize the Ontario Community Support Association, whose membership consists of 360 not-for-profit home and community care agencies who help seniors and disabled individuals live at home. Both these organizations recognize that the long-term homes sector plays an important role in helping the government achieve its health care objectives. By providing our seniors with the health care attention they deserve, it plays an important role in helping the government maintain its mandate.

Colleagues, it's important that we learn about these organizations and the role they play in providing long-term care. I encourage you all to attend their reception in the Legislative dining room this evening at 5 o'clock. I want to particularly thank Donna Rubin and Susan Thorning, who are representatives of the organizations. They and their organizations are doing great things for Ontario's seniors, and I hope you will all attend the reception.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FAMILY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

LOI DE 2008 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE DROIT DE LA FAMILLE

Mr. Bentley moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 133, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to certain family law matters and to repeal the Domestic Violence Protection Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 133, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne des questions de droit de la famille et abrogeant la Loi de 2000 sur la protection contre la violence familiale.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Hon. Christopher Bentley: Defer to ministerial statements, please.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

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

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

Hon. Monique M. Smith: We move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice be waived for ballot item 63.

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

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FAMILY LAW DROIT DE LA FAMILLE

Hon. Christopher Bentley: It's my privilege to rise in the House today to propose legislation that would, if passed, better protect and support Ontario children and families in times of family breakdown and distress.

Our new legislation would reform family justice for Ontarians by taking away some of the cost and stress that goes along with the difficult decisions made in our family courts. We are relentless in our determination to reform justice for Ontarians, be it criminal, civil or family, so they can find justice in their most difficult times of need.

Aujourd'hui, les réformes que nous proposons viennent en aide aux familles de l'Ontario, en particulier les femmes et les enfants, pendant qu'elles traversent certains des moments les plus pénibles et les plus personnels qu'elles rencontreront.

Our proposed reforms help Ontario families, particularly women and children, through some of the most painful and personal circumstances they will know. No one should live in fear in their own homes, which is why we're responding to over a decade of calls to change restraining order laws by expanding eligibility to protect those who've lived together for fewer than three years.

Our proposed legislation will also allow us to prosecute restraining order breaches under the Criminal Code. This change would allow for tougher enforcement by our police partners, and the accused would face stricter bail conditions. It's noteworthy that we're introducing this during Woman Abuse Prevention Month.

Those who speak out on behalf of the victims of woman abuse have wanted this reform for over a decade and there are many in this House—in fact, all in this House, of all parties, have stood and called for reform for over a decade and we're answering that call. I thank all my colleagues from every party for the tireless advocacy that they have been engaged in over the years. I thank the member from Durham—Mrs. Munro was here at the announcement—the member from Whitby—Oshawa, as well as my colleagues Minister Matthews, Minister Pupa-tello and Laurel Broten for their long-standing advocacy in bringing this today.

I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the many participants in the system of justice, in all the galleries—people who have tirelessly advocated for reform for years and are seeing it come to fruition. Without the tireless advocacy of all of them, we wouldn't be here today.

1320

A child is our most precious gift. The loss of a child, in tragic circumstances, shakes us with sadness and anger and moves us to ask: Why did this happen and what more can we do?

We entrust our courts with the responsibility of deciding what's in the best interests of a child when a non-parent wants custody. Before, very little evidence was required before this decision concerning our most vulnerable could be made. Now, if there's evidence of a violent history relevant to the ability to care for a child, we want the court to know about it. That's why our proposed reforms would protect children by requiring a sworn statement, and for non-parents, children's aid society information and the police records check, something specifically mentioned from a question earlier by the member from Whitby—Oshawa.

There's something else we're going to do for children. We propose to require annual financial disclosure where child support orders exist, making it easier to obtain fair child support payments. This change is another step toward making sure that good parents pay, and it will also go a long way to reducing family court battles and freeing up court time. Dans les cas de rupture de mariage, rien n'est plaisant ou facile. Our proposed reforms would allow families to spend less time and money on family court proceedings and more on getting on with life.

One of our most valuable assets to be divided between spouses is often a pension. The legal status quo is not clear about how to deal with pensions in circumstances of family breakdown, which adds to the stress and cost of prolonged court disputes. That's why, together with the Minister of Finance and pension experts and officials as well as the bar, we're proposing changes to clarify the division of pensions when marriages break down. By helping to sort out the value of pensions, we'll also free up valuable time in our courts. I'd like to make special mention of the great work done by the Law Commission of Ontario in proposing much of what will be found in the reforms.

Many of the changes today are the product of years of work by our justice partners in the Family Law Working Group, the bar association, Catulpa, the law society, the Advocates' Society and so many others. They're here with us today and we owe them a debt of gratitude.

This legislation will make the law fairer for families going through the anguish of marriage breakdown. It will reform family law to make it simpler and less expensive, strengthen the rules to help protect women and children, and I ask the members of this House to join me in supporting the proposed legislation.

FAMILY LAW

Mrs. Julia Munro: I am very pleased to be able to respond to today's announcement. We are happy to see that the government has, through this proposed legislation, addressed some of the very serious concerns and flaws in our current system. We're also very happy to see that the government is acting on the suggestions we made over the summer regarding non-parent child custodies.

On Sunday, August 3, 2008, seven-year-old Katelynn Sampson was found dead in the apartment of her guardian, Donna Irving. Irving was granted full and final custody of Katelynn Sampson this year; despite having many criminal convictions. Katelynn was supposed to be placed in Irving's custody while Sampson's biological mother straightened out her life.

Immediately after Katelynn Sampson's death, we as a caucus called for mandatory criminal checks in cases where someone other than the child's parent is applying for custody and the mandatory appointment of the Children's Lawyer to independently represent the child in these cases. Obviously we are pleased and certainly appreciate the recognition that we had made to the discussion. In looking back over the high-profile cases of

Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson, it becomes clear to everyone that many of the problems that had existed with the earlier case contributed in some ways to the Sampson case.

In the Baldwin case, the court was never made aware of his grandmother's criminal record; there was no requirement for the judge to ask. But I do have a question in the sense that Baldwin's grandparents were convicted over two years ago and the government waited, but they didn't wait for the court proceedings against Donna Irving to end before they announced these changes. I think it's a legitimate question, then, to ask why the difference in approach?

The announcement today is obviously one piece of the problem. Unfortunately, more than one ministry failed poor Katelynn Sampson. Today in the House, Joyce Savoline asked the Minister of Education what investigations, if any, had been conducted into the school's failure to contact authorities and report Katelynn Sampson's prolonged absence prior to her death. People will remember that she had been absent from school for two months and that the wounds on her body were not all fresh. She was clearly struggling in the months leading up to her death.

We recognize that today's announcement is a good first step, but we obviously have questions that will need to be answered as this legislation proceeds. Clearly, enforcement is the paramount piece. With all of these initiatives that are being proposed in this legislation comes the issue around enforcement. I think that part of that enforcement is also going to mean a significant allocation of funding, even in the areas, for instance, of training and being able to measure outcomes, to be able to say that we have in fact taken steps that are going to make a difference in people's lives.

There are some of the challenges around things like an annual financial disclosure. What happens if they don't show up? What happens if this kind of process breaks down? These are obviously things that the government is going to have to address.

I think one of the areas that is also very important to look at, as has been raised in the areas of pensions and custody, is access to the courts. Certainly, this is something that we have heard over and over again from people who are struggling through divorces and ongoing consultations and court hearings for custody. These are things that, frankly, bankrupt people and therefore, as a part of that, restrict the access.

In the final moment, I would just remind everyone that at the end of the day, we're talking about children who are abused, and that abuse is for life. We know the stats. They remain victims or they become abusers themselves. This is the task at hand.

FAMILY LAW

Mr. Peter Kormos: Like everyone else in this chamber, we in the NDP take these matters very, very seriously. We believe that this is an opportunity, in the course of the process of this bill, through second reading

and then into committee, to have some pretty extensive committee hearings. At the same time, we're concerned that this bill contains but half measures that don't fully address a very serious problem. In the short time allotted to it, Ms. Horwath is going to address this as children's critic for the NDP.

A restraining order is only a piece of paper to a violent party who has no intention of being bound by it. We've seen that far too often. After the deed has been done, after the assault has taken place, after the murder has been accomplished, calling the police does little to protect that woman or child. So we can't just talk about more accessible restraining orders. We have to talk about shelters for abused women. We have to talk about second-stage housing. We have to talk about the fact that most women who flee violent households are forced into a poverty that leaves them in a position where they're unable to care for their children. That's a great amount of leverage, and it has been used many a time to force a woman who's a victim back into that abusive home.

If you talk about the proposals with respect to the considerations for a court when considering an application for custody of a child, my goodness, to merely change the existing check-off-the-box application form with one where you check off the boxes and then swear it to be true doesn't seem to me to accomplish a great deal. We have to have, in the view of the NDP, an on-site inspection and the involvement of a professional, whether they're from child and family services or a similar child protection agency, to conduct subjective evaluations so that recommendations can be made to the court.

1330

A criminal record check, in and of itself, is not sufficient. A sworn application, in and of itself, is not sufficient. Those children who are the subjects of custody applications deserve and ought to have the full protection of that court. If they can't get it in that court, then where else are they going to get it?

We can't talk about protecting children unless we talk about major reforms to legal aid in Ontario so that, more often than not, women and children have access to legal counsel, because the reality is that there are precious few competent family lawyers who can afford to practise family law in our family courts on legal aid certificates.

We need adequate staffing of family clinics, and we need competent and experienced duty counsels working in our family courts. You've got to understand that the family courts here in Toronto and across this province have become but sausage factories. Cases are being processed so quickly and the pressures on the court, on the judges, on the staff, are so great that we're confident that there are lapses on a daily basis and children are being put at risk.

In the course of discussing this proposal, we have to talk about ensuring that we have adequate numbers of judges, that we have judges who are focused solely on family law matters, so they can develop the expertise and the sensitivities that are necessary. We need legal representation for people in those courts. We need an active

and more aggressive Office of the Children's Lawyer from the Ministry of the Attorney General. We need on-site examinations by trained professionals who can assist the court by making recommendations about the competency of the proposed custodial parent to fulfill that role in every respect.

FAMILY LAW

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I just want to echo the comments made by my colleague from the Welland riding.

The reality is, this is but a small piece of the puzzle, and this government knows this darned well, because during its term of office there have been a number of significant domestic violence cases that it has ignored, in terms of making real change. We have a Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services who is not prepared to call an inquest into the brutal murder of a young boy in Brantford. We have the death of Lori Dupont, resulting in jury recommendations that this government still has not acted on. The situation of domestic violence is epidemic in this province, yet the government has not acted quickly enough or far enough.

Absolutely, we'll look at the one piece of one side of the equation that is in these recommendations carefully, and we'll look for those committee hearings. But start acting on the things that will help women and their children flee situations of domestic violence: transitional housing, affordable housing, in neighbourhoods. That's what we need. That's what this government needs to act on.

PETITIONS

WORKPLACE INSURANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have received more petitions to do with Bill 119 and I shall read it.

"Whereas the McGuinty government has introduced Bill 119, Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2008, which makes WSIB mandatory for independent operators, partners and executive officers in construction; and

"Whereas this bill will cost the average business owner about \$11,000 while doing nothing to catch cheaters in the underground economy; and

"Whereas this bill will do nothing to make workers safer in the workplace; and

"Whereas there has been insufficient consultation with construction companies and stakeholders to discuss the impact of this bill or other alternatives; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government refuses to allow discussion of this bill with the affected parties through the committee process;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To revoke Bill 119 or to require the Standing Committee on Social Policy to travel across the province of Ontario in order to provide an opportunity for consultation with affected businesses."

I support this petition.

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas workplace harassment (physical/psychological) and violence are linked to the mental and physical ill-health and safety of workers in Ontario; and

"Whereas harassment and violence need to be defined as violations of the Occupational Health and Safety Act so that it is dealt with as quickly and earnestly by employers as other health and safety issues; and

"Whereas employers will have a legal avenue and/or a legal obligation to deal with workplace harassment and violence in all its forms, including psychological harassment; and

"Whereas harassment poisons the workplace, taking many forms—verbal/physical abuse, sabotage, intimidation, bullying, sexism and racism, and should not be tolerated; and

"Whereas harassment in any form harms a target's physical and mental health, esteem and productivity, and contributes to trauma and stress on the job; and

"Whereas Bill 29 would make it the law to protect workers from workplace harassment by giving workers the right to refuse work after harassment has occurred, requiring the investigation of allegations of workplace-related harassment and oblige employers to take steps to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related harassment;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to treat workplace harassment and violence as a serious health and safety issue by passing MPP Andrea Horwath's Bill 29, which would bring workplace harassment and violence under the scope of the Occupational Health and Safety Act."

I agree with this; I'm sending it to the table by way of page Sara.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's signed by a number of people, primarily in Erin Mills, and others from Oakville and Burlington. I especially want to thank Magda Moore of Berwell Road in Erin Mills for having sent this to me. It reads as follows:

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

"Whereas 'day surgery' procedures could be performed in an off-site facility, thus greatly increasing the

ability of surgeons to perform more procedures, alleviating wait times for patients, and freeing up operating theatre space in hospitals for more complex procedures that may require post-operative intensive care unit support and a longer length of stay in hospital;

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

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

I agree wholeheartedly with this petition. I’m pleased to sign and support it and to ask page Jenna to carry it for me.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Minister of Community and Social Services, Madeleine Meilleur, has decided that grandparents caring for their grandchildren no longer qualify for temporary care assistance; and

“Whereas the removal of the temporary care assistance could mean that children will be forced into foster care; and

“Whereas the temporary care assistance amounted to \$231 per month, much less than a foster family would receive to look after the same children if they were forced into foster care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse the decision to remove temporary care assistance for grandparents looking after their grandchildren.”

I support this petition and am pleased to affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Hamilton Health Sciences centre proposal to restructure health sciences includes plans to provide a children-only emergency room at the McMaster site;

“Whereas the closure of the Chedoke urgent care site has left over 170,000 Hamilton residents with the McMaster emergency room as the closest available emergency urgent care facility;

“Whereas there are over 170,000 residents in Hamilton that will be adversely affected by the closure of the McMaster emergency room;

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

“That the Ministry of Health take all necessary steps to ensure that the LHIN postpone their decision for 60

days to allow for HHC to engage in ‘comprehensive’ consultations to answer the concerns of the many residents” of the Hamilton area “who are affected by this decision.”

I support this, have signed it and send it with Tess to the table.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased to read this petition. It’s addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, and it is a petition that I’ve been reading, along with my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora. It reads as follows:

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

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

1340

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

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

There are a great many people from the city of Mississauga who have signed this. I join them in signing it, and ask page Sara to carry it for me.

INNISFIL EARLY YEARS CENTRE

Mrs. Julia Munro: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas on September 15, 2008, Simcoe Community Services announced that due to lack of funding by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Ontario Early Years Centre Innisfil satellite location located at 8000 Yonge Street in Innisfil, Ontario, will be closing on November 30, 2008;

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

“We respectfully request that the province of Ontario and its funding partners take any and all means necessary to provide an adequate level of funding on a consistent, ongoing basis to Simcoe Community Services for the purpose of keeping the Ontario Early Years Centre Innisfil satellite location open to the parents, caregivers and children of the town of Innisfil and surrounding communities.”

As I am in agreement, I have affixed my signature and give it to Jason.

LUPUS

Mr. Bob Delaney: There seems to be a small fraternity reading petitions today. I’m pleased to read this

petition submitted by my seatmate, the hard-working member from Niagara Falls. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas systemic lupus erythematosus is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals and governments, driving the need for greater awareness;

"Whereas medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are underfunded in comparison to diseases of comparable magnitude and severity;

"Whereas no safe and effective drugs for lupus have been introduced in more than 40 years. Current drugs for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to assist financially with media campaigns to bring about knowledge of systemic lupus erythematosus and the signs and symptoms of this disease to all citizens of Ontario.

"We further petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide funding for research currently being undertaken in lupus clinics throughout Ontario."

I'm pleased to support the member for Niagara Falls, to affix my signature to this petition and to ask page Sarah to carry it for me.

HOSPICES

Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas hospices on church or hospital property do not pay taxes;

"Whereas hospices are not-for-profit organizations providing emotional, spiritual and bereavement support and respite care to terminally ill individuals and their family members;

"Whereas a residential hospice (usually an eight- to 10-bed home-like facility) provides around-the-clock care to terminally ill individuals and support to their families;

"Whereas hospice services are provided free of charge;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to allow hospices across the province to be exempt from municipal taxes."

I agree with this and will send it with page Sarah to the table.

LOGGING ROUTE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with logging through the village of Restoule, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Nipissing forest management plan proposes to use Hawthorne Drive in Restoule, which features a single-lane bridge and narrow and steep sections; and

"Whereas area residents have grave concerns about community safety, traffic speed, truck noise and general wear and tear of Hawthorne Drive and the bridge in the village of Restoule; and

"Whereas the proposed route travels past the Restoule Canadian Legion and two churches; and

"Whereas alternative routes are possible via Odorizzi Road and Block 09-056;

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

"That the government of Ontario put the safety and concerns of the people of Restoule ahead of logging interests and ensure an alternate route is selected for the Nipissing forest management plan."

I support this petition.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Jim Brownell: I have a petition from a number of constituents in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the people of Ontario, deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents.

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act" as above "to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

As I agree with this petition, I shall sign it and send it with Brittny.

EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition to do with 911 services in Parry Sound and Muskoka. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is considering relocating emergency ambulance and fire dispatch services currently provided by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service to the city of Barrie; and

“Whereas up to 40% of all calls received are from cellphones from people unfamiliar with the area; and

“Whereas Parry Sound–Muskoka residents have grave concerns about the effect on emergency response times if dispatch services are provided by dispatchers who are not familiar with the area; and

“Whereas 16 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care-funded jobs, held by qualified communication officers from local communities, may be lost as a result of the relocation of dispatch services to the city of Barrie,

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

“That the government of Ontario put the safety, health and economic concerns of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka ahead of government efficiency interests and ensure that emergency dispatch services continue to be provided locally by Muskoka Ambulance Communications Service.”

I support this petition.

TOM LONGBOAT

Mr. Mike Colle: I have a petition to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.

“Whereas Tom Longboat, a proud son of the Onondaga Nation, was one of the most internationally celebrated athletes in Canadian history;

“Whereas Tom Longboat was voted as the number one Canadian athlete of the 20th century by Maclean’s magazine for his record-breaking marathon and long-distance triumphs against the world’s best;

“Whereas Tom Longboat fought for his country in World War I and was wounded twice during his tour of duty;

“Whereas Tom Longboat is a proud symbol of the outstanding achievements and contributions of Canada’s aboriginal people;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to recognize June 4 as Tom Longboat Day in Ontario.”

I affix my name to this petition, as I support it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated May 1, 2008, for the purpose of conducting its 2009 pre-Budget consultation, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs shall have authority to meet and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the week of December 15, 2008.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Probably normally most members would rise and say that they’re pleased to be on their feet to speak to this motion or it’s a privilege and honour to be able to speak to a motion. Let me just say on this one, I have the opportunity to speak to this motion.

As I understand it, this is a substantive motion that allows for up to eight and a half hours of debate. The critical part of the motion provides for the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to have the authority to meet and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the week of December 15, 2008. I know that there are probably those in the Legislature, certainly past and maybe present, who could probably have any number of us sitting on the very edge of our chairs during a long and intense debate over whether or not a committee should meet and adjourn from place to place during December. There are those, probably, who would be sitting on the edge of their chairs listening raptly to all of the reasons why, or their blood pressure would be rising and they would be anxious to jump into the fray. I certainly wouldn’t want to include myself among the history of orators in this place who could bring a motion of this nature to that kind of life.

1350

But it does give me an opportunity, as part of the motion, to speak, probably extensively, on the processes that we have the opportunity to use in this place by virtue of coming to some conclusion on how we’ll conduct ourselves as a legislative committee. This matter is before us today primarily because we don’t have the unanimous agreement of the three parties on when we should travel in Ontario. There’s certainly no disagreement that we need to have pre-budget consultations; as a matter of fact, we have already begun that process. We began that process formally as a standing committee last Thursday, in which we spent the morning, prior to question period, and the afternoon as a standing committee, with all three parties that day, hearing from those in Ontario who were able or wanting to present here at Toronto. That was the first of our hearings. Given the opportunity a little later, I may just comment on the variety of deputations, the witnesses that we heard from as recently as last week.

We are scheduled currently to meet on December 4 and December 11 here in this place, at the Legislative Assembly, in the committee rooms just below us to continue that process of hearing from Ontarians, from organizations in Ontario—principally organizations. It’s not the norm that we get large numbers of individuals wanting to present to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on the pre-budget consultations for the development of a provincial budget. More often than not, it’s organizations that want to be able to present to us.

I’m going to use some of the time to talk a little bit about the kind of process that we use. I’m going to go into a little more specific detail because this does require that through the work of all three parties—on the standing committee, we do have nine members, and from that, we draw one member from each of the three parties to act as a subcommittee. I know that virtually everyone

in this place is aware of those kinds of procedures, but there will be lots out there who may be watching us—the member from Trinity–Spadina often likes to say, “It’s 8 or 9 o’clock in the evening, and you may want to tune in in 15 minutes because I’ll be speaking then for 20 minutes” or 30 minutes or an hour, as the case might be. So for all those folks out there who may be tuned into the legislative channels who aren’t aware of the procedures that we might use in this place to come to some conclusion on some of the things we do, it might be of some general interest, because it’s not haphazard and it doesn’t happen by accident how we get to the places we get to.

The subcommittee report that was prepared was presented to the full committee at the beginning of its hearings last Thursday. I had the opportunity to present the subcommittee report, and it went like this:

Chairman, “Your subcommittee met on Thursday, October 30, 2008, to consider the method of proceeding on pre-budget consultations 2009, and recommends the following....” That was the preparatory clause that was presented so that people were aware of what it was that we were going to do. It was a result of that subcommittee meeting that this particular motion came before the committee with all of its addendum clauses.

Let me go through some of them; I could go through all of them:

First: “That the committee hold pre-budget consultations in Toronto on Thursday, November 20, 2008, Thursday, December 4, 2008, and Thursday, December 11, 2008.” That’s just the first subclause, and each of these had to be read into the record at the beginning of the committee hearing. So there’s probably no particular reason why the entire Legislature, all of whom are here today, shouldn’t have the opportunity to hear our subcommittee report as well.

We agreed on those three dates. As I said before, the first day was last Thursday—we read this into the record at that time—and we’re scheduled to meet again on Thursday, December 4.

The second bullet point says: “That the committee request authorization from the House leaders to meet during the week of December 15, 2008.” That’s the substantive part of the motion we have before us today: that we meet during the week of December 15, 2008.

The third bullet point references: “That the committee hold pre-budget consultations in Niagara Falls, Windsor, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Ottawa during the week of December 15, 2008.”

That’s not part of the motion we have before us, but it is a result of the subcommittee discussion that went on, trying to see which communities in Ontario we felt it would be appropriate for the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to travel to this year to hear from a fairly broad cross-section of Ontarians, that covered some considerable geography and, in essence, tried to touch upon various parts of this province, as the committee does on an annual basis. In doing that, each of the parties in the discussion had an opportunity to put forward locations that they felt they might want to travel

to, that their caucus may feel they should be travelling to or where they felt there would be a large representation of interest in the province. By some consensus, we came to agreement on what those locations might and should be.

You can see from the listing of five that we, as a subcommittee, have put forward this year that we are travelling from the very southerly part of the province, on the Niagara peninsula—Niagara Falls—to Windsor, one of the manufacturing heartlands of this province. We know the struggles and tribulations that manufacturing is going through, so it’s important and appropriate that we travel to locations of that nature. Often, some of the organizations that would like to speak to us find it more appropriate, and obviously easier, to meet in their communities than travel here to Toronto. It also provides an opportunity, obviously, for the local media and local citizenry and/or supporters of the organizations to be in attendance at those hearings, which might not otherwise be quite as convenient here in Toronto.

We also want to travel on an annual basis—at least in my limited time, we have tried to travel throughout the province, and we’ve tried to travel to northern Ontario. Some would suggest that Sudbury is not northern Ontario. I would suggest that probably most of the folks north of Sudbury would sometimes think of Sudbury as being in southern Ontario. We certainly heard that on occasion in some of the more northerly communities. Thus, we make efforts to travel to communities such as Sudbury and Thunder Bay.

Often it’s said that we should be travelling to small communities. We’ve done that in my limited time as well; we’ve travelled to smaller communities. But there are constraints at times in doing that. There are a couple of things that factor in to it. One is that smaller communities have a rather limited population base to work from. We found, on occasion, that the level of interest from the communities is not substantial enough to fill up a complete day of hearings, and thus we end up having people travel larger distances, who could not be accommodated elsewhere, to arrive at these less populated smaller communities to make their deputation.

From a practical standpoint, particularly as we travel in northern Ontario, it’s important to find centres of activity that have ready transportation for those who have to travel back and forth, and that have a sufficient population base and organizational base of communities of interest to give us the input we need, particularly when you’re talking about budgetary considerations, either for public services or from tax standpoints or what the economy is like at this point. Larger communities give us a broader cross-section, at times, of what’s happening in a bigger geography.

There are some practical constraints too in where we can travel from the standpoint of smaller communities, particularly in northern Ontario, where we’re travelling long distances. I’ll give you an example.

My first year on the committee when we travelled was, I believe, three years ago. As the committee had its discussions, we thought it would be appropriate to travel

to Atikokan, in northwestern Ontario. The travel at that time was in late January and/or early February. We travelled from Toronto on two very small planes. As a matter of fact, the planes were small enough that we had to gas up or fuel up in Sault Ste. Marie because they couldn't carry enough fuel, with the seven or eight passengers that that particular plane would hold, to get us to Atikokan.

1400

We arrived in Atikokan and we were fortunate that the weather was relatively co-operative for that time of the year, because you can imagine in a relatively small airport, there's really no such thing as a hangar. I think there was, if I recall, a small building on-site; certainly no staffing of that particular facility. You called ahead and were met at the site by someone who could transport you to the location we were staying at some 30 miles or so, I think, or 20-odd miles, outside the town of Atikokan.

It was a great trip. It was wonderful to see that small community. But at the end of January, flying in two small planes into a relatively small airport and wondering whether we were going to get out the next day so that we could make the next stop on the tour presented its own challenges. As a matter of fact, after we landed, the plane left and I think went to Thunder Bay so it could be hangared for the night. They were obviously concerned about icing occurring, and if it had stayed in Atikokan overnight, we wouldn't have been able to de-ice because they don't have facilities, and thus we might not have gotten out of there.

So we make choices, as a subcommittee and committee, about the nature of travel around not only what communities it would be interesting to attend, but what communities it is practical, in part, for us to attend.

The fourth item on our subcommittee report: "That the committee clerk, in consultation with the Chair, post information regarding pre-budget consultations on the Ontario parliamentary channel and the committee's website."

Now, this is a pretty straightforward thing and it's pretty well agreed upon that we need to, obviously, get information out there as readily as we can about the nature of the work that the committee is going to do, the nature of the locations it's going to travel to and the timing of those locations so that people and organizations can begin thinking about whether or not they want to present. In many cases, they've already made up their mind in that regard, but it does frame it a little bit as to the time they might have available to them.

Item five in our subcommittee report: "That the committee clerk, in consultation with the Chair, place an advertisement, no later than the week of November 3, 2008, in a major newspaper of each of the cities in which the committee intends to meet, and that the advertisements be placed in both English and French papers where possible."

Again, when you read this stuff and you look at it, you think this is pretty straightforward, but each year, as we have the debate among the subcommittee, there is dis-

ussion around the nature and the extent of the advertising. We talk about whether we advertise in a single major newspaper or we advertise in two major newspapers. Do we advertise in community newspapers or just major dailies? Do we advertise in all communities in both official languages? Do we advertise in any papers in other than the two official languages?

Now, on paper, at the end of the day, it might seem like something pretty straightforward. Often the matters of structure and advertising become a matter of discussion among the three party members.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Talk about the economy.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I hear members opposite talking about, "What about the economy?" The motion before us, to stay to the motion before us, speaks to the committee on finance and economic affairs having the authority to meet and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the week of December 15, and thus we're talking about the reasons and the rationale and the strategies by which we got to those decisions.

Sixth is, "That each party provide the committee clerk with the name of one expert witness and one alternate no later than November 27, 2008."

Each year, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs deliberately seeks out the opinions of experts. We don't solely ask the public at large and organizations if they want to make representation as witnesses, but we seek out experts in the field. Each of the three parties allocates an expert witness, and they come with different perspectives on the economy, and it makes for a very interesting part of the debate that goes on at that point in time. So each of the parties goes away to identify their expert witnesses and an alternate, to ensure that we have folks available.

This activity just doesn't happen casually. You don't suddenly decide to have a committee meeting one day and expect everyone to show up and for it to run smoothly. It's only when you have, ideally, full agreement that things work the best.

Seventh: "That expert witnesses be offered 15 minutes for their presentation, and be given five minutes of questioning from each political party."

We get pretty specific about how we articulate what it is that we want witnesses to be able to present, from the standpoint of time frame, and specific about what each party will be able to do from the standpoint of asking questions or commenting on the activities of the expert witness at this point in time.

The expert witnesses, we agree, can be quite concise when they're asked to be. If you gave them each an hour, they would be able, I'm sure, to fill that hour, providing us with information; if you gave them two hours, they could provide us with two hours of information. We've found, at least of late, that in this year, by this motion, 15 minutes is an adequate time for them to be concise in the context of that committee work, and provides an opportunity for each party to be able to ask questions of that particular expert.

Eighth on our subcommittee report: "That expert witnesses be scheduled to appear before the committee in

Toronto on Thursday, December 4, 2008, or Thursday, December 11, 2008, subject to their availability.”

It would seem to be, “Well, just whenever they’re available,” but that’s not the case. We have to have some agreement as to when best to hear those expert witnesses and where to hear those expert witnesses. This particular year, we decided that we would offer them two dates on which they could appear before the committee, and sent the committee clerk off to do that work.

As it turns out, two of those expert witnesses were available on one of those dates and the third was available on the alternate date. The committee clerk came back to the subcommittee members to advise us of that, because there might have been some expectation in our minds that it might be easy to coordinate all of these three individuals and organizations on the same day. We have agreed, as we laid out in our subcommittee report, that we would hear them on the days that they were available to us.

Ninth: “That interested people who wish to be considered to make an oral presentation in Toronto contact the committee clerk by 5 p.m. on ... November 17, 2008.” So in late October, we set out a time frame of about two and a half weeks, as the advertisement was being done in the parliamentary channel and the like, for people in Toronto to get to the clerk by a specific deadline if they wanted to make representation before the committee.

Interestingly enough, each of the parties, through the committee clerk or independently, was contacted by organizations that would have missed that deadline. The question was: “Well, I missed the deadline, you know. We just missed it by an hour. We were busy doing other things. Do you think that if you had unanimous agreement among the three parties, we could be heard on that day?”

That causes its own difficulties, because we may have one or we may have 10 organizations. There was actually one or more who were rejected for exactly that reason. We advised those groups that we will be travelling and they have an opportunity to make their submission to be heard at an alternate location, but not at their preferred location and not on their preferred date.

I don’t, off the top of my head, recall the numbers, but there was sufficient interest in the Toronto location that we had to prioritize the list of those who wanted to speak. We do that regularly, as well. Each party takes a look at the list; we have a fairly long list to prioritize. We give a list of alternates. The clerk takes it all, blends it all together, and to the extent possible, accommodates all of those people. And there will be some who might not be able to make an oral presentation to the committee.

Item 10 in our subcommittee report spoke to that issue of the subcommittee prioritizing the list of requests and returning it to the committee by 12 noon on Tuesday, November 18. So from the time we closed off the time for oral presentations and finalized the list, there was a short turnaround for each of the parties to be able to submit their prioritized list as well as alternates for the committee clerk to compile.

1410

We set some dates out: “That interested people who wish to be considered to make an oral presentation in Niagara Falls, Windsor, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Ottawa contact the committee clerk by 5 p.m. on Friday, December 5, 2008.” Once again, we’re being pretty specific about giving lead time, putting deadlines on and getting advertising done so we can actually hear from people on the times that we had considered setting aside. Subject to how this motion pans out, we’ll be able to work through this. Similarly, item 12 spoke to the subcommittee members prioritizing those lists as well, not just the ones in Toronto.

We authorized the clerk through item 13 that “if all requests to appear can be scheduled in any location, the committee clerk can proceed to schedule all witnesses and no prioritized list will be required for that location.” In essence, if you have this much space in the day and you have enough space to take all the witnesses, then they’re all on. If you have too many witnesses and too little space, then it’s back to the three parties to prioritize the list.

Item 14 in our subcommittee report—these things are rarely short: “That the minimum number of requests to appear to warrant travel to a location be eight.” For the most part, our committee Chair, the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, runs a tight ship during our committee hearings. He needs to. We want to hear from as many witnesses as we can in the time available and we want to be respectful of their time. We’ve run into occasions where we were preparing to travel to rather distant locations and found that there were only three, four or so interested witnesses. It hardly seemed reasonable for us to travel many hundreds of miles by air with a committee of nine, with a support staff of three or four from the clerks’ office, plus a single support staff from each of the three parties, plus the technical crew that’s necessary to set up and take down, plus the booking of space for the meeting, plus the booking of hotel space that would be required to stay over in those locations—turning it around in a day is just not practical either.

Over the past couple of years, we’ve begun to build into our processes, at the behest of the Chair, some minimum numbers to warrant travelling to a location, so we’re not leading witnesses and the community to think that we’re going to show up there if there’s not sufficient interest in doing that. It’s worked pretty well. We’ve actually managed, where there were only a couple of witnesses who were interested, to accommodate them through a teleconferencing methodology, and they’ve been satisfied. They’ve had their opportunity to present to the committee, they’ve made their written submissions, and we have avoided the unnecessary time, travel and cost of travelling to a location where there wasn’t sufficient interest.

The witnesses themselves—that’s in item 15: “That all witnesses be offered 10 minutes for their presentation, and that witnesses be scheduled in 15-minute intervals to allow for questions from committee members if neces-

sary.” Again, we’re pretty concise. We ask those who want to make presentations to the committee to do it in a concise and precise fashion. Almost all of them will provide a written submission as well, and their written submission is often far more lengthy. It offers background on their organization or it’s specific to the issue that they’re presenting at that period of time, but their presentation to us is kept concise, as are our questions, so that we can maximize the opportunity to hear from Ontarians during the travel and during the hearings that we have here in Toronto.

“Item 16: That the deadline for written submissions be 5 p.m. on Friday, January 16, 2009.” Not only do we have opportunity to make oral presentations, but there’s obviously the opportunity as well to make written submissions, all of which will be included in the report that ultimately comes to the Legislature and the minister. We put a deadline on that of mid-January, and there are reasons for doing those things in a timely fashion. It’s not over when those submissions arrive. There’s then the work to be done by the committee staff in consolidating that information, in extracting from it the recommendations coming forward from those organizations and ultimately, at the end of the day, translating that information into both official languages, finalizing the report of the subcommittee when it finishes this work and presenting it to this Legislature.

The interesting part of our legislative process that this committee uses is item 17. It says: “That, in order to ensure that all scheduled presenters are treated with respect and dealt with without delay during the committee’s public hearings on pre-budget consultations, the committee adopt the following procedures.” These are procedures for committee members, and they are bullet pointed:

First: “That notice be provided of any proposed motion that would refer to issues that would normally be included in the committee’s report-writing stage.” This simply says that if a committee member wants to propose a motion that refers to issues we would normally see at the report-writing stage, they can do that, but they have to give notice that they’re going to do it. We can’t bog down the time for witnesses by having procedural debates in the committee.

Second: “That notice of a proposed motion be tabled with the clerk in writing.” It’s not good enough for a committee member simply to say to the clerk, “Oh, by the way, I’m going to be proposing this motion when we get to the report-writing stage.” He can give notice of that intent, but he has to provide it in writing, so that the clerk doesn’t have to guess what the committee member intends to do.

Third: “That the committee postpone consideration of the proposed motion until the committee commences its report writing.” What that says, in effect, is that we don’t deal with those motions at that point in time. We don’t deal with motions at the point where it’s the public’s opportunity to present to us. We save those for a point in time when it’s simply the committee doing its final work, and deal with those motions at that point in time.

The final bullet point: “That adoption of the above notice procedure would not limit in any way the right of committee members to move any proposed motion during the committee’s report-writing stage.” This says that even though there’s a need to give notice of a motion and provide that notice in writing during the hearings stage, this doesn’t mean that any member of the committee will be frustrated in his capacity to bring forward a motion at the point in time when we’re doing our own work and there isn’t direct public engagement.

So we have some fairly extensive procedural activities for witnesses and for the operation of the committee, to ensure that their time in front of us is used efficiently and effectively for our purposes, and we have the opportunity to listen carefully and politely and respectfully to our witnesses and not get bogged down, some days, in the politics of committees. That gets us through some of the process up to the point where we have heard our witnesses.

Item 18 in our sub-committee report: “That the research officer provide a summary of the presentations by 12 noon on Monday, February 9, 2009.” Not only do we have a committee clerk; we have a research officer who provides support and help. It’s that research officer’s job to summarize all those many, many presentations we are hearing and put those into a summarized format and provide them to the committee in early February. This is not a short task; it’s not an afternoon’s work. It takes the research officer and the support staff considerable time to prepare this material for us.

Item 20: “That, in order to facilitate the committee’s work during report writing, proposed recommendations should be filed with the clerk of the committee by 12 noon on Friday, February 13, 2008.” This is to facilitate the committee’s work. We need to have recommendations from the various committee members, from the parties, presented to the committee ahead of time, and we put some deadlines on that as well.

As we started to hear our first witnesses on November 20, having met on a subcommittee more formally as early as October 30, 2008—and we even had some preliminary discussion prior to that. We’re now into the middle of February, a full three and a half months from where we started. The work of the committee is ongoing, to provide a report back to this Legislature for consideration by the minister in the development of his budget.

1420

“Item 21: That the committee meet for the purpose of report writing on Thursday, February 19, 2009.” We’ve completed the pre-hearing work, based on our subcommittee report and subject to the fact that the matter was item two, which was the referral; in effect, the request to the House leaders for authorization to meet during the week of December 15. But we meet as a committee at that point in time to do the report writing. That’s the opportunity for us to debate, consider and vote on the recommendations that are put before the committee, as well as the content of the report prepared by the staff research officer and others.

There are only two other items.

Item 22 speaks to the authorization of “one staff person from each recognized party to travel with the committee, space permitting, for the purpose of prebudget consultations, and that reasonable expenses incurred for travel, accommodation and meals be paid for by the committee upon receipt of a properly filed expense claim.” I don’t know when this started per se; my time is limited. It was in place; I don’t know if the words were quite that formal at that point in time. It says that when each of the parties has one or more members on the standing committee—the third party officially has one member—it doesn’t preclude other members from being at any of the hearings. Members of the Legislature are always welcome to sit at the table at committee hearings, although they won’t be voting members of that committee unless subbed in for that purpose. The third party has a member on the standing committee, the official opposition has two members on the standing committee, and the government side has five members and the Chair on that standing committee, for the nine. Having a staff person from each of the parties there to support their members is very helpful. It’s a means by which we can acquire information effectively on the fly, depending on how one looks at that, for our purposes when we’re hearing from witnesses, when we know witnesses are coming, when we’re following up. It’s helpful for them to be able to keep track, keep notes; also, to be another set of eye and ears on what we’re seeing as the priorities moving forward.

Finally, there is item 23, and that would be the end of our subcommittee report. This was read into the record on November 20 in our committee hearing: “That the committee clerk, in consultation with the Chair, be authorized prior to the adoption of the report of the subcommittee to commence making any preliminary arrangements necessary to facilitate the committee’s proceedings.” It’s a procedural kind of process. One would think that you don’t need to have that that, but it’s helpful. It’s helpful for us to authorize the clerk, in consultation with the Chair, to begin the processes necessary to facilitate the committee’s proceedings, even before the full committee adopts the subcommittee report. The subcommittee has three members; the full committee, nine members. The subcommittee reports to the full committee. In the interim, the advertising needs to be done. It’s not always efficient and easy to have the committee come together simply to adopt the report until the committee actually meets. So the clerk can go off and do some of the advertising. The clerk can begin to look for spaces in which we’re going to meet when we’re travelling. The clerk can begin to look for travel arrangements to get us there and back, and around and about—buses, planes, whatever it takes. The committee clerk can begin to look for accommodation for a fairly large group of people on occasion.

I mentioned a while back our trip to Atikokan, which was really very interesting. I can’t recall exactly how it fell out at that point in time, but we were looking for

space in Atikokan for a large group. We were expecting a large number of people to want to present, because to a large extent it is a resource-based community, whether it’s forest activity or hydro production. We were looking for space and the only thing they could reasonably find initially, I think, was the second floor of a building. Well, that wasn’t going to work, because second floors are not accessible. We as a committee and as a Legislature have an obligation to ensure that those who want to present to us can actually do that, and disabilities should not preclude someone from reasonable access to a committee hearing. So the clerk was left with the challenge of finding alternate space. One of the challenges is that space is booked up for various activities; not everything is available. So my recollection was that he negotiated with the local branch of the Legion, I believe, for the Legion hall to actually arrange for someone to either change the time or move their venue so that they could accommodate the work of the Legislature.

I have to compliment him, obviously, on the work he did in doing that. It was a nifty bit of negotiation that he did. We paid a little more for the room than they might normally charge on a given day, and everyone won. We had the space we needed; we were accessible; it was large enough to accommodate the number of people that we had—and there were quite a number; the Legion had their space filled, and they acquired some additional resource for that; and the folks who were going to use it were reasonably accommodated as well.

Each of these 23 numbered points, plus a few bullet points, may seem at times to be laborious, overly procedurally driven; some may say, “Why is it even necessary?” It’s probably necessary because we don’t always agree, and where we don’t agree is where the challenges come in to be able to operate in an effective and efficient manner. There are occasions in the committee hearings when one or more members from all sides of the House might query the Chair as to whether or not they can bring forward a particular motion at a point in time, because they think it would be opportune, apt or appropriate, and the committee Chair has the capacity to refer to the report adopted by the committee—and this is not a standing order, in essence, for committees, if I can use those words; this is drafted each time we go through it. A lot of it’s the same, but it gets a little tweaking. But he has the capacity to go back and say, “No, the committee has agreed that under item such-and-such we’ll report in this fashion, that you’ll provide your notices in writing to the committee clerk, not just a verbal notice of motion.”

So much of what is in here, I’m going to suggest—and I can be corrected—we probably have unanimous agreement on, among all three parties. On the subcommittee drafting and presenting its report, we certainly had majority support of the subcommittee. My recollection—and again, I stand to be corrected if need be, but I think when we actually took it to committee on Thursday the 20th, we may very well have had a majority of the parties in support of the subcommittee report, but I can’t recall exactly, and I leave it to others to clarify that, if need be.

So our real challenge is whether or not this committee travels for five days, from December 15 to December 19, to five locations in the province of Ontario to hear from a great number of Ontarian organizations primarily, but probably individuals, on their thoughts and their priorities about the 2009-10 fiscal year budget.

Most Ontarians, when they think of a budget year, think of a calendar year. We're kind of familiar with the calendar year as being the year in which you function. We know businesses don't always have calendar years and the province doesn't have a calendar year; it has a fiscal year that ends at the end of March and starts April 1, and runs in that time frame. So we talk about the budget year 2009-10, because it runs to March 31, 2010. There was a time, not so much recently, in the past couple of years, although I'm sure over the years that has varied too, where the province brought its budget in in April and May—and I'm not even sure whether there was ever any provincial budget brought in in June, but certainly April and May were not uncommon.

1430

We've made an effort during the past three or four budgets now to bring a budget to this Legislature before the end of the fiscal year. Now, in my days in municipal government that was always a laudable goal that we never really seemed to achieve: getting a budget before the council of the day before the end of December, as we worked on the calendar year. It's kind of nice if you can set out the strategy, the goals and the expectations before you actually start spending the money. It's really hard when you set your budget three months into the year, saying to folks, "We've changed course a little bit, but don't worry about it. We're three months into it now already."

Part of the challenge, part of the objective, has been to move the budget process so it better aligns with the fiscal year, so that our expectations for the coming year are being set out before the end of the fiscal year. I don't know what the minister's plans are this year. I know he started his consultations earlier than normal. I would anticipate that he would want to follow in the same manner as we've been doing the past few years; that's the presentation of a budget before the end of the fiscal year.

That presents its own set of rather unique challenges to the committee and the travel and reporting schedule of the committee. I was referencing during my comments earlier on that rather extensive subcommittee report about a variety of dates, starting in November, December, January and through to February. That kind of time is necessary to be the most effective. The lead time for the staff is important to be able to prepare the reports, so we have the report written, we have the translation done and we're able to present it back to this Legislature for consideration. It's in the hands of the minister as he continues the development of his budget. The longer it takes us to complete that work, the less time there is for consideration of the comments of the public to be included in the budget deliberations. It's often as though they're being held over for a year as opposed to being dealt with immediately.

I recall not so long ago—just a couple of years ago—where I thought we were backing up very, very close to bringing the committee report into the Legislature, and the minister's budget was pending within a matter of days or a couple of weeks. That hardly seemed to be adequate time, in my view, for the minister or this Legislature to be able to consider the matters of the committee's report prior to the budget being presented, let alone during the budget debate itself.

So I think at a time when budgets were accepted in April and May as being the norm, it might have been okay to do your consultations later and later. But strictly from the procedural standpoint, it makes eminent sense to try to get your consultations done earlier, complete your work and give the maximum amount of time for consideration of those inputs in developing the budgetary process that we work on.

I haven't talked at all to this point about what are some of the other drivers. Clearly, we're as anxious as anyone to hear from the public on the 2009 budget. We started that process. We started earlier this year with our Toronto hearings than we have in the past, and we're anxious to get out there and hear from them now. There's no question that people are ready and anxious to talk about the economic climate and the challenges that they face.

Interestingly enough, even from our first day of hearings—and I made mention of a few of the folks who came to speak us about their desire to ensure that their organizations and their particular interests remain a priority for the province of Ontario. That always sets particular challenges, because priorities and budgets usually mean an allocation of money. Where that's an allocation of new dollars—which no one is anticipating at this point there's going to be a lot of—or whether that's prioritized existing dollars, it becomes a bit of a challenge. We need the opportunity to be able to get those inputs at the earliest possible time.

You know, it wasn't too long ago as well that, traditionally, this House returned for its spring session in the middle or the latter part of March. We've changed that. We changed it in an informal way, I guess, for a couple of years by having the Legislature come back for a sitting in February. Now, with the new standing orders, we have formalized that even more. So it becomes increasingly important, as we streamline and structure the way we function here in the times that we function here, that we look at the work of the committees to accommodate the work of this Legislature as well. It would be my view, and I would put forward the premise, that by doing the work of the committee, this committee, in an expeditious fashion, at a time when people are attuned to the budget, attuned to what's going to happen next year—it's good for them, as well as it works well for us.

We're not the only ones, though. Although we're speaking today to the motion that will give us the authorization to travel during that week, we would have hoped that the House leaders, who this matter was requested of—because that's their jurisdiction—would have come

to a unanimous agreement, and we wouldn't have set aside the time for this debate. Again, I haven't been here all that long—five years. I don't recall debating a motion on when a committee should meet. I may be wrong about that; I don't recall it. I know there are motions brought forward that are more, I'll call them "omnibus"—a bad word sometimes—but a motion that comes forward saying that such-and-such a committee, or committees, be authorized to meet from place to place and adjourn from place to place in Ontario during the intersession, during the time that the Legislature is not sitting. We need to have the authorization of the Legislature to go off and do that work. I've seen those motions come forward, and they tend to be far more generic and accepted readily. I don't recall having to debate it. This is somewhat unique, that we're going to spend some many hours debating whether or not we travel the province of Ontario for five consecutive days in locations from Niagara Falls to Thunder Bay to Windsor to Ottawa, to hear from Ontarians about their priorities as related to budgetary matters.

I mentioned, because early on someone suggested that I talk about the budget but I really was here to talk about the economy—I was here to talk about the motion. The last time I rose on a motion—I wouldn't say not unlike this; I think it was a time allocation motion—the member opposite was chastising me by points of order that I deviated from the motion at hand. So I was hesitant to do that, because I certainly wouldn't want to have that transpire again. So let me just take a couple of minutes out, since we are talking about the finance and economic committee and the status of the 2009 budget, and speak to what we've heard already, because we did have the opportunity already to hear from a number of organizations, primarily, and even an individual who is a member of an organization, there on her behalf and on behalf of others but not as a direct representative of the organization that she's part of.

We had a deputation from Colleges Ontario. It's not unusual that this particular organization seeks to present itself before this legislative committee. As a matter of fact, there are a number of organizations that traditionally we can expect to want to present themselves before us: colleges, universities, health care, long-term care, nursing, municipalities—sometimes as individuals, occasionally as an organization such as AMO—occasionally firefighters, police, school boards, business organizations, manufacturers—

Interjection: Farmers.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs:—farmers, those in the resource industries. So we normally anticipate that we're going to hear from some of those organizations. I don't know what the year is, it may be a matter of location and their frame of reference may change, but we expect to hear from them.

1440

We heard from the Colleges of Ontario. They spoke to us, and I suggest they spoke well about the investments that we've been making in post-secondary education.

We're pleased with that. But they also spoke of what they felt was a disparity in some of the funding allocations between themselves and their peer group, universities. They felt there was some disadvantage to the colleges in respect to that funding allocation and they wanted as much assurance as they might be able to obtain through this process that they would not be disadvantaged further in light of today's economic climate. They talked about their successes in putting students in the workforce. They talked about businesses that are facing labour shortages, looking for college graduates over university graduates by a ratio of 6 to 1. They talked about what they are producing in the form of students ready to go into the workforce and why, even in tough budgetary times, economic times, we have to maintain a sense of priority investment in colleges. They also recognize there's probably not a lot of new money, so they wanted to make sure that the share allocated to them was a fair share.

We also heard from the Ontario Road Builders' Association, and they had a summary document they presented us with as part of their presentation to us. Among their recommendations, if I could paraphrase, was that this is not a time to neglect public infrastructure and neglect road construction. So they were saying, "In spite of the fact these are tough economic times and you're faced with economic challenges, infrastructure is a priority you should be investing in." As we understand, they were saying, "There's not a lot of new money, but make sure that the money you have is used wisely and make sure the wise use of that includes investment in infrastructure so that when we come through this economic climate, we'll be well positioned to go forward."

So you might see a modest theme beginning to develop over just the first two presentations I've referenced, the colleges saying, "We know there's not much new money, if any, but we want to make sure you understand the priority of college education and what we provide to the workforce, and as we come out of this economic climate and the labour shortage it's going to be the colleges that are going to provide the workers that are going to fill those vacancies." And the road builders are saying, "In these tough economic times, we know there's not a lot of new money available, but the money that you have, make sure you prioritize it in the right way, and infrastructure is one of those priorities, and roads are a critical, important part of that as we come out of this economic climate that we're in, to be ready for the new economy." So you may see a bit of a train of thought by our presenters already developing as they make their case before us.

We had a presentation a week ago, Thursday, from the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada—AIAMC. This is a familiar group. These are folks that we hear from on an annual basis, and all three parties and government hear from them on a pretty regular basis, as we keep tabs on what is happening in the automotive economy. This organization is not the Big Three, as we refer to the Detroit three, the Big Three. I want to be sure that I get all of the group intact, or I'll

miss some otherwise. Membership includes BMW Canada, Honda Canada, Hyundai Canada, Kia Canada, Mazda Canada, Mercedes-Benz Canada, Mitsubishi Motors Sales of Canada, Nissan Canada, Porsche Canada, Subaru Canada, Suzuki Canada, Toyota Canada and Volkswagen Group Canada, so a pretty extensive listing of auto organizations that play an important part in our economy, both from the standpoint that some of their products are manufactured or assembled here, but also the downstream. Whether it's the dealer networks that sell the vehicles or service said vehicles, whether it's part suppliers, whether it's the service folks at the end of the day that service these vehicles over the long-term, they play an important part in the economy.

Their basic message to us was, "We're doing okay." There were more saying, "We're not the Detroit Three and we're not at that table with the Detroit Three, but we understand and are experiencing the issues of the auto industry in the world and in North America and in Canada, and if the determination is made that the Detroit Three need help, we can accept and understand that, but don't do it on our backs. In these tough economic climates, if you have to invest in priorities and if those priorities are the Detroit Three, don't do it at our expense." Does that sound a bit like the road builders? Tough economic times, not much money to spend, if you have to spend it, prioritize it and make sure that you consider as a priority roads and infrastructure—a little modification, but a bit of a theme.

We heard from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, and many of you in this place will know those folks and have met with them individually or collectively as they advocate for affordable housing, housing that can be available to families often on a more modest income. They're urging the government to continue its work on the affordable housing front, suggesting or even urging the government to expedite some of the commitments that have been made; some of those that we have yet been unable to fully accommodate. They're pretty precise in saying, in tough economic times when money is short and you have to choose priorities, don't forget about housing, because housing is a good investment. Not only does it create opportunities for labour to build new products and or bring existing products up to current standards, but it provides shelter for those who might not otherwise be able to afford adequate shelter. So in tough economic times when money is short, there may not be new money and you have to prioritize, don't forget how important affordable housing is, because we wouldn't want to fall behind.

We heard from Canada's chemical producers—and this is just our first day. This is one day at Queen's Park; this is not weeks of deliberation. This process works tightly, it allows people to make their representations, it allows us to gather the data and it allows us to begin to synthesize it.

We heard from the Canadian Chemical Producers' Association, and they're referencing their role in being productive in competitive enhancements in tough eco-

nomie times, that they bring value-added manufacturing. They brought some fairly specific recommendations, and those included tax concessions. We're going to hear, during our deliberations, from a great variety of folks—

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: I join in with my applause for my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East. I enjoyed his comments on committee meetings 101. I wish I had had that when I started. I do look forward to the time ahead with my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East and my colleague from Beaches–East York, the critic for the third party. Of course, the speaker just before me, from Pickering–Scarborough East, is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, so we spent a lot of time together, the three of us and other committee members—my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk, Toby Barrett, and Ted Arnott, from Wellington–Halton Hills—and we always enjoy hearing from the various groups and individuals who come forward with their suggestions that we then relay to the Minister of Finance for his upcoming budget.

1450

I think this would be the third time the three of us have done this—the three of us, at least—and I know Toby has been on the committee for a number of years, as has Mr. Arnott.

But there is a difference that I want to speak to, and that's why I rise in debate on this motion before the assembly. For the first time in recent memory, the pre-budget committee consultations, the committee listening to delegates, will end in December. Typically in January, February, and even, in the past, in March, the committee has gone out to various communities to listen, whether you're in Ottawa or Windsor, or in Niagara, where I'm from, to hear what groups and individuals have to say. But this year, for the first time in recent memory, the committee hearings will stop on—let me think about this—Friday, December 19.

The concern that I'm going to bring forward in my remarks—and I look forward to other speakers from the PC caucus; I know Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North will be speaking after me on behalf of the PC caucus—is that it does give the appearance that the McGuinty government is trying to bury the committee hearings under the shadow of the Christmas season. This is the Friday before Christmas that the committee hearings will be taking place, the week before, when a lot of individuals will be looking forward to the holidays and they'll be completing other work. We do have concern that we won't hear from all of the groups or individuals, live and in person, that we have in the past at these hearings. So I want to raise that concern, and I'll get into some more details momentarily.

Second, not only do we have the fear—well, "fear" is not the right word for it—the significant concern that the Liberals are trying to bury the finance committee's consultations under the shadow of the Christmas season, but we think that by ending the hearings at that point in

time, when the economic news seems to be changing by the day, becoming increasingly dramatic, we will not have the opportunity to present our best advice for the finance minister, who will do a budget some time in mid- or late March, because who knows what will have transpired in that short period of time?

I know my colleague from Oshawa, who is here in the assembly, has great concerns about the auto sector: a lot of jobs in his riding; a lot of families impacted by the auto sector. And we see every day several new headlines about the future of GM, Chrysler and Ford, let alone the parts manufacturers. Who knows what kind of condition they'll be in, in March?

I think it would be much more sensible for us to be hearing advice in the run-up to the budget, to give much more contemporary thoughts to the finance minister, and that's why we are objecting to the motion that is on the floor before us this afternoon.

Let me illustrate by way of some examples. Here is, from the last month or so, a survey of newspaper headlines. Karen Howlett's article in the *Globe and Mail* of October 23, roughly a month ago, a headline: "Ontario Runs Deficit as BC Slashes Taxes." That's on page 1 of the *Globe and Mail*. A follow-up story from Ms. Howlett the next day, October 24: "Brace for Bad Budget News, McGuinty Warns."

November 4, page A4, a shocking headline for many of us: "Struggling Ontario Joins Have-not Ranks." I mean, who ever would have expected that we would contemplate the news or read in our newspapers in the morning that Ontario, which had always been the engine of growth, the biggest job producer and wealth creator in all of Confederation, which had never in its history received equalization payments, would be joining the ranks of have-not provinces, due in significant part to the harmful and outdated tax-and-spend policies of the McGuinty government?

Steven Chase, *Globe and Mail*, November 4: "From Have to Have-not." Mr. Chase walks through what happened in Ontario's recent decline to become a have-not province.

Murray Campbell, November 8, 2008: "McGuinty's Challenge Grows Heavier by the Day." Of course, that's also in the *Globe and Mail*.

National Post, Monday, November 17, front page story: "Face the Facts: It's Going to Get Ugly," by Jacqueline Thorpe.

Mr. Campbell's column, November 20, 2008: "Auto Makers Presenting McGuinty with His Worst Crisis Yet."

Monday, November 24, "Canada May Be in Recession: Flaherty," referring of course to federal finance minister Jim Flaherty. That's David Akin—National Post that day.

On the same day, November 24, Financial Post: "RBC Takes \$1.6-Billion Hit Amid Credit Crisis."

Jamie Sturgeon of the Financial Post, Monday, November 24, 2008, the same day: "Consumer Confidence at Recessionary Levels."

That's just a small survey of the headlines that we've seen in the last month alone. If you were to compare those headlines to the month previous, you would not have seen the increasingly dire characterization of the economic news that is buffeting Ontario and our country as well.

I do worry, as we complete our hearings in December, that there'll be even more dramatic news happening in January and February that I do believe that the finance committee should be paying attention to and offering recommendations on so that our advice is as current as is possible. That's why I believe we should return to the tradition of the Legislature that the finance committee would travel in the new year and provide the best possible advice for the minister.

The current schedule, as my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East has said: December 15, we're in Niagara Falls, the 16th in Windsor, the 17th in Thunder Bay, the 18th in Sudbury, the 19th in Ottawa and then that's it; that's all she wrote, so to speak. We are hitting five corners of the province; we're hitting five major centres that I hope will attract regional interest as well. But I have to believe that as we get closer to Christmas, particularly, and other holidays being celebrated around that time, the ability of deputations to give us their best efforts will be challenged. I do hope that through our debate today we will revisit the decision of the committee to host those hearings in the shadow of Christmas and move them back to the traditional time in January and February.

I do want to note for the record that I find my relationship with the member from Pickering–Scarborough East and the member from Beaches–East York to be highly collegial. I think that we work well together in allowing for full and open debate at the committee. In a general sense, I did vote against the subcommittee report and expressed my concerns as well here in the assembly today. I do know that my colleague Mr. Barrett at committee voted against the subcommittee report. But we don't have the votes. Liberal members have the votes, and I do worry that it's part of the McGuinty government's plan to try to limit debate, to limit the participation of the opposition parties in the ongoing economic news. And who knows if they will prorogue the House as we head into 2009, and limit debate as we head into February and March? Under the new schedule, of course, we're scheduled to come back in mid-February. We'll see if that's actually the case or not.

A harbinger of this was probably the resolution that my colleague Mr. Arnott from Waterloo–Wellington had brought forward both at committee and here in the assembly—it actually passed—calling on the government to I think work with opposition parties and come forward with an economic plan. Mr. Arnott was well ahead of the game. This was a couple of years ago when he put this on the floor, seeing, if you will, the canary in the coal mine of manufacturing sites shutting down, laying folks off across the province. I think if Ted's advice had been followed by the powers that be in the Premier's office,

we could have done some good work together and offered very sensible advice that may have helped curtail the situation and may have helped curtail Ontario plunging over the cliff into have-not status.

Let me give you examples just to back this up. I know some of the members in the assembly have been around since this point in time; others are more recently elected. In 2000, to get ready for the 2001-02 budget, the committee met on the following dates: February 15 in Niagara Falls, February 16 in Toronto, March 6 in Toronto, March 8 in Toronto. So we were on the road in 2000, and actually also had Toronto-based consultations here at Queen's Park well into the new year as the budget was being prepared for that spring.

1500

The following year, 2001, for the 2001-02 budget, had the following dates: February 13, Toronto; February 14, Toronto; February 15, Thunder Bay; February 16, Toronto; February 19, Ottawa; February 20, London; and February 21 and 22 in Toronto. Again, the advice the finance committee would have provided to the then-finance minister—for the 2002 budget I think it was Janet Ecker—would have been quite close to her decision-making on the budget and would have given very recent input based on deputations across the province, having travelled in February 2001.

Oh, let me go on. I apologize; there were more dates in 2002. For the record: March 4 and 5 in Toronto; March 6 in Cobourg; March 7 in Waterloo; March 8 in Barrie; and April 4 in Toronto. So there was quite an aggressive schedule of committee hearings travelling to a number of different locations in addition to Toronto, some of which we haven't had a chance to visit recently.

In 2003: On January 27, 28, 29 and 30, the Toronto hearings took place; February 3 in London; February 4 in Sudbury; February 5 in Thunder Bay; February 6 in Ottawa. There was a small hiatus, and then it returned to the road on February 20 in Toronto as well. Once again, there were hearings in different corners of the province and major regional centres, in addition to Toronto, that took place in February of that year to give advice on the 2003-04 budget.

That fall, of course, the election took place. There was a new government. Dalton McGuinty became the Premier. Greg Sorbara was the then-finance minister. Was Mr. Arthurs the parliamentary assistant? No, you didn't start out there. You started out in municipal affairs, given your work as mayor and such. The parliamentary assistant at that time was Mike Colle, if I recall, so Mr. Colle would have led the consultations in support of the finance minister.

The Liberals followed a similar pattern to the previous Progressive Conservative government. In 2004: January 26 in Toronto; January 27 in Niagara Falls; January 28 in London; January 29 in Windsor; February 2 in Toronto; February 3 in Ottawa; February 4 in Timmins; February 5 in Thunder Bay; February 9 in Peterborough; February 10 and 11 in Toronto; February 12 in Kitchener-Waterloo. The committee then reconvened on March 10

in Toronto. Again, there were some rather extensive hearings both in Toronto and several different centres, at least six or seven outside of Toronto, that took place in February 2004 under the then-recently elected Liberal government.

For the next fiscal year, for the 2005-06 budget, again they began in January: January 10 in Sault Ste. Marie; January 11 in Sudbury; January 12 in Ottawa; January 13 in Kingston; January 17 in London; January 18 and 19 in Toronto; January 29 in Whitby; and on February 17 they reconvened in Toronto. So you had the committee travelling in mid-January to give advice to then-finance minister Sorbara, who I believe was still at the helm at that point in time.

I think folks know where I'm going with this, but let me—oh, we'll go though 2006 as well. My friend from Pickering-Scarborough East had mentioned Atikokan. Mayor Dennis Brown did a very good job, along with the Legion, the chamber and such, in hosting us in Atikokan. It was quite interesting to go to a small northwestern Ontario community to hear directly about the very real concerns they had at that point in time and would share today on the energy and manufacturing job losses and the devastation in the forest sector across our province. We were in Atikokan on January 25; in Timmins on January 26; in Cornwall on January 27; in Niagara Falls on January 30; in Sarnia on January 31; in Kitchener-Waterloo on February 1; in Toronto on February 2; then reconvening in Toronto on February 20. I imagine that was probably for report writing back in Toronto.

In 2007: January 22 in Windsor; January 23 in Kenora; January 24 in North Bay; January 25 in Ottawa; January 29 in Hamilton; January 30 in Toronto; January 31 in Belleville; February 1 in Barrie; and on February 22 they convened in Toronto, probably to summarize the work.

Once again the Liberals for several years had continued the same pattern of the previous PC government by travelling into the new year. Last year, as we conducted our pre-budget consultations in 2008 for the 2008-09 budget: January 21 in Toronto, the 22nd in Sault Ste. Marie, the 23rd in Timmins, the 24th in Thunder Bay, the 28th in Toronto, the 29th in Kingston, the 30th in Guelph, the 31st in London; and then March 31 for report writing, presumably in Toronto.

I'm pleased that folks bore with me through that length, but I did want to demonstrate that it has been the tradition of the finance committee for a good number of years—we went back to 2000; I'm sure even before that—to travel in the new year, to get the most contemporary advice possible on the financial situation from interested parties, be they individuals, groups or municipalities. Then the committee does its best to work together to take that advice back to the finance minister for his or her budget. That has been the pattern for almost a decade, at least on my list, and I'm sure well before that.

Now, for the first time in my memory at least, we will be travelling and completing our work on the road before

the Christmas season. You wonder why we've moved off that pattern. It seems to me that the McGuinty government has become increasingly queasy about the financial news, the role that their tax-and-spend policies have played in precipitating the decline in Ontario, to the point where we're last or second last in all of Canada in job creation. We're losing record numbers of talented individuals. They are trying to find work in other provinces, and not just Alberta but most of the others, and leaving Ontario. No doubt they have great concern about the case that is being made by the official opposition, among other observers, that it was Dalton McGuinty's early decisions to increase taxes to among now the highest in North America on business investments, as well as on middle class families; to increase the cost of energy, to close down without any real plan to replace about 20% of our energy supply; and with each cabinet meeting unrolling more spools and spools of red tape that are throttling the creativity of our entrepreneurs and the private sector.

I know my colleague from Sarnia and my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka have brought forward, quite passionately, the concerns that they have heard in their communities, and from the small business sector particularly, with the new WSIB bill standing in the name of Minister Fonseca that is before the assembly. In fact, we had the gallery filled just the other day with hard-working small business people from Muskoka and other parts of the province who wanted to express directly to the government the impact this is going to have, shutting some of them down, sadly, and increasing their costs by \$11,000 or more, depending on the size of their operation.

So I do worry that the motivation here, in moving away from our tradition of listening to the public in the new year and providing advice shortly thereafter for the spring budget, is motivated by the fact that Dalton McGuinty does not want to have any further debate on the state of the economy and his role in Ontario's decline in becoming a have-not province. Quite frankly, I wouldn't be surprised if we see the Ontario Legislature prorogue in the time ahead and come back further into the new year.

As I said earlier, you don't know where the news is going. Every day brings a different headline. If you talk with the auto sector, it seems that every day there are at least three or four different stories in the major media outlets about where that sector is heading. Bank reports are coming out painting an increasingly gloomy picture of Ontario's future. We, in the Progressive Conservative Party, would look forward to providing our best advice on how to get Ontario's economy back to its traditional spot as a leader in Canada. In fact, we always do that: We bring forward at least our dissenting reports filled with our recommendations because, as you know, we don't have the votes on the committee and not as many motions, not as many amendments as we'd like to see to government bills or to the report pass. I will be reading through some of these reports from earlier on to talk

about some of the work that the official opposition has done on the committee.

1510

I do want to give credit to William Short, who is the clerk of the finance and economic affairs committee. He's a very hard-working and dedicated public servant. It's been a pleasure to work with him on the committee. It's not easy, I think; it's almost like herding cats sometimes, trying to hold rein on 10 or more politicians who are on the road, let alone all the staff that come with committee: the translators, Hansard, etc. The clerk's work is very difficult, not only in lining up, as my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East described, who's coming to the committee, but in making the travel arrangements and making sure the committee runs on time and the folks know when to be there to provide their advice. I do want to give Mr. Short credit.

We have an experienced Chair, Mr. Hoy, the member from Chatham–Kent. Is that riding correct?

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Pat Hoy: Leamington now.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Chatham–Kent–Essex, soon to be Leamington, he says. All right. Anyway, we have an experienced Chair there who helps to guide the process.

The problem is that we have been rushing through the finance pre-budget consultations this year. I do worry that the time in which this motion, if it does pass, gets through the assembly will put Mr. Short on a very tight time frame to fill up those committee hearings, and all of the groups who should be given a chance to have their say won't have that opportunity at those hearings.

Just by way of example, if you look at the agenda of our first meeting here in Toronto on Thursday, November 20, while we did hear from some groups—my colleague referenced a couple of them, like Linda Franklin from Colleges Ontario, and you had also mentioned, I think, the road builders in your presentation. There were a number of gaps on the schedule. Historically, we don't have that number of gaps. For example, if you walk through the afternoon, we had People for Education at 2:30, the Canadian Youth Business Foundation at 2:45, a 3 o'clock presentation from Donna Rubin of the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. They were all very good presentations, but then we had a gap at 3:15. "To be confirmed" was at 3:30. Fortunately, the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada were there early and we were able to fill in some of that gap. I think the Co-operative Housing Federation of Ontario, who made an important presentation, spoke at their time at 4 o'clock.

Because of these challenges with the schedule—and again, 4:15 was to be confirmed; 4:30, to be confirmed; 4:45, to be confirmed. We had the restaurant, hotel and motel association, and then again, 5:15 was to be confirmed and 5:45 to be confirmed.

As I said, I think Mr. Short has great skill; he's incredibly dedicated, doing his best under the circumstances. But if we look at the first day of committee

hearings as an example, that gives me great pause about the motion that the Liberal government has brought forward and our ability to hear from the kinds of groups that we traditionally hear from or for new groups and individuals that may be coming forward, based on what we've seen to date and based on the incredibly tight time frames that Mr. Short and Chair Hoy are going to have to work under.

Unsurprisingly, this is consistent with what we saw around Bill 114. Bill 114, of course, was a budget bill. It was a bill that was brought in, infamously, on the day when the finance minister rose in this assembly and announced that Ontario was back in deficit financing, that despite a \$28-billion increase in revenues in the provincial treasury, Ontario was going to be running a deficit. Just on that point, if Ontario's government, the McGuinty government, had spent at a level of inflation plus population growth—it's a relatively generous modifier, if you will—they would still have some approximately \$8 billion left in the kitty, if all that revenue had come in. That could have helped to fund reductions in taxes for our beleaguered business sector; that could have helped with some infrastructure investments to provide for a better future for Ontario businesses and families. But instead, that massive increase in revenue was frittered away. I think if you asked the average person in the Rotary Club or down at Sobeys on a Saturday morning doing the shopping if they've seen \$28 billion in increased benefits as a result of this spending, you'd be hard pressed to find many. It would be a very small minority that would agree that that money was put into the right priorities, given the demands today.

Bill 114 was brought in on the infamous day of Ontario's return to budget deficit financing. I guess we could have predicted what would happen with the finance hearings when we looked at the timeline for Bill 114. I think only a small handful of Liberal members rose to speak this bill, even though it was a budget bill, even though it had approximately 20 or 21 different schedules, impacting everything from the aggregates sector to long-term-care homes to senior citizens and even to attendance in question period by cabinet ministers. Only a handful rose to debate it.

I know that a number of members of my caucus who wanted to speak to it did not have the chance, because the bill was time allocated on November 3. Therefore, under the rules, there was the vote the next day. The bill was carried on division. We voted against it, and the NDP voted against it; the Liberals had the votes, so the bill passed. But again, debate was cut short by a time allocation motion, also known as guillotine motion.

Here are the peculiar aspects—"peculiar" is probably too modest a word—the very upsetting aspects of the time allocation motion. Amendments to Bill 114 were due by noon on November 5. So the bill was ordered to committee on November 4, and amendments were due by noon the very next day. The deadline to apply for public hearings was 5 p.m. on November 5, 2008, and then public hearings occurred on November 6. So the bill was

ordered to committee on the 4th, and average Ontario citizens and interested groups were expected to prepare presentations on this mammoth budget bill, covering 20-some different schedules, within 48 hours, on November 6. Then, in a feat that defies physics, it was expected that what the committee members heard on November 6 would help them produce amendments to the bill on November 5.

Let me make that clear, Mr. Speaker. We had committee meetings on November 6. We listened to groups like the Coalition After Property Tax Reform and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, but if we liked something in the presentations we heard, the amendments were due 24 hours earlier, on November 5. Short of borrowing Dwight Duncan's time machine, it's obviously impossible to take what we heard at the committee hearings and move it into amendments to the bill, given the bizarre and dramatically unfair and undemocratic aspects of the time allocation motion on Bill 114.

Then, it was ordered for third reading. It was reported without any kind of amendment. We had brought forward some amendments. We had our own amendments; we scrambled. My colleague from the NDP brought forward several amendments. I know we agreed on some and disagreed on others. I think he supported some of mine and I supported some of his; they seemed sensible.

I don't think it's Mr. Arthurs. He didn't crack the whip. Somebody else over there cracked the whip. Despite the fact that we actually found agreement—our parties have very divergent views on a number of issues. But the fact that NDP and Conservative members supported some very sensible motions that either party had brought forward, but the fact that the Liberals—every one of them—voted them down tells me that it was more likely that they were whipped to vote them down as opposed to listening to the actual case made at committee.

Then, despite the bill covering 68, 70 pages, something like that—Lord knows how many different acts it covered—the government members didn't bring forward a single amendment to the bill either, which defies reason. So Bill 114 was reported to the House on November 17, 2008, and then the time allocation motion, if I recall, allowed for a total of one hour of debate. So we had 20 minutes, the NDP had 20 minutes and the government members had 20 minutes, and then she was done.

Perhaps we in the opposition could have read the intent of the McGuinty government to try to push everything through before Christmas and then go quiet, hoping that the economic clouds pass over, or that they won't get blamed for their tax-and-spend policies that impact the economy. Nonetheless, Bill 114 did not allow for much input from the general public and was rammed through the Legislature, and now we find ourselves in the same situation in the pre-budget consultations, seeing them end in the week before Christmas. As I suggested, I think it's going to be awfully difficult for many people to find the time, given all things happening in the third week of December, to put together the report they probably would

if they had the time and the committee was restored to its regular hearings in late January or early February.

1520

We'll see where this motion goes. It's the intention of the PC caucus to vote it down. Whatever happens, we'll continue to do our work. If our motions are not adopted, our good Conservative motions to stimulate the economy, if they get voted down by the government members of the committee—we do put together our pre-budget consultation dissenting reports. I hope that the Minister of Finance takes the time to read through them. I've gathered them up because I think they always make for good reading; very good advice. Secondly, it's interesting, too, to see the topics that were highlighted and compare that to the situation we find ourselves in today.

I have in my hand the Pre-Budget Consultation Progressive Conservative (Official Opposition) Dissenting Report of 2004. The committee members at the time: Toby Barrett, Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant; and John O'Toole, Durham. Other members who were part of the committee, who participated in the committee hearings and in the report: Ted Arnott, Waterloo–Wellington; John Baird, Nepean–Carleton; Jim Flaherty, Whitby–Ajax; Tim Hudak—I was then Erie–Lincoln; Frank Klees, Oak Ridges; Norm Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka; Bob Runciman, Leeds–Grenville; Laurie Scott, Haliburton–Victoria–Brock; Elizabeth Witmer, Kitchener–Waterloo; and John Yakabuski, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

A good number of PCs had taken the time to sit on the committee. We did travel extensively around the province in January and I think February of that year and came up with our report in 2004.

Let me highlight some of the aspects of the executive summary to start with, page 3 of that report, entitled "Competitive Taxes = Strong Economy = More Jobs and Secure Employment = Better Quality of Life for All." The report begins, "It is the position of the official opposition that a competitive taxation system attracts more business investment, which in turn creates a strong economy and creates more high-paying, secure jobs for Ontarians. With revenue generated from the resulting economic growth we can afford better health care, better educational opportunities for our children and more effective social programs.

"In Ontario today"—again, this was 2004—"there is no so-called 'structural deficit'—only a deficit in leadership and courage to make the decisions necessary to govern in a fiscally responsible manner. The Liberal government has done nothing in six months to improve the fiscal situation in Ontario. In fact, they made it worse with the largest tax hike in the history of Ontario."

Just a few months before, the Liberals had talked about the increase that they were going to bring forward, despite campaign commitments to the contrary, that saw a dramatic increase in business taxes, in taxes on middle class families and seniors. We saw at the time driver licence renewal fees going up by some 50%, if I recall. Health care services like chiropractic care and optometry that had been on OHIP for some time were de-listed,

meaning they were basically privatized. Again, that's the framework that this report was written in.

The report goes on to say, "The Premier has broken almost 20 of his key election promises, and because of his government's inaction, Ontario will now run a \$7.8-billion deficit in the fiscal year 2003-04. The official opposition and third party analysts such as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation maintain that this was not necessary and the books could have been balanced if the government had the necessary courage and political will."

This was, I think, a very important observation, considering that this report was written only a number of months after the McGuinty government had been sworn in.

"The Liberal tax hike agenda renders Ontario at a competitive disadvantage. Corporate taxes are higher than competing provinces' and 11% higher than in the United States. Raising taxes cripples our ability to attract and create jobs. It also means a loss in foreign investment and much needed capital for expansion of businesses in Ontario.

"The government should reduce the tax burden on both individuals and their employers in order to make Ontario more competitive. Furthermore, the government should live up to its pledge to not raise taxes or implement any new taxation measures without the explicit consent of Ontario voters through a province-wide referendum."

Let me pause for a second there.

Back in 2004, my colleagues Mr. Barrett and Mr. O'Toole, with support from other members of the PC caucus who sat on the committee, had called attention to the potential damage that the high-tax agenda could cause to the Ontario economy.

If you look at the numbers since 2004, over 200,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have fled our province. The impact in my area from John Deere closing down is now being felt and will be felt for some time to come. In the Hamilton area, the Stelco and other layoffs and some closures—Ball manufacturing in Burlington impacts on my riding as well—have had significant impacts, not only on the local economy but on Ontario families that have depended on those well-paying jobs and have been struggling to find replacement jobs that match the pay and benefits of those manufacturing sites.

Since that time of the significant tax increases, we've seen other provinces actually go in the opposite direction and reduce their tax burden on businesses in those provinces. Ontario, since that point in time, regularly ranks last or next to last in job creation in the entire country when it comes to the percentage of jobs in the economy. Our growth rates have stalled, and there is much speculation about our heading into recession as a result of the slowdown in the Ontario economy.

If you look at the actual numbers, while government members will regularly rise in the House and boast about all the jobs that have been created under the McGuinty government, on most measures, the majority of those jobs have actually been government jobs, which are not in themselves creating wealth.

Jobs that are in the private sector create the wealth to help us afford to better deliver government services like health care and education. The problem is that you need to do those things in lockstep. When you have a healthy private sector economy creating jobs and investing, and more people working, they pay taxes to support essential public services. But what we have seen from the McGuinty government is a rapid growth in government spending that is well beyond what private sector job creation could sustain, and that's why we've seen the slowest rate of private sector job creation in Canada by the McGuinty government.

So kudos—I wish the news were happier; I wish they had been wrong—kudos to Mr. Barrett and Mr. O'Toole and others who were participating in the committee for having the foresight to call attention to the McGuinty government about the impact that their high taxes could potentially have on the economy. We are now paying a price for that, four and five years later.

While this report was put together, and it was an excellent, well-thought-out report, it does look like then-Finance Minister Sorbara ignored the advice, because he maintained that high level of taxation since, and added on other levels of direct or indirect taxation, such as the new WSIB bill that is before the assembly as I speak.

Here's a second and important piece of advice in the 2004 opposition report that I think supports the call for lowering taxes but stands out on its own as well:

"The government should tie its spending to outcomes. Increased spending in areas of health care and education must benefit patients and students respectively, and not get sucked into the black hole of skyrocketing salaries and governance. Government spending should only take place when Ontarians can obtain real value for every dollar spent. If the government continues down its present path, Ontario will lose its competitive advantage, an advantage it enjoyed for eight consecutive years under the Progressive Conservative government."

I always like to put the government spending in this perspective. It took from Confederation—John Sandfield Macdonald, the first Premier of the province of Ontario—until Ernie Eves to get government spending to \$68 billion. In just over five short years, Dalton McGuinty will put it up to some \$96 billion, on the way to triple figures.

1530

A \$28-billion increase is dramatic. It is greater than the entire budgets of Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and New Brunswick combined. It is greater than Saskatchewan and Manitoba combined. I think we would be hard pressed to say that we have seen value for all those tax dollars that have been invested.

We did see the creation of a massive new bureaucracy of middle management, the LHINs—Local Health Integration Networks—local in name only, by the way. I know decisions for Niagara's health care have been amalgamated into one massive system. Niagara, Hamilton, Haldimand and Brant, I believe, are all part of that LHIN. We're now seeing, as a result of these un-

accountable, unelected and largely anonymous individuals, hand-picked by the Liberal cabinet to sit on these LHINs, the closure of emergency services in Fort Erie and Port Colborne, the loss of the maternity ward in Niagara Falls. I know my constituents in Glanbrook and upper Stoney Creek, who will mostly utilize Hamilton health services, are very concerned about the elimination of services to adults at the McMaster emergency room. In fact, we saw one member of the LHIN actually resign in protest, commenting on the undemocratic nature of the decisions from the LHINs.

I forget off the top of my head, but some hundreds of millions of dollars have been taken out of front-line health care services to set up these new bureaucracies. Sure, they have a beautiful new office in Grimsby with new furniture, a new building being constructed that is going to house all of the staff working for the LHINs, but I bet if you surveyed folks at Coffee Culture in Grimsby this afternoon, you wouldn't find a single one who would rather see the money going in to that new LHIN building at Bartlett and Highway 8. They would want every one of those dollars going in to the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital or McNally House hospices by way of example.

The concerns that Mr. Barrett and Mr. Arnott, among others, brought up in 2004—I know our then finance critic, John Baird, had a significant role. He's gone on to bigger and better things in the federal government and we congratulate him on his new position at transport and infrastructure. But I do want to commend my colleagues for the foresight, in that 2004 report, in at least warning the McGuinty government, specifically finance minister Sorbara, that their runaway spending and taxation policies would put significant shackles on the Ontario economy and make it increasingly difficult for us to compete if markets internationally turned downwards. I think that their advice, unfortunately, seems to be coming through. I wish Liberals had listened to him at the time and we could have staved off many of the job losses we're seeing in Ontario.

Let me point you to 2005's pre-budget consultations, again standing in the name of Mr. Barrett and Mr. O'Toole. Official opposition members who participated: Jim Flaherty, Whitby-Ajax; Cam Jackson, Burlington; Norm Miller, Parry Sound-Muskoka, Bob Runciman, Leeds-Grenville; Jerry Ouellette, Oshawa.

The reports, by the way, are many pages long. They're usually about 20 or so pages. I do believe they get to the point rather quickly; there's certainly not a lot of extraneous language. I think the fact that they're that length shows that a lot of thought was put into them and a lot of important statistics to back up the case. But I'll confine, in the interests of time, my remarks to the executive summaries. In 2005, "The Liberal government entitled their 2004 budget *The Plan for Change*, but in fact, this document marked the point at which the Liberals officially changed their plan. Instead of providing fair tax policy, a balanced budget and keeping their promises, the Liberal government slapped hard-working Ontarians with a \$2.6-billion regressive health tax,

committed to adding \$10 billion to the provincial debt and threw away any plans for a sustainable economic future for our province.

“Unfortunately, the outlook for the upcoming 2005 Ontario budget is no better for the people of Ontario.”

They reinforce some of the points that they made in their 2004 report by saying, “The Liberal government has done nothing to control spending across government, and a record \$7 billion in increased taxes over the past year has resulted in stagnating economic growth and thousands of lost jobs. Recent reports show that employment has plummeted by 212,000 since the implementation of the regressive health tax in July 2004, and economic experts indicate that the government’s current agenda will in fact see over \$38 billion added to the provincial debt by 2010.”

That’s pretty close. We are now at 2008, heading into 2009, and the provincial debt has gone up by close to that figure. I think their prediction of 2005 will ring true, that we’ll see an additional \$38 billion added to the provincial debt under the McGuinty government by 2010.

“In addition, our most cherished public services are facing an epic crisis at the hands of this government. Teachers are voting in favour of strike action across the province, 8,500 front-line health care workers will lose their jobs in the coming year, our agricultural sector is teetering on the verge of bankruptcy and Ontario doctors are resorting to unprecedented labour action....

“The official opposition is calling upon the government to take immediate action to ensure that the viability of our economic future is restored, and that vital services that all Ontarians rely upon are preserved for generations to come.”

Here’s the shorthand for what the official opposition recommended at that time: “The Liberal government must respect the financial circumstances of low- and middle-income Ontarians and must cease their regressive taxation measures, including the Ontario health premium....

“The Liberal government must ensure that vital front-line health services in our hospitals are not compromised by their inability to negotiate with hospitals and stop the layoff of 8,500 nurses and staff.” I do hope that we will hear from the Ontario Hospital Association in the upcoming consultations to see how high that number may be under the current circumstances.

“Starting today, the Liberal government,” the report says, “must put aside its reckless agenda and start working to regaining trust, fairness and develop a strong economic plan for the province of Ontario.”

An interesting chart I’d refer members to, on page 4 of the report, shows the drop in employment that took place not too long after the Liberals announced their massive tax increases on seniors, working families and businesses.

In 2006, entitled *Liberal Ontario: Here They Go Again—High Spending, High Taxing McGuinty Liberals Continue to Mismanage the Economy*, the 2006 report, standing in the names of Barrett, O’Toole, Hudak, Yaka-

buski, Miller again, Runciman, Munro, Witmer, Arnott and Tory:

“Paying More, Getting Less

“Consistent with the dissenting reports of the official opposition in 2004 and 2005, over the past year the McGuinty Liberals have forged ahead with their reckless fiscal agenda and driven the Ontario economy backwards.”

Between then and 2008-09, this report suggests that, “The McGuinty Liberals will add \$75 to the provincial debt each and every second—that totals almost \$14 billion. That is more than \$1,000 of new debt for every man, woman and child living in Ontario and represents a significant mortgage on our future prosperity.

“This increase in the provincial debt is shocking considering the spike in tax revenue that has been generated by the record-breaking McGuinty Liberal tax hikes. In 2008-09, the McGuinty Liberals forecast that the government will spend over \$90 billion—that is almost \$20 billion more than when they took office.”

Ironically, they passed that like nothing. They blew that in the dust. They’re well over \$90 billion by 2008-09. The Liberals were spending at a rate that would make Bob Rae blush, and they even surpassed that.

“However, it should be noted that as far back as the 2004 dissenting report, the official opposition has been on record warning the McGuinty Liberals of the long-term impact their reckless fiscal policies would have on the provincial economy and the standard of living for Ontarians.”

Page 3: “Perhaps the most telling of the numbers above”—some economic measures that the report refers to—“is the decline in manufacturing jobs under the watch of the McGuinty Liberals. Manufacturing is at the heart of Ontario’s economy.” Those of us from Hamilton and Niagara know that all too well. “Manufacturers create spin-off jobs with suppliers that provide services to manufacturers and to their workers. Manufacturing jobs tend to pay more and have more generous benefits and pensions than jobs in other sectors.”

1540

Sadly, the prediction from the 2004 report turned out to be true and accurate. This report notes that in Ontario in 2006 the manufacturing sector employed 80,000 fewer people compared to just one year earlier.

Here’s something to worry about too. The 2006 report notes in the the section on Liberal mismanagement of the economy that, “The McGuinty Liberals’ consistent mismanagement of the province’s finances is setting up the next government to inherit an unsustainable mess.... Their plan is focused on generating abnormally high revenue by punishing hard-working Ontarians and their employers with high taxes and spending public funds at record rates.

“Since the McGuinty Liberals took office, program spending has increased at a rate of 8% per year. That equates to a \$10-billion jump in spending over the past two years and puts ... Liberals on pace to increase spending by \$20 billion or 27% over their four years in office.” And despite that prediction, despite that view that Liberal

spending would come to a level of \$20 billion, they actually exceeded that and are now on pace for more than \$28 billion in spending.

The report talks about some fiscal challenges—tax increases, corporate income taxes, property taxes among many others—and makes the recommendation that in order to stave off future job losses, in order to help the remaining manufacturing jobs stay in the province of Ontario and encourage our talented young men and women who are coming up through our school system to stay in Ontario to raise their families and build their own futures, they take heed of that advice. But as we know, the finance minister and the Premier did not take that advice of the committee. As a result, as you'll see in 2007, the situation becomes worse.

Pre-Budget Consultation, Progressive Conservative (Official Opposition) Dissenting Report, Liberal Fiscal Mismanagement: The Final Chapter—McGuinty Liberals Asleep at the Switch as Ontario's Economy Sputters. It stands in the names of Arnott, Barrett, Hudak, O'Toole, MacLeod, Yakabuski, Norm Miller, Tascona and Murdoch.

Just a summary of the introduction: "During the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs hearings, the committee was made aware of the very disconcerting news that Ontario was dead last in economic growth among Canadian provinces in 2006—trailing the next-slowest-growing province by a substantial 0.7%—and is forecast to only marginally improve to ninth place this year. Furthermore, Ontario is at risk of losing an additional 50,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs in 2007...."

"Unfortunately, the finance minister is either oblivious to the challenges or seems to believe that the cure for the problem is another heavy dose of what caused the illness in the first place: higher taxes, higher-priced and less reliable energy supply and government spending increases far in excess of the growth rate of the economy. Ontario residents are responding in record numbers to the harmful policies of the McGuinty government. Ontario has seen a net loss of 30,000 residents over the previous year, spiking in the third quarter of 2006 with a loss of almost 59,000 at annual rates.

"Based on the advice heard at committee and our own research, the official opposition submitted motions that, if endorsed by the Minister of Finance, would help reverse the decline in manufacturing jobs and spur investment in the province of Ontario."

Page 4: "Since the 2004 dissenting report, the official opposition has been on the record warning the McGuinty Liberals of the long-term impact their reckless fiscal policies would have on the provincial economy and the standard of living of Ontarians."

Here's what they said in 2004, highlighted in the 2007 report: "The fiscal agenda of this government is one that will eliminate Ontario's competitive advantage, and one that will drive business investment and jobs into neighbouring jurisdictions that offer lower tax rates and a more attractive business environment.

"The tax system being created by the Liberal government will create a significant barrier to investments, and erode our ability to improve productivity and adopt new technologies. Rather than adopting policies that create a competitive advantage, the Liberal government is pursuing tax policies that create disincentives for investment...."

"Our standard of living will be significantly compromised in this decade if the Liberals continue to press forward with their reckless tax hike agenda. Ontario cannot afford to veer from a course of tax reductions in the ... future. Instead, the position of the official opposition is that the upcoming budget should introduce new tax reduction measures that improve our productivity, competitiveness and incomes measurably."

Again, in 2007, the committee members noted the warning from the 2004 dissenting report about the long-term impacts of the reckless fiscal policies and outdated tax-and-spend initiatives of the McGuinty government. Now, as we stand at the end of 2008, the long term is here. We all know about the layoffs happening across the province; we all know about the increased cost of living to Ontario families and Ontario seniors; and we all were devastated by the news that the province of Ontario, the engine of growth in all of Confederation, had become a have-not province and, for the first time in history, will be receiving equalization payments. Basically, Dalton McGuinty's policies have put Ontario on the welfare rolls of Confederation.

I would have expected that when Dalton McGuinty came back from his two-week trip abroad, he would have stood up said, "Come hell or high water will I allow Ontario to remain a have-not province for one year more. I will call together my finance minister, economic development minister and others concerned to come up with a plan to grow Ontario out of its have-not status." Instead, all we see from Dalton McGuinty is a character from Oliver putting his hand out, "Please, sir, may I have more?" asking for more handouts. There seems to be no chagrin, no regret that Ontario is a have-not province, and no plan, despite repeated calls from the official opposition, has been forthcoming to grow Ontario, help us create jobs and make us once again the most attractive environment and province for starting a new business or expanding an existing one.

Then the most recent, 2008: Once the Economic Engine of Canada, Now the Caboose. The Progressive Conservative official opposition dissenting report asks the question, are Dalton McGuinty's harmful economic policies driving Ontario to have-not status? Arnott, Barrett, Hudak, Yakabuski, Murdoch, Bailey and Munro contributed to this report back in February 2008. Are Dalton McGuinty's harmful economic policies driving Ontario to have-not status? When we asked the Premier, the finance minister or any of their colleagues, "Is that going to happen," they'd say, "No." They'd say, "Oh pshaw, you're exaggerating. You're blowing it out of proportion. There's no way Ontario would be a have-not province."

We took it seriously. We took seriously the advice we heard in January and February of that year and throughout the year before. We said that if policies did not change, if we did not bring forward an economic policy that helped give relief to middle-class families and seniors, that didn't help our struggling business sector, Ontario was on the verge of becoming a have-not province. Then this October, like a bombshell landing on our province, Ontario, filled with great entrepreneurs and hard-working, talented individuals, was on the welfare rolls of Confederation because of Dalton McGuinty's tax-and-spend policies. I do wish they would have listened to our 2008 report.

I express, with great regret, the motion before the assembly today, and I do want to move an amendment to the motion.

I move that the government motion be amended by striking out "during the week of December 15, 2008," and replacing it with the following: "during the months of January and/or February 2009 when the Legislature is not sitting, rather than rushing the pre-budget hearings under the cover of Christmas, and in the following 19 vulnerable communities, among the hardest hit by Ontario's economic downturn: Brampton, Brantford, Cambridge, Chatham, Cornwall, Guelph, Hamilton, Ingersoll, Kitchener-Waterloo, Lindsay, London, Oakville, Oshawa, Owen Sound, Smiths Falls, St. Catharines, St. Thomas, Welland and Windsor."

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Could I get a copy of the amendment, please?

Mr. Hudak has moved that the government motion be amended by striking out "during the week of December 15, 2008," and replacing it with the following: "during the months of January and/or February 2009 when the Legislature is not sitting—rather than rushing the pre-budget hearings through under the cover of Christmas—and in the following 19 vulnerable communities among the hardest hit by Ontario's economic downturn: Brampton, Brantford, Cambridge, Chatham, Cornwall, Guelph, Hamilton, Ingersoll, Kitchener-Waterloo, Lindsay, London, Oakville, Oshawa, Owen Sound, Smiths Falls, St. Catharines, St. Thomas, Welland and Windsor."

Further debate?

1550

Mr. Michael Prue: I rise to speak both to this motion and to the amendment made by my friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook. I want to assure the House that I am fully aware that I have one hour in which to debate this motion and the amendment thereto, but I do not expect to spend my hour, with the greatest of respects to my colleagues who have spoken at great length about the minutiae here of the committee process and about the history of this committee as it has travelled around the province.

I think the issue is a relatively simple one. The issue is, does the committee, which has been so structured and which has voted by majority to conduct its hearings in the five cities that were mentioned, the cities of Niagara

Falls, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Ottawa, have the authority and the right to do so?

The only reason that we are before this House is that there was not unanimous consent amongst the House leaders. That's the reason that we are here. I will state for the record that it is my intention, when this comes for a vote before this House, to vote for the subcommittee recommendation that was made to the committee. I said so in subcommittee; I said so in committee. I have to state that I take some considerable umbrage this morning at the comments made during question period—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Umbrage? You're upset. Tell them you're upset.

Mr. Michael Prue: Yes, I take considerable umbrage at the comments made by the Minister of Finance, who accused both the opposition party and the third party of not supporting this particular motion. As my friend the parliamentary assistant surely can advise the minister, that is not and was never the case. I want that to be very clear for the record, because it seems to me, and I will explain in the body of my argument, that holding the rotation and going to these five cities—I believe the cities themselves were chosen unanimously by the subcommittee—was in order to accommodate the legislative process.

Having said that, the subcommittee and the committee approved the times and the dates and the places. They first of all chose that there would be three days of consultation in Toronto. At least one of the days and possibly two of them would involve expert witnesses.

They chose the locations, I think, quite carefully, Toronto being sort of central and where the Legislature sits—easy access for three days. They also chose to go to each of the regions of this great province: the Niagara region, southwestern Ontario, northwestern Ontario, northeastern Ontario and eastern Ontario. They were chosen, one in each place, as I think was appropriate and correct.

They chose the date, and the date was chosen, I think, with great concern, not because we are trying to hide under cover of Christmas—certainly, that is not my intention as an opposition member, to hide under cover of Christmas—but in order to accommodate what needs to happen in this House.

Quite frankly, we are facing the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression, and some are of the opinion that it may even rival that of the Great Depression. We need to get on with this and assure the public that what we are doing in this Legislature meets the requirements of the people of Ontario.

We had to debate the method of travel. It seemed quite logical to hold three here in Toronto; to go by bus to Niagara Falls, because, contrary to what some politicians have done in the past, taking planes to Hamilton and Niagara Falls, I am of the firm view that taking the bus there is the appropriate method of travel. The rest will be accommodated by plane, because it's a large province, to go to Windsor, on to Thunder Bay, on to Sudbury, and finally Ottawa and back to Toronto. We also chose quite

carefully the methodology by which people would be heard.

This was referred to the House leaders, and I understand the arguments being made by my friend from Niagara West–Glanbrook. I also understand perhaps some of the feelings of my colleagues in the official opposition. There is a great deal of angst on this side of the House, as there is a great deal of angst throughout Ontario, about where this government is heading, what is happening in the budget downturn and what is happening in the economic downturn, not only in this province but around the world. People want to debate it and they want to be current on it. But I think we have a larger obligation. We have a larger obligation to the citizens of this province to discover what they have to say, to do it in a timely manner and report back in time for the budget announcements that will be made by the Minister of Finance.

Quite frankly, I am not afraid of a lack of participation by people coming before the committee. If anything, it was very clear: Other than a few minor glitches, we had 80 people lined up and ready to proceed on the budget, to be heard in Toronto. We could only hear 51. We had to go to our respective caucuses and each had to choose 17 people we wanted to hear. Part of the problem was that perhaps we all didn't choose the right 17, because some of the ones we chose determined that they couldn't come. There was really not time, I guess, for the first day for us to make the determination whether we could call someone else in or someone could come. But I don't believe that's going to happen on days 2 and 3, those days being December 4 and 11. That is not going to be a problem. We will accommodate the overwhelming majority of people who have applied here.

I am convinced that we will have full or nearly full representation in each of the other five cities. There will be people leaving from Toronto to go there. There will be people in those towns that are hard hit in the Niagara region; people who are hard hit in Windsor and the areas surrounding in southwestern Ontario; people who are hard hit in northwestern Ontario, particularly the forest industry, who will want to talk to us; people who are starting to suffer even in a boom town like Sudbury; and in the northeast, with the mining, because the prices of commodities have fallen recently, people who will want to be heard; and people in eastern Ontario, through Ottawa, who will want to be heard as well.

I also have to stop and think about exactly what our committee does. This is a unique experience for our committee, and perhaps most committees, because we're not dealing with a bill. Every other committee upon which I sit has a bill, and we are talking about the bill and asking for amendments to the bill. This is not what we're doing here. What we are doing here is a service to the people of Ontario, in my view, by going out and asking them what they would like to see contained within the body of the budget.

I've been on this now for a number of years; I think this will be my fifth or sixth year travelling the province

as the finance critic for the New Democratic Party. It's pretty much the same and it happens all the time. We have people who come in from groups that are looking for additional funding. We have people who are coming in and looking for spheres of the economy that they think need a push. We have people occasionally who come in and tell us to hold the line on taxes because they don't want anything else. We have people who come in to talk about local issues, local problems, in hope that the government will listen. We have people who come in arguing and looking for legislative changes that will help them, even though it may not be within the mandate of the finance committee. But we are there to listen, and we are there in the end when we sit down and do our motions to try to convey to the ministry and to the Minister of Finance what should be contained within the budget. We are not there to make amendments; we are there to make suggestions. We are there to listen and then to use our collective wisdom upon the basis of what we've heard to make recommendations that we hope the Minister of Finance will include within the budget.

I do have to admit that from time to time, I have been disappointed on that committee. I have to admit that from time to time, when we hear repeated and good suggestions being made by groups—and I think particularly of some of the groups that come before us with issues of autism and with the developmentally delayed and others—where they are seeking funding and kinds of government services which have not been given out in the past, I have been disappointed. But they still have the opportunity to speak and they still have some champions in the finance committee who try to go forward and do something for them.

1600

I think that's what is important here. Is it going to be any better if we delay it? I would hesitate to say that it could possibly be better. Are the economic conditions going to change between now and January? Undoubtedly. They changed today from yesterday, and they'll change again tomorrow. I am constantly shocked, as a reader of the financial pages of the local newspapers, to see the swings that are happening, not only in the Dow Jones but in the Toronto Stock Exchange, not only here on this continent but around the world each and every day—the price of commodities that rise and fall.

Who would have thought a mere month ago that oil would be trading for \$49 a barrel? Who would have ever thought that? Who would have thought that the Canadian dollar would drop 20 cents in a matter of a couple of months? Nobody could have, with any great certainty, known that.

But having said that, I am convinced that the people of Ontario need to be heard and that we as a committee need to have the opportunity to present what we learn in a rational, coherent and cogent way to the Minister of Finance.

I take this all upon his word, notwithstanding the umbrage that I earlier expressed at how he got the fact wrong about what I was trying to do in the committee. I

do take him at his word that he intends to bring forward a budget this year earlier than most years; that he intends to bring it forward in the month of March prior to the end of the fiscal year. In my mind, this is good, sound fiscal planning. I have to put myself in those shoes. If I was the Minister of Finance, would I be wanting to present a budget before the end of the fiscal year? The answer quite clearly would be that I would want to.

I know Mr. Hudak, who's watching me intently here, would also be of the same mind, were he to sit over there, because it's important that the ministry bring forward a budget. It's important that we know the direction of government spending, because this is going to be a year unlike other years. It's not going to be all right to try to catch up two or three months into the process where you are forced to make drastic cuts that could have been much smaller or drastic increases that could have been much smaller had they been put in within the full 12-month period.

I think that this is a smart thing to be doing, and I don't know what he's going to do, so I don't want to commend him for the final result, but I do want to commend him for the process of starting it and making sure it is in place for the start of a new fiscal year on April 1.

The second point that seems to be lost here, and I think needs to be made, was the suggestion that the interest will be higher closer to the budget. I don't know whether that is necessarily true. People know what is happening. Every day, there are calls to my office, and I'm sure to all of your offices, everybody on both sides of this House. People are worried about the government direction around a whole range of issues, whether it be education and education funding, whether it be hospitals, whether it be the plight of the poor, and when the government is finally going to come down with its much-vaunted announcement some time in December.

That one puzzles me, as to why there is no speed on that at all. I am very afraid that that announcement is going to be made after the House stops sitting, because I think that's the government's plan. But I will leave that, because I ask the questions, as you know, almost daily, and certainly a couple of times a week, wanting to know when that plan is going to unfurl and unfold itself and when we're going to hear it, and I would hesitate to be a pessimist at any time, but I have a funny feeling it will come after December 11. I don't know why I think that, but I think it will come after, when this House is not in session, because there is a method to that.

But I am not convinced that there is the same method here. There is the reality of the urgency of an earlier budget, which I've already talked about. There is also the opportunity, though, for members of all sides of this Legislature to listen and to carefully consider what has been said, to take the opportunity between December 19 and that time in January when the committee will come back to hear the motions and go through the motions one by one. It is not only an opportunity for us to listen to what the hundred or so presentations that we're going to hear have told us, but also an opportunity for of us to

read the newspapers, to look at statistical and other reports, to look at written documentation which will flow and to come up with good motions. With the House not being in session there will be an opportunity for all parties and all research staff to do that.

I just want to almost finish, I think, talking about how passionately people in this House have spoken in the past about the need for all of us to work together. I remember only two weeks ago, standing here making a passionate speech in support of the Conservatives, who wanted to have an all-party tripartite committee with equal numbers of members who could discuss this issue. I remember thinking that this was a really good idea, that we could work together because this is a time unlike any other time. It is a time of huge economic turmoil. It is a time when people are worried about their pensions. It is a time when people are worried about their jobs and the economy and what is going to happen to them and their children, what is going to happen to their house, what is going to happen to their life savings, what is going to happen to the decimated towns and cities across this entire province. They are looking to us for direction. I supported the Conservatives in their opposition day motion and I was saddened when it went down to defeat because I thought we could all work together.

I am equally saddened, and I listened to my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook when he talked about what happens in the committee process, or what has happened, where we try to make sane and sensible motions and they all seem to be shot down. I remember he talked about the budget bill, where the town of—was it Caledon?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: Clarington.

Mr. Michael Prue: Clarington; thank you. The town of Clarington came forward and they were in a huge dilemma because they were facing a court case that had been many years in the making, and all of a sudden, there was a change to the budget act which was going to impact that court case and literally had the possibility of taking millions upon millions of dollars out of the local economy. There was no opportunity for a motion to be put forward. I asked, and I thought it was a reasonable thing to ask during that committee, that the government put forward the motion, and if they couldn't do it because of the order of the House, that it be brought back before the committee of the whole House. That's an unusual procedure, but it was at least possible to do it, and I asked that it be done in order that the concerns of the people of Clarington could be heard in this House so that we could do the right thing. I promised on behalf of my party, as the finance critic, that we would not, in any way, try to encumber this House or hold up the House, because that is a possibility when you resolve yourself into a committee of the whole House.

All of that was rebuffed. This is the difficulty I have, so I'm asking you again. I stood up in favour of their motion. I'm now standing up in favour of the government motion. I'm trying to be a voice of sanity in this sometimes not-so-sane place by saying that we need to work together. This is an opportunity to do it. I am going

to support this motion. I'm going to support it because we need to get on with this job; we need to get on with this job now. We need to look after all of those people who have lost—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: No—all of those people who have lost their jobs, all of those people who are worried about where the economy is going, all of those people who are worried about their pensions, all of those people who need the government to do something.

I have listened to the opposition's amendment, and I appreciate the 19 locations they want to go to. I don't know whether it would be physically possible for this committee to visit all of those 19 locations and present a report if we had to start in January or February, and to have that kind of stuff in front of the minister in time for the budget. I, therefore, reluctantly cannot agree to that. If it was simply another date, I might listen to the date, but it seems to me that the longer we prolong that date, the longer we take, as a Legislature, to come to the inevitable conclusions that the finance committee must do and to present those conclusions to the minister.

1610

I don't know what is going to happen, but I do want to say to this House that we all need to work together, and the best way to work together in this circumstance is to go along with the recommendations of the subcommittee of which I was a part. My friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook, my friend from Pickering—Scarborough East, Chair Hoy, and all the others who were on there were all part of that together—and that was the best and most sensible thing to do. I'm asking this House to follow with what the committee wanted to do and let the finance committee get on with its work.

In conclusion, I also want to say that I would hope this government knows that we don't need to spend four days debating this. The people out there expect us to spend our four days on really important things. There are other bills, there are finances that have to be looked at. I'm only taking 20 minutes of my time and then I'm going to sit down, and I don't even know whether any of my colleagues in the NDP are even going to speak to this, because we think there are more important issues than the minutiae of this committee. Let's get on with our work. Now having had three speakers from three parties, in my view that's probably enough on this particular issue.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's always fun to follow the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, a very hard-working member. We disagree on a few things: mostly everything that the other says and believes.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I disagree with that.

Mr. Bob Delaney: He disagrees with my assumption. But as we get closer and closer to Christmas, I'm sure we will take it all in stride.

What are we talking about here today? Well, every year the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducts pre-budget consultations. Normally,

these have taken place after the new year, in or about late January. But this year, in the current economic climate, the message that we've heard loud and clear is that Ontarians would like to speak to their government. Ontarians want to have a chance for their government to talk to them about the economy. People look at their pension plans and think, "Oh, my gosh, look at what a beating I've just taken." People read about banks failing and think, "Can it happen here?" They'll call me in my office and say, "No Canadian banks have failed yet," and I'll say, "Well, no, they haven't," and they'll say, "I keep reading about this stuff in the States. Is that going to happen here?" These are some of the things that prompt Ontarians to want to talk to us. That's why the Minister of Finance proposes conducting the pre-budget consultations now rather than after the new year, as in years previous.

The member for Niagara West—Glanbrook pointed out that he thought that these budget hearings should be conducted earlier in the new year. When their party was in government—eight very long, long years for Ontario—their budget was presented well into the fiscal year. I think this is an important point that needs to be brought out. What is one of the other reasons that the government is holding these consultations now? Holding the pre-budget hearings well into the new year means that you can't present the budget until later and later in the year. What's really important now is that people get a sense of where we are as a province and get that sense in a budget presented earlier, not later. To compare this way with the bad old way, most funding partners who depended on provincial funding were often nearly halfway through their fiscal year before they knew what they would get, and in today's current fiscal climate you need to know that earlier. What this also meant was that those partners that depended on transfer funding—this is in no particular order, and I don't pretend it's complete—entities such as hospitals, cities, school boards, police forces, community care access centres, universities, often had to do their budgeting and negotiate their collective agreements by feeling their way out in the dark, because the budget wasn't going to be presented until well into the spring.

Bear in mind, the fiscal year starts on April 1. We think it's incumbent in this financial climate to present that budget earlier and not later. That's why budgets are read earlier now, since the government was elected, and it has made a real difference to those transfer partners: those hospitals, our cities, our school boards, our police forces, our community care access centres, our universities and so on. They need to know earlier what their numbers are. They need to know there's going to be a change. They need to know how much more they're going to get, or if they're not going to get anything more. I think it puts an air of certainty onto it by giving them their budget numbers earlier. That means we've got to do the pre-budget consultations earlier, and I'm sure even my good friend from Niagara West—Glanbrook can't quarrel with the logic in that.

I'd like to speak to some of the importance of doing it this way to my home city of Mississauga. Since 2003, our government's approach to budgeting, to delivery of the budget and to what to do with the outcome of the budget—I'm just going to speak about my home area of northwest Mississauga—has put seven new schools in our area that we didn't have before. It has meant that Credit Valley's phase 2 was there.

Our opponents opposite say, "We want to cut the health care budget by \$3 billion by eliminating the health care premium." In the absence of that health care premium, facing the growth pressures we have in western Mississauga, we couldn't have Credit Valley Hospital's phase 2 expansion. Trillium couldn't have its expansion, which is nearly complete. These are things an area like Mississauga, which grows each and every year by 20,000 people, virtually all of them within a 10-minute drive of Credit Valley Hospital—that's how many more people our health care system has to serve. We need the fiscal capacity to be able to serve them. Credit Valley needs the certainty of having its budget read, so that it can do some intelligent planning for the next year.

What about that hospital expansion? What would we miss if we followed their advice and weren't able to build it? That's 275,000 square feet of new hospital health care space that western Mississauga couldn't have under a Tory regime. That's 140-plus new beds we have now, but if we followed their advice, we wouldn't. That's an expanded maternity suite. Our maternity suite was built to handle, I think, 2,600 births when the hospital opened in the mid-1980s. Last year, that hospital handled 5,500 births.

The expansion of the maternity suite isn't so much a question of need, anymore, as it is a question of safety. Done their way, we couldn't have it. Done this way, moms who are getting ready to deliver won't have to worry about calling Credit Valley and saying, "I'm getting ready," and have Credit Valley say, "I'm sorry, we can't handle you. We'll have to send you to another hospital, even though your doctor is here," knowing full well that on the date that expectant mom is getting ready to deliver her new baby, that hospital may be booked to capacity.

Our fastest-growing demographic in western Mississauga is seniors. We need those complex-continuing-care beds. Done their way, we couldn't have them. Done our way, those complex-care beds are going to be available to our community when phase 2 is complete in 2011. We desperately need that project. Now we're going to have it.

We needed the rehabilitation of existing space. While we were on constituency week, a week or so back, I had a chance to go in and do my periodic visit to the surgery ward. I went in at 7 o'clock in the morning and met my friends the surgeons. I changed where they change. To give you an idea of how pressed we are for space in our hospital, if your children who play hockey were asked to change for a game in a space like our surgeons change in to get ready to operate, you as parents would be up in arms. At least this year we finally got the surgeons a

washroom in their change room, in their locker room, where they can wash their hands. To quote a line from Bugs Bunny, "I don't want to say this room is too tight, but you've got to go outside to change your mind."

Mr. Tim Hudak: It was Groucho Marx, wasn't it?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It was, in fact, Bugs Bunny.

I spent the morning in surgery. I watched them perform everything from a major hip replacement to a complete rebuild of a jaw, something a very specialized surgeon was doing for a patient who had been flown in from Thunder Bay. Our hospital has got exactly the surgeon that that patient needed. However, who is paying for that operation? We don't begrudge the patient the operation, but that's coming off our budget at Credit Valley. That's one of the reasons that we have such financial pressures in a growth area like Mississauga. That's part of the reason that we need this budget read early.

1620

Now, I don't really blame the members opposite. I mean, they just don't get it. What kind of thinking is this? This is the neo-con, Republican, Conservative way of thinking. Where are they getting their marching orders from? Is it coming off the fax machine at the Langevin Block in Ottawa? Is it coming from Republican National Committee headquarters in Washington? You just wonder, "What is going on with them?"

Now, looking at the logic, let's just revisit history, something that they like to reinvent. Brian Mulroney ran up \$300 billion in public debt. Conservatives say that they don't want to be seen as a tax-and-spend government. That's true. They're not a tax-and-spend government; they're a borrow-and-spend government. "Borrow and spend" doesn't mean that you're paying your bills as you go. "Tax and spend" means if you raise the money and spend the money, you don't leave any debt for future generations. Borrow-and-spend conservatism means that you're leaving the bills to be paid by your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren and their great-great-grandchildren.

Let's look at one of their heroes, Ronald Reagan. God bless Ronald Reagan; he won the cold war. Economically, Ronald Reagan was a disaster. Ronald Reagan left the US taxpayer with \$4 trillion in long-term debt—\$4 trillion. Mike Harris cut taxes and couldn't run a balanced budget even in the huge boom of the 1990s. Well, not without dumping a highway like 407 as an asset at a fraction of its fair market value. That 407 sale is universally considered to be the yardstick for perhaps the most one-sided dumb example of ideology-based neo-con privatization in all of history.

Our government inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit in fiscal 2003-04—\$5.6 billion. Just think of what would have happened if the Ontario public in its infinite wisdom—because after all, the voters are always right. What would have happened if this party opposite had been elected in 2003? What else would they have left us with? Well, they had a—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The member for Simcoe North, I'd ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Withdrawn. But, Madam Speaker, on a point of order: Would you mind letting him tell the truth?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): That's not a point of order, and I would ask you to please respect the member's right to make his comments. We're in a debate, and everyone has a right to make their comments. So please respect the Speaker's wish to have order in the House. Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: So, let's go back where we were. Let's start with that \$5.6 billion. That was the one that the Toronto Star came out with: this big banner headline that said, "\$5.6 billion." Right underneath—I still have a copy of this paper—it said, "Outgoing Tories Out-right"—well, it's a word you can't use in here.

In addition to that \$5.6 billion, they had proposed, and our government cut, a corporate tax cut—let's do the math here—of \$4.3 billion. They had a private school tax credit of about, oh, half a billion dollars and a grab bag of about another billion dollars in various other giveaways. What did that leave you with by the time you've added it all up? What did the Ontario taxpayer just narrowly miss? They missed a Tory budget deficit of \$11.4 billion.

We started \$5.6 billion in the hole, and three years later, we had managed the economy to a sustainable surplus—a sustainable surplus. If we had followed the Tory rule, where would we be today? How would we be coping with this particular economic slide if the Conservatives had still stayed in power? I shudder to think. Ontarians pretty much know, and that's why in 2003 and 2007 Ontario was consistent. Ontario said the most sensible, the most logical, the most workable plan is the one that this government has implemented since 2003 under two truly outstanding finance ministers: my colleague Greg Sorbara, the member from Vaughan, and my colleague Dwight Duncan, the member from—what is he now? Windsor—St. Clair.

Now, our federal government inherited from its predecessors how big a surplus? I think it was, oh, \$15 billion, and now it's going into a deficit.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It takes a lot of doing.

Mr. Bob Delaney: As my colleague from Oakville says, it really does take a lot of doing. How do you run a \$15-billion surplus into a deficit? Well, you give away all the money that you need—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Would the member please get back to the motion that's on the floor? We're debating a particular motion, and I haven't heard many remarks on that motion. Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Well, thank you, Speaker. You cut the opposition a little bit of slack, so I thought I could discuss some of their points. But let's go back to that, Speaker, back to the motion.

Every year, the committee tables a report with a summary of what the committee heard. It tables its recommendations to the Minister of Finance for his budget. Now, just four weeks ago, I was present in the House. So

were all the members opposite. Four weeks ago, the Progressive Conservative Party spent two hours of debate asking for a select committee on the economy. Of course, we already have a committee that deals with the economy. It's called the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Let's just quote from its mandate as per standing order 107(e):

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs "is empowered to consider and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the fiscal and economic policies of the province and to which all related documents shall be deemed to have been referred immediately when the said documents are tabled."

The reason we need this particular motion is what? Let's say we agree with the thrust of it, that we really feel that Ontarians should be talking to their government. Then surely the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is the medium. This is the one committee that the province has set up that considers these matters each and every year.

We said, "Okay, let's get the committee travelling early." The PC Party initially wanted the committee to meet early but is now playing partisan politics because they don't want it to meet before the new year. I don't quite exactly follow that.

So what are we trying to do here? We're trying to validate Ontario's five-point plan. Let's just quickly recap, because you say "the five-point plan" and people say, "Well, what is the five-point plan?"

Number one, cut business taxes. Number two, invest in infrastructure. Number three, support innovation. Number four, partner with businesses.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: The plan is working so well.

Mr. Bob Delaney: The plan is indeed working extremely well. What else would you want to do? Our members opposite are talking about cutting taxes. Let's look at what Ontario has done in the realm of cutting taxes, because we know the PC Party has a one-point plan, and that's to cut taxes.

Ontario has already implemented \$3 billion in tax cuts and rebates. That's already done.

We have already eliminated the capital tax for manufacturers and resource sectors and made it retroactive, which flows money directly into the coffers of companies that need it most now. There's no point in cutting taxes to companies that are losing money and therefore are not paying taxes, but a retroactive tax cut actually put money in the hands of the people who needed it most.

We cut business education taxes and we—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I ask the member to please get back to the motion?

1630

Mr. Bob Delaney: All right. Let's stay on our topic here.

So, Speaker, in this motion here, one of the outcomes of it is going to be to discuss, among other things, is it possible to reduce the regulatory burden? And among the

things that we can expect to be discussed in committee is the fact that the paper burden has already been reduced by 24%. Maybe people have some suggestions for how to bring it down even more. We can bring out to Ontarians the fact that corporate tax collection has already been harmonized with the federal government and the savings to businesses are more than \$100 million a year; that service guarantees, something that people ask me about, have already been implemented to boost service with taxpayers.

Now, the Leader of the Opposition, in an article just this week, talked about restraint in the public sector, and of course, we agree. However, we are not going to fire water inspectors, fire nurses, lay off teachers, fire meat inspectors like the Conservatives did.

We do agree with the concept of working with our overlapping governments. Almost certainly, during the committee's hearings, people will bring this point out. It isn't realistic to expect that one level of government, such as the feds, are going to trash-talk the engine of the Canadian economy, such as Ontario.

Speaker, in conclusion, I'd like to thank you for the time and for the opportunity to respond to some of the comments that have been made and to set out what I hope is going to be a realistic set of consultations by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs this month.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I appreciate the comments, and I do apologize for losing my patience earlier, but you know, this is painful to listen to at times—very, very painful. This motion—they make it sound as though the budget's almost being set between December 15 and 19, the five days when they travel to Niagara Falls—where are we going, here, on that date? Anyhow, we've got five particular locations. Do you know when the report writing is due? When do you think it's due? February 19, two months later. It's not due on January 1. It's not due on January 3. It's due after their famous screwed-up—what do you call it?—Family Day situation, where half the people get Family Day and half the people don't get it. That's what they've got. We have an eight- or nine-week period where the committee is not meeting. There's an opportunity, in that particular period of time, to meet with many, many other communities across the province. What is the rush?

The member from Mississauga just mentioned that we were opposed to meeting before Christmas. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have no problem meeting December 15 to December 19. That's not a problem. We want to meet after that. We want to meet in January and February, for that eight weeks that's there, so we can work up to the budget. The budget's not going to be delivered on January 15 or 16 or March 20 or whatever. The report writing's not due until February 19, so there's absolutely no rush.

The reason we have it between December 15 and 19? They're trying to hide it in the Christmas season, plain

and simple. They don't want any controversy. They know that students are still in school. They know that the school boards are getting ready for Christmas presentations and school concerts and all that sort of thing, and you want to hide; that's what you want to do. You actually want to hide that week.

Why else would you not want to meet after Christmas? Can anybody possibly explain that? You've got eight weeks. You've got eight weeks before you have to meet. So why would you hide? And that's what we've got—because they're afraid of what's coming at them.

They inherited a fantastic economy from the Mike Harris government, over one million net new jobs created, and what have they done in that time? They have raised taxes \$29 billion. They've raised taxes \$2,300 for every man, woman and child in this province—\$2,300. Imagine what that would do. But they've wasted and wasted and wasted.

And yet, when I go to my Midland Area Reading Council, they're not getting any more money. When I talk about the Treasure Island Day Care Centre at the OPP headquarters that are being kicked out, there's no money to help them relocate, and this is the government that cares about children. Where is the money going? Twenty-three hundred dollars, ladies and gentlemen: \$2,300 is how much you have raised taxes.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: How many schools have you—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: You know what? "How many schools" is right. The number of students is decreasing. That's the only reason they have a smaller per class average, because there are not as many kids in the schools, plain and simple. Everyone knows that. The minister herself said we have, like, 90,000 fewer students around, so naturally the average size of the class goes down.

It's pretty pathetic when the member stands there and talks about the ideological problems with the Harris government or Ronald Reagan or any conservative-minded individual in this country or on this continent. They criticize us because we actually created a strong economy. You will remember that when Mike Harris started out in government in 1995, there was a \$12-billion deficit. That's what it was.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would just remind the member to speak as much as possible to the motion that's on the floor.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Like the previous member did. Okay. So what I'll say, then—actually, I'd like to talk about where this committee could go and where they have been in the last five years. Let's say, for example, since 2000, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs has travelled to—of course, it has been here in Toronto. It has been to Kenora, Timmins, Brockville, Chatham, Niagara Falls, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Cobourg, Waterloo, Barrie, London, Sudbury, and the list goes on and on. We also can add Peterborough, Atikokan, Sarnia and Guelph as a few other locations that the committee went to.

There would be time, Madam Speaker, to visit some of those communities—not all of them, but we don't

have to have it all done in one week. We, the PC caucus—I personally would be happy and proud to sit on that committee between December 15 and 19, but I would like to go out on the road after as well, in January and February, because, as I said earlier, we do have eight weeks at least. We actually have seven weeks after New Year's Day to travel with this particular bill, and there's no reason we can't do it. As I said earlier, this is no more than a case of this government hiding from the general public on the standing committee on economic affairs.

Now, my suggestion is—obviously they're going to pass it; they've got a majority—we'll do our own. We'll go out and we'll listen to the general public. We can put together a committee. If members of the third party want to join in, they can. We can visit those communities. We can travel around the province and we can find out what the people in Ontario want.

I personally hold two pre-budget consultations in my particular riding, in both Midland and Orillia. I spend half a day at both of them. I have at least 25 to 30 deputations in each of those communities that come forward. They are organizations that never get an opportunity to be invited to the Toronto hearings because, in a lot of cases, there's a lot of poverty involved; they don't have the finances available to travel. So they actually come and are able to speak in our communities.

I would recommend to anybody—I know the government members won't want to hear it, but certainly to any members of the official opposition and of the third party—I think it would be a wise idea if you were to hold pre-budget consultations in your own communities, in your own ridings, and listen to what the general public has to say. The government? They don't want to hear what they have to say. Clearly, that's the case.

This is a motion that is deliberately hiding this committee from the people of the province of Ontario, and they should be ashamed of themselves for bringing a motion like this forward. If we have to meet earlier, as I said earlier, so be it. We can meet earlier and through that week, but later on go out on the road in the winter.

I wanted to also talk about some of the problems they're facing. Obviously, they have no idea what they are doing in the automotive sector. You're hearing different comments each and every day from either the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Economic Development or the Premier, so I don't think we've actually got any kind of a plan there.

But I got a kick out of the five-point plan, the lower taxes for businesses. Bill 119: \$11,000 is a tax increase for the average business—\$11,000 and you're going to lower taxes for business? You're trying to put people out of business. That's what this is all about. You have a hatred for small business for some reason. That seems to be the case. Why do we have that?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): I would ask you to withdraw that remark, please. You're suggesting that the government has a motive of hatred. I think that's inappropriate. I'd ask you to withdraw, please.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Okay, I'll withdraw the word "hatred."

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): That's fine.

1640

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: What I would like to say is this: There's a problem with this government and small business, particularly the construction business, or we wouldn't see Bill 119 even out there today. That has been a real problem.

We've also seen it with the way they've treated the apprenticeship ratios in the province of Ontario. There's an opportunity to create more jobs, to get more young people into trades, and what do we do? We have this ridiculous 3-to-1 ratio, and the minister refuses to move on it. Do you know what? We're going to have to get back in government, which we probably will in three years' time, to actually change that ratio.

These are the types of things I see. I see it with the small convenience stores. In fact, there's actually a saying out there in the business community now: "the endangered species." What would they be? Well, they'd be small business operators, convenience stores, the agricultural community. We created legislation around the Endangered Species Act, but now the endangered species are the very businesses that operate this province, the people who have created the jobs since this country and province were formed. Now we have tremendous pressure on them from all different angles, and this government forces their way through with legislation like Bill 119. It's very, very discouraging.

Get this: I've even heard today that Mr. Mahoney, the chairman of WSIB, is out on a tour trying to promote it. He's actually going to be in the town of Midland tonight. Sometime in January—I guess he's not worried about the prebudget problems—he'll be in the city of Orillia. He's out there promoting all the wonderful things WSIB is doing. I wonder who sent him out there. Do you think he just went on his own this time? Do you think maybe he has gone out because of the pressure of Bill 119? I think so. Was he not appointed? Mr. Mahoney was a former MPP, wasn't he? Anyway, he was appointed by this government to that high-paying job, and there he is doing the job today, and he's out on a tour to say how wonderful WSIB is. He should drop into our constituency offices. We'll give him some files that he can take back and actually correct for once. I'd be happy if he would drop in to the riding of Simcoe North, at 14 Coldwater Road in Orillia, when he's there. And if he wants to drop in to Elizabeth Street in Midland, my other office, we'll give him some files on WSIB, when he's doing his grand tour.

Moving on with this motion, I'm disappointed that we've come to the point where we have to hide behind a religious time of the year, a time when families get together, and close debate at that particular time for political and partisan purposes. If someone can tell me why we can't meet that week, the week before, the 15th to the 19th, and then come back, say, the second week of January and have this committee travel on the road for

two weeks or three weeks and get a complete feel for how the citizens of the province feel about the economy—I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I would hope that the government would at least consider that when they hear our comments. I don't think the finance critic for the third party agrees with me on this. It sounded like he wanted to get it all done today and get this on its way. I personally feel that we have to have a lot more on something as important as this budget, a \$90-billion budget.

A couple of the members mentioned here earlier today that they inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit. Let's just zero in on that for a second, because obviously that must have a major impact on how this motion is worded and why they feel that way. For example, that was halfway through the year, in the 2003-04 budget. I don't ever hear the members from the government talk about the blackout that year. I don't hear them talking about SARS, which had a major impact on the economy. You'll all remember SARS Fest and trying to get people back into the city of Toronto and areas so that they could try to get the economy rolling again. There were all kinds of hotel discounts. I know the Rolling Stones and AC/DC came here for free to try to get the economy rolling. I never hear them mention any of those things in their conversations. Of course, they won government by September of that year. Did they try to work on that deficit? No. They just spent their way—and they never quit taxing and spending from that particular point on.

Now, here we have a government that has got to a point where we have a \$90-billion budget. It's up \$2,300 per person, or \$29 billion, a 41% increase in spending, and now they've run out of money. The economy is going sour on them, and they have no idea what to do. They were warned over and over again about how they were mismanaging the money, and that's what I feel is the biggest problem here. They have done a wonderful job of working with the media and making sure the media got lots of big full-page advertisements and that sort of thing in all the little papers across the province so they wouldn't write negative articles against the government. That's how I feel about it, anyways, because all these little papers get large ads.

The adoption disclosure bill, for example, has been out there for weeks; up in my area, the Lake Simcoe Act. Instead of having an ad that big or an ad the size that we use for the notification of pre-budget consultation meetings or the ads we use for committee hearings, we're having full-page ads in these papers, and that has to be tens of millions of dollars alone right there that have been spent by this government, as we advertise all these wonderful things the government's doing. I don't see any reason.

The other one, of course, is this retraining program. Has anybody followed that? There are literally ads every 15 minutes on all of the major TV outlets advertising this retraining program. I want to know who they're retraining. I haven't seen anybody. I don't know one person in my riding who has gone forward and applied for that or

has been successful in that. Maybe we could get a list from the minister or from the ministry and see who is actually taking advantage of this. One thing we know for sure is that millions and millions of dollars have been spent on advertising for this program, and that's federal money that was sent down to the province to waste. That's what it's all about. It's like the \$340 million from the labour market agreement that we hear about over and over again. That was a special deal. It was all signed. Where's the \$340 million? I'm sorry, I correct myself; it's \$311 million, effective April 1 of this year.

There are a lot of people in training, colleges and universities and all the different transfer agencies that are wondering what happened to that money. That would be something that I think would be important for the minister to actually answer someday, either at estimates or question period, because that's a lot of money that should be wisely spent in that particular ministry around reading centres, literacy councils, college tuition, whatever it may be. We need to make sure we look at those sorts of things.

So I'm saying that, although the government has run into problems with their revenues, and there's no question there's a forecasted \$500-million deficit for this year, we all know it's going to be a lot higher than that by the time the budget actually rolls around. Those are the kinds of things they don't want to answer to the people in the province at the standing committee hearings, whether they're in any of these communities that I suggested earlier that they go to. They don't want to know that their budgets are actually going to be cut, because that's what's going to happen or there's going to be a huge deficit. I don't think anybody is going to get any more money. That would be my understanding of how it's working right now.

I think they've run into a terrible economic system, and they were warned. They've had five years of good sailing. As I said earlier, they inherited a strong economy, a very strong economy, and they've taken that economy by tax-and-spend, tax-and-spend, tax-and-spend, the same as we've seen everywhere they've gone in the past, both at the federal and provincial level, and now with tough times they're looking for people to blame. Every second day they turn and blame it on five years ago. People are saying, "Pretty soon you're going to go back to Sir John A. Macdonald. It must have been his fault." Was he not a Conservative? I think he was. That type of thing.

We keep standing in this House and trying to voice our concerns almost to a deaf ear. It's the same as in my particular critic's portfolio. We have a need for money there and there's \$156 million that has been sent from the federal government to that particular ministry, the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. They signed on the dotted line. They said that they would agree to the conditions of the \$156 million they sent to them. Now every time the minister gives a speech anywhere, whether it's in this House or whether it's at a stakeholder relations event or talking to some of the

transfer groups out there like the PAO or OPPA, for example, he talks about how bad the federal government is and how they cheated him out of money. The reality is he signed on the dotted line; he agreed to the amount of money that was being sent. He didn't have to sign to that; he didn't have to agree to that. But we turn around and we listen over and over again to these concerns that I think are completely unfounded.

1650

As we move forward with this debate, I'm one of the people in this House—I think the debate should carry on for four or five days or to its maximum, or at least until they time-allocate it, because it's unfair to the people in the province of Ontario. They've been overtaxed to a high degree, and now they've got terrible economic conditions in front of them.

They are going to try to hide from the general public with even these pre-budget consultation meetings, having them the week before Christmas when all the plays and Christmas events and receptions and everything are on. I feel sick as a parliamentarian having to put up with this kind of nonsense at a time like this, when you should show leadership.

We should show leadership. We should be out there as much as possible with this committee. It's a very, very important committee. And do you know what? They don't have to report back until February 19, and what are we going to do? We're going to basically time-allocate the committee for five days, let them go on a long winter vacation for six or seven weeks and then come back and write their report. It will be all over, and the government won't have been accountable and transparent to the citizens of Ontario.

I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words today. I encourage everyone in the House, including the Liberal members, to take part in this debate; it's very, very important. It is the history. It is the future of our province and our children to make sure we get this thing right, not by hiding from the general population for six or seven weeks this winter.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Normally, I love to take my 20 minutes or hour to debate issues, but this is not an issue where I want to spend more than a couple of minutes, and I want to explain why.

First of all, this debate is about whether we have enough time in December to debate issues as people come in front of the finance committee, or whether we need more time in January. The point is, the government is not going to change its mind. They clearly want this out of the way, and I understand that. The four days of debate are not going to change that. These four days are not going to politicize anyone. Nobody is listening to what we have to say, except for the devoted people who watch this political channel. Nobody is going to storm Queen's Park to say, "We want more hearings in January." No one is going to do that. What will punish the government is the recession. I've got proof.

In 1990, we got punished so badly, we didn't need hearings, and God, did we have hearings. But did we

need hearings to get beaten up? No. The recession beats up on government members whether they like it or not. Whether it's in December or January, it's going to happen to them. They're going to get whacked.

So what I want to say to my Tory friends in a few seconds is this: They have nothing to debate. They love this motion. The parliamentary assistant took a whole hour. I've never seen him do that before. He took a whole hour to debate nothing. Then the member from Mississauga–Streetsville took 20 minutes to blah, blah, blah, and some other Liberal is going to speak for another 20 minutes to blah, blah, blah. About what, I don't know. They have nothing to bring forth to debate, and you fine Tories are giving these people four days to debate a motion that, in the end, is not going to amount to much.

My view is, let's end this debate, let's force the Liberals to bring some bills that we can debate, and I guarantee they've got nothing. They have absolutely nothing to debate, and that's why they're happy to stretch this out over an eight-hour period.

So for my time, that's it. I don't want to give any more of my time to give credit to this motion that the Liberals have introduced or to support the Tories that I think are way off base. The Liberals will be punished. That's what recessions do, they punish governments, and they're not going to like it, I guarantee it. Whether it's December, January, February, March, it won't mean anything.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak—

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Not 20 minutes.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: And thanks to the member from Trinity–Spadina for prejudging my time as to how long I will take, but no, I will not speak 20 minutes on this. I am not going to participate in further fostering the cynicism that exists towards politicians by engaging in a debate that is not needed, that is not required.

I actually find myself in agreement with my friend from Beaches–East York in saying that this is a time when we need to work together. We all need to roll up our sleeves and get down to work, because we are going through unprecedented times. I spoke to exactly that theme on October 20, when I urged all members of this Legislature to stop pointing fingers at each other, to bring ourselves together collectively. We are all very smart people. We have a duty and a responsibility to our constituents to work together to make sure we come up with good ideas and creative solutions.

This is the time we need to do that. This is exactly the time when we need to demonstrate leadership, when we need to demonstrate that we can rise above petty partisanship and get down to work. We are facing some really unprecedented times, something I can definitely claim I have not seen in my lifetime. In order for us to be able to deal with these economic challenges, we need to ensure that we work together, that we don't spend our time in this Legislature debating a motion about when we go out and actually talk to people about how to deal with this economic reality. I'm shocked that the official opposition has brought this issue to the point where we have

to be in this Legislature debating this, as opposed to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs being outside this building, talking to Ontarians.

This is a deepening economic crisis. I, like I think all of you who have been speaking with your constituents on a daily basis, know that people are concerned. People are scratching their heads, trying to figure out what is going on. We are hearing things like deflation, inflation, stagnation—stuff that most people really don't understand. Deficit structure versus cyclical—what does that mean? What they're looking for is leadership, guidance and reassurance that we will get through this, that their government, their parliamentarians, their legislators are working on this really important, critical issue.

As we also know, this is not a made-in-Ontario problem. This is not even a made-in-Canada problem. This is a global issue. This is an issue where the 20 biggest leaders around the world are sitting together, discussing and trying to figure a way out.

A couple of weeks ago, the opposition was trying to make the argument that this is a recession somehow created by Dalton McGuinty, or that this is a deficit that is being incurred by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government. Just today, we found out that the Prime Minister said, "Guess what, folks? Canada is already in a recession. Guess what, folks? Canada will be incurring a massive deficit." Interestingly, I don't hear the official opposition talking today about how we are in a Harper recession or how we're going to be facing a Harper deficit.

This just goes to show that these are bigger challenges; these are issues that are beyond the scope of Canada and beyond the scope of Ontario. This is why it is even more imperative that all of us work together and try to find those creative, out-of-the-box ideas and solutions to the problem at hand.

I was actually quite heartened today to read in the newspaper that the Prime Minister is now talking about an economic stimulus package, exactly the kind of stimulus package this government brought out months and months ago and has been talking about again and again: the five-point stimulus package investing almost \$10 billion in our public infrastructure through the Investing in Ontario Act—\$77 million to Ottawa alone, \$238 million to the city of Toronto, and across the province. Why? To ensure that we invest in our public infrastructure, and that we stimulate our economy by creating jobs. It's good to see that the Prime Minister is now talking exactly the same, that we need to make sure we invest in our economy, that we invest in our society. It's something that I think gives absolute credence to the actions and measures this government has been doing all along and arguing in this Legislature.

We need to get out of this chamber and hear from Ontarians now. This is a crisis that is developing and deepening every single day.

Ontarians are worried. This is not a matter of Christmas, before Christmas or after Christmas; this is a matter of getting out there and listening to Ontarians so that this

Legislature, the finance minister, the cabinet and the government can take appropriate actions as we move forward.

1700

We don't need to wait until January or February, when it's convenient for us to go and find out what Ontarians are thinking, while they spend their holidays all worried. We need to do that now. What's wrong with our going out and listening to Ontarians across this province—and it is a large province; it takes time and effort to organize to meet those Ontarians—so that this committee can deliberate, come up with a well-thought-out, comprehensive report which then can be tabled in this Legislature for debate, so that the Minister of Finance has time to review that report and to be able to take those recommendations into account when he is putting together the budget at the end of this fiscal year in March? That's reasonable.

If we go out there and talk to people—and we all do talk to our constituents—they will all say: "I can't believe you spent eight and a half hours arguing about this. Is that why we're sending you to Queen's Park?" I'd rather be in Ottawa right now, working on constituent issues, as opposed to standing here and debating whether legislators, members of the committee, should be out in the communities listening to Ontarians and trying to figure out what their concerns and issues are.

I encourage all members of this Legislature to vote in favour of this motion so that members of the committee get ample opportunity to listen to Ontarians, to hear their concerns, to answer their questions, to take in the ideas and bring that feedback to this Legislature so that we all—the Minister of Finance, the cabinet, the government—can benefit from those ideas. January or February is too late. Things are moving constantly. We need to take action now.

In the meantime, I encourage the government to keep investing in our communities. The \$77 million which was given to my community of Ottawa is going toward renewing infrastructure like the sewer system, and it's going toward the renewing of affordable housing in my community, to ensure that people have good places to live. Those are the kinds of investments we need to continue making. We need to ensure that we listen to and hear from Ontarians on whether they want these types of measures to continue as we enter into these uncertain economic times, to make sure that our families have a good quality of life which they very much deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this very important matter. I really urge that we don't debate this 'till the cows come home, as the expression goes, and we move on with the business of representing our constituents and making sure this committee goes out now to hear the views of Ontarians and advise the government to take concrete actions and steps.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's not too often that we see the Liberals being so frugal. We don't often use the term

“frugality” when we speak of the Liberal government. But I’ll tell you, they are absolutely frugal in allowing for debate of important subjects.

Here we see a little bit more of their frugality with debate, moving these pre-budget consultations into a week in December. Everybody knows that historically, and for good reason, pre-budget consultations happen throughout January and February to give the people of this province adequate time to convey and express their thoughts and views to the government, so that when budget time does come, they at least have an understanding of the concerns. They may not act upon it, but at least they have a comprehension level and an understanding of the concerns of the people in our province.

This is atrocious that we are going to move our budget consultation meetings into one week in December. I know my Liberal colleague from Ottawa mentioned that instead of debating, he’d be better off in Ottawa, and maybe he would be better off in Ottawa if debate on something so important as our economy will not afford us the opportunity to hear from those whom we represent in this House, the people who really have granted us authority to act on their behalf. We have an obligation and a duty to them to listen, listen intently, listen with conviction, about what it is that is important to them.

We have seen the Liberal government spend significant amounts of time debating many subjects, debating whether or not we should ban plastic water bottles, whether we should ban incandescent light bulbs, ban trans fats. These are their priorities, but when it comes to actually discussing and debating the real priorities of this province, they try to slough it off into a week in December, just before Christmas. It’s no present for the people of this province when they act in this manner. You cannot wrap up the economy into a nice little bundle one week in December and expect it to be hidden from view of the people of this province.

We have an obligation, and we must take it seriously, that when budget time comes around, the budget will reflect not only the state of our economy but also the priorities of the people in this province.

I would hazard a guess, and I don’t think I’m going too far out on a limb in saying that the priority in this province is our economy—our lost jobs, the downturn in the markets, the tightening credit markets, all significant, important aspects that we must take into consideration. These are the priorities of the people of this province. They ought to be the priority of the members in this Legislature, and it’s inconceivable that any government will have a full comprehension and adequate level of understanding of what this province needs by one week of pre-budget consultation hearings in December.

I ask the members opposite, really, are you spending more time looking at what else you can ban, how many kids are going to be banned in cars or what other light bulbs or junk foods are going to be banned, or are you actually going to put some effort and some consideration into the priorities of the people of this province?

We’ve seen that just last week, 30 mayors from rural Ontario and throughout Ontario got together about the

problems that their communities are facing with this auto bailout or the state of the auto industry. To really address these problems takes a significant amount of time and energy, but it also takes interest, and that is one thing that we are sorely lacking from this government: an interest to discuss and debate and solve the problems of rural and all of Ontario.

We’ve seen time and time again, even this Bill 114, the budget measures that were brought in, closure of debate on significant priorities, closure of discussion and debate, and we see it happening once again. I have to ask all the members of this House, are you doing what the people of this province elected you to do when you prioritize plastic water bottles, the Lord’s Prayer and light bulbs, and you bring closure to our economy, sneak through pre-budget consultation processes and diminish the role of the individuals, the businesses, the communities? You’re diminishing their role in our democracy. It is not acceptable that we have on the opposite side of this House such a cavalier disregard for the interests, opinions and concerns of the people who have elected us to this House.

1710

I could go on and on about things, but I guess we have seen these trends developing for some time. It’s not just overnight that we lost 200,000 jobs in manufacturing. It has been a long-term trend, but we have done nothing to solve it in this House. The Liberal government has chosen to prioritize the insignificance, prioritize the trivial, and hide from real debate and discussion, just as they are doing with this motion as well. They are hiding from their duties. They are hiding from their obligations. They are hiding from the people of this province. It is not what I expect from my fellow legislators. I am sure it is not what the people of this province expect. We expect a certain and significant level of interest by the people in this chamber to actually follow through on their election promises and the rhetoric that we have so often heard.

These trends have been a long time coming. As I said, we didn’t lose 200,000 jobs overnight. Anybody with careful foresight and a vision to tomorrow would see that our economy has been heading in the wrong path for quite a period of time. Taxation levels have been increasing. Government spending has been increasing, increasing, increasing. Jobs have been lost, lost, lost. And all we heard was debate on the trivial and closure on the significant.

Once again this House, this Liberal government, brings in what amounts to a procedural closure, not a closure on debate like they did with their economic Bill 114, not a closure on debate like they did with Bill 119 and the WSIB. This is a closure of process—restricting, preventing and limiting people from engaging their elected representatives in the most fundamental elements of democracy: access to their elected representatives and a means and a vehicle to express their concerns.

The priority of the people of Ontario is not to diminish our democracy, as the Liberals would like us to believe. The priority of the people of this province is to have an

open, transparent and functioning democracy, not what we are getting from this Liberal government, Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Speaker? Excuse me—

Interjection: Madam Speaker.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Madam Speaker.

Interjection: You got the right one.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I got the right one eventually; sorry about that. My apologies.

I guess that's an important thing for all of us to understand: We all recognize we can make mistakes. We should apologize when we make those mistakes and not do them again.

This Liberal government errs, makes mistakes, and then they laugh. The honourable member opposite likes to laugh at this important subject, likes to laugh at closure of democracy, laugh at the process of democracy. Same with the honourable member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, I believe—he likes to laugh at the priorities and the importance of—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: This is an important element. The most important element of democracy, as I said earlier, is access to elected representatives, not closure. I am sure that when the members opposite go home and see their constituents, there should be and probably will be some hanging of heads on this session. However, we on this side of the House have a deep and unwavering commitment that process in democracy and objectives be held firm, be closely guarded, and we will be opposing this motion. We will be opposing the Liberal idea that they can diminish democracy because they have a majority. That's not the way it works.

I do hope that members opposite take some time to reflect on what actually they're doing. Do not cower in front of the whip. Do not hide and shirk your duties. Stand up for the people that you represent, just the way we do on this side of the House. Stand up and say, "We are going to do the right thing, not the wrong thing. We are not going to do what is politically expeditious." You're going to do the right thing, and that is to stand up for the people of this province, allow them to express their voice, give them the opportunity to let you know what their priorities are and provide the avenue for them to express those opinions fully and in a manner that is suitable and appropriate in a democracy.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm pleased to join today's debate because I think it's very important that we have a fulsome discussion on the state of our economy. Our Prime Minister stated, just in recent days, that the world economy has not seen anything quite like the instability it's seeing since 1929. It's almost a century. I think that desperate times call for desperate measures.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I will allow them to continue to heckle, and that's fine, because I really, really am concerned about the state of our economy. I think that it is

important that we speak to all Ontarians when we move forward in how our response to this world economic crisis will be.

I want to give you a few examples of how important travelling with this committee is to my constituents. Each year that I've been elected, representatives from my city and from my riding have been able to take part in the consultations that ultimately became part of a report to the Minister of Finance on how to conduct business in this province.

I'll give you an example from the first year that I was elected, Madam Speaker. As you well know, in 2006 I ran against a New Democrat, Laurel Gibbons, whose son has autism. I made a commitment to Laurel the night of my victory that I'd be her voice on autism matters here at Queen's Park. You know that I have worked hard on that issue, not only here at Queen's Park but also in my own riding. Myself, Laurel Gibbons and a city councillor named Jan Harder in Nepean–Carleton got together and decided we would talk to the province about the need to adequately fund autism resources in the province. The eastern Ontario consultation for the finance and economic affairs committee was in Belleville, so we travelled together to Belleville to talk about the importance of this issue. It was a great opportunity for us, as a community, to talk about the needs that we had identified in our community, the shortcomings, and a way for us to move forward. It was a great opportunity for us to talk to the government as just regular community members, to say that the government of the day needed to address this health issue.

1720

We were happy, then, to see that not only did our party, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, address the issue of autism in our 2007 platform—and I give a lot of credit to my colleague Christine Elliott and my other colleague Frank Klees for working with me in putting together an autism platform which I think was probably among the best of the three parties'—but in addition to that, the other political parties also worked on this issue and included measures in their platforms for treating children with autism. In a very significant way, I believe, it came from these types of presentations.

As importantly, of course, we realized we weren't getting money from the provincial government to fund our autism centre, so in the true spirit of the people from Nepean–Carlton, and in the true spirit of what we would do, we relied on ourselves: self-reliance, which is a key component of the lifestyles of those of us who live in Nepean–Carlton. What we did was we worked very hard to raise \$38,000 for the first year of programming for the South Nepean Autism Centre.

I want to go back to last year, during times when we needed to consult with our constituents regarding the finance and economic affairs committee and its report, ultimately, to the finance minister.

We all have issues in our ridings, and some of these issues don't isolate themselves in Nepean–Carleton or Ottawa–Vanier or Northumberland; they tend to be systemic. It's an opportunity, when we travel, to look at

issues. For example, I have four mobile home parks in my riding. One of the mobile home parks has had water quality problems for the past 30 years. Selenium content is too high, sodium content is too high, and the water is just undrinkable; it's not potable. The aesthetics are terrible.

So last year, during the finance and economic affairs committee hearings, and of course, ultimately, in the report-writing and in our recommendations, I was able to put forward recommendations that would have assisted mobile home park owners right across this province who are confronted with the high prices of testing their own water that goes into their mobile home park, though it's on land that's privately owned. It didn't pass, but it was an opportunity for my community to be part of the consultation in this province on where our budget would eventually go.

It is matters like these—and I had another initiative which I thought was a good idea, because, as you know, and I'm very proud of this, my riding has some of the highest birth rates in the entire country. In south Nepean, in Greely and Riverside South, there's a very high growth area with high birth rates, and there are a lot of young families. So one of the other initiatives, which was brought in by my colleague's husband at the federal level, is the sports registration tax credit. The previous minister of public health promotion, I guess—he was the health promotion minister—had actually said he was going to bring in the same sort of tax credit here provincially. He didn't, but we were able to talk about that as a segment of society, as young mothers and young fathers who are confronted with the skyrocketing costs of hockey and ballet and all those other things that we like our children to be part of but that are becoming increasingly difficult for our families to fund because of the current economic circumstances.

So when we talk about going to committee in the good times, even during the good times we have solid recommendations coming from our communities at these consultations. But sadly, my friends, we're not faced with the good times.

Mr. Mike Colle: Are you having a good time?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: We all remember the good times, Mr. Colle, but—

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Let the good times roll.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Unfortunately, the good times aren't rolling, Mr. Flynn. Unfortunately, we are faced with economic circumstances sometimes beyond our control, other times not. We have to hear from the people across this province.

Granted, the Liberals may not want to hear some of the messages. In recent days, we've been hearing from the 20,000 young men and women who have joined a Facebook group opposing their new drivers' legislation. My own office, although I am nowhere near York University, has received close to 200 e-mails opposing this government's action in recent days.

Interjection: Or lack of it.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Or lack of it, my colleague points out.

The reality is, just because we don't want to hear something does not mean it doesn't need to be said.

My colleague Tim Hudak from Niagara West—Glanbrook, who is also our finance critic, has proposed that we travel to 19 other communities in the province of Ontario. Those who don't support this resolution say that we should just get on with the business of passing the government's bill because it's going to happen anyway, or that we want to stall, or whatever.

The bottom line is, if we're to be responsible in this chamber, we ought to be having the discussion with everyday Ontarians.

In fact, this morning when I was on the flight here from Ottawa, I was talking to somebody who worked at the Ottawa Hospital—my colleague Mr. McNeely will know that oftentimes when we fly to Toronto, we see people who are coming here for meetings, whether they're in the health care sector or the transportation sector or what have you—and I was remarking, as one of the newer members of the assembly, on how disappointed I was in the response to the economy, because I thought it would've been very important for us in this chamber to really debate the substance of the day.

As my colleague Mr. Hillier notes, many times when we want to discuss budgetary or economic measures, closure is forced. We're expected to rush through and not have fulsome debate. When we want to consult further with Ontarians, we're told, "No, we need to do this within a week and a half so that we can meet the deadlines."

Personally, I think that this chamber should be handling things much the way we are in the government agencies committee, which is bringing in agencies of the crown that are responsible to this assembly and asking them for briefings on how it is going to impact the economy. That's actually no different than the committee of finance and economic affairs going out and consulting with everyday Ontarians.

Let me give you two examples of how we're dealing with this very critical issue of consultation and briefings and ensuring that every legislator is brought up to speed so that they can adequately make the tough decisions that we are called upon to make. Tomorrow, the committee that I sit on—I don't see any of my other committee members here, but they will tell you, regardless of political party, that we have brought in Infrastructure Ontario twice. We're now writing a report with recommendations that are going to be very solid, that have to deal with the very tough economic circumstances we're dealing with in this province and how we can move forward. We'll bring them in again, and that's important for every member of this Legislature to know. The government agencies committee will invite Infrastructure Ontario back to our committee so that they can provide all members of this Legislature with a briefing.

Similarly, we will be bringing in the Ontario Securities Commission on December 2. This is critical in these tough economic times when we see people's investments being lost, when we see families wondering how they're

going to pay their mortgage, put food on the table and pay for their kids' education. It's important that the financial systems which we have built, not only in this country, but also in this province, are accountable to the people we represent. So we'll be bringing in the Ontario Securities Commission. They will be offering us a full briefing, and I invite every member of Legislature to attend that briefing. Have your questions in hand, because there is probably no greater issue that we are going to be confronted with in this Ontario Legislature in the 2003-11 period than the state of our provincial, our national and our world economies.

1730

No matter how much members opposite may want to try to hide things under the rug, put their heads in the sand or cover their ears, the sad reality is that over 200,000 people have lost their jobs since they've taken office. That means there are people this Christmas who aren't going to be able to afford the things they'd like to for their children. It also means, in some cases, that they're not going to be able to put food on the table. I don't need to consult widely to know that, because those calls are already coming in to my office. But I'm going to tell you something: If we are going to confront this situation together—the challenges our economy faces, the challenges Ontario workers face, the challenges Ontario families face—we'd better be listening to the families, the workers and the people of this province.

I have more faith in the people of Ontario than I do in the government of the day. It's through them and their hard work that jobs are created; it's through them and their hard work that they put food on the table to feed their families; and it's through them and their hard work that they can send their children on to higher education so that they can once again make this province Canada's economic engine.

I want to speak to that, because I think that if we were to travel to all these important communities, we would learn so much. We would learn about the forestry sector, the manufacturing sector, the health care sector, small trades, the independent business people—all those people who are trying to make ends meet. Again, the Liberals may not like what they hear, but the story needs to be told.

My colleague Mr. Hillier remarked about democracy. We have rules in this place, obviously, and one of my favourite comments actually came from an old Conservative senator my husband used to work for, Senator Mike Forrestall. He spent over 42 years in the Senate—

Mr. Jeff Leal: He was from Halifax, wasn't he?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: He was from Dartmouth, very close. He spent seven elections in the House of Commons and then was appointed to the Senate. He would often remark, because he got to sit on both sides for so long—he sat in opposition and in government; heck, he even saw the Conservative Party down to two seats. But he would always say, "The rules in democracy are to prevent the tyranny of the majority over the minority."

What we often see in cases with this government is that they do try to subvert our rights and the rules that

protect us, in the minority, to have free and full discussion of the important matters of the day. I think this is just one more case where they have subverted our abilities as lawmakers.

I personally would like to appeal to the government today to do something innovative. When we look to our colleagues to the south, in the United States of America, what are they doing right now? They tend to have consultation; they tend to debate the important matters. As my colleague Mr. Hillier said, we're relegated to banning water bottles; we're relegated to taking away the ability for kids to drive freely, even though they've been given a provincial privilege; and we're told that over the two-and-a-half-month recess we're about to have, we can't talk to Ontarians about the economy, arguably the most important issue our province will face in the period from 2003 to 2011.

I'm admittedly a newer member of this chamber, but I know when there's an issue that's bigger than me and every other member in this Legislature. It's the economy, and it's impacting so many other people. It's larger than all of us, and it's important that we make a decision in this chamber to ensure that every Ontarian's voice is heard during these difficult times. I'm not sure how I feel about trying to ram this debate through just before Christmas, when parents are going to be preoccupied with feeding their children and not with debating public policy of the day. I think that out of respect for the people of this province, we ought to be consulting them. If the Liberal government of our day were to be truly innovative, truly caring of this situation, they would make great efforts to reach out to those who are in need right now, those who have lost their jobs, those who are worried that they have lost their life savings, those who don't know where their next mortgage payment is going to come from.

I often tell people in this chamber that I came here from a have-not province, Nova Scotia. That's where I was born, that's where I was raised and that's where I was educated. I came here to create a life. I remember when I came to Ontario it was the height of the Mike Harris revolution, the Common Sense Revolution.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Wow. You'll remember, that's when one million jobs were created by the hard-working people of this province—by the people of the province, not by the government of the day. At the time, the great thing about the Harris Common Sense Revolution was that it put self-reliance—and I talked earlier about communities creating communities, communities creating jobs, people working hard and being proud of it. That was a time when Ontario's economy was the fastest-growing economy, the strongest economy, the best economy of Confederation, and for all of the talk and the baffling and the reason these people don't want to consult is because they have taken Mike Harris's work, Jim Flaherty's work and Norm Sterling's work in an Ontario that was number one in its class to sitting at the back of the classroom. The reason they don't want to consult is

because of that. They don't want to talk to Ontarians because they don't want to hear the truth.

The fact of the matter is, they have squandered Ontario's strong, rich history as Canada's economic engine, and I'm going to tell you something, Madam Speaker: We need to have that discussion with the people in this province, the people who have elected us. Sadly for our good friends in the government, they will be rewarded in a way in which they wish they were not come 2011.

Again, I appeal to them and I request that they consider their actions by forcing through this committee and their earlier actions of moving forward without substantive debate—

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

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: It's a great pleasure to join this debate. I think there's something going on with regard to the strategy of the government to have these hearings take place prior to January and February of next year, and I don't think it's a motivation that should be condoned or accepted by members of this Legislature.

First of all, there have been many motions put forward in this Legislature by the opposition to have meaningful debate by a select committee to deal with this economic crisis that we now have. I would have preferred that a select committee deal with this particular issue over a period of time, as many of the issues that we now face in the province of Ontario are complicated, need serious study and need serious recommendation to the government. We also need to hear from many different people who are involved in many different sectors across the province of Ontario. We are going to need their help to find resolutions to problems which we have not faced in my lifetime or my time in this Legislature, which has been considerable.

1740

The problem, first, with the finance committee of this Legislature dealing with the pre-budget consultations is this: This budget is going to be different from almost any other budget we have seen. There are going to have to be considerations in this budget which no other government has had to deal with. The considerations are going to be: Should we go into deficit, should we be spending money, and what should we be spending that money on if we, in fact, do go into deficit? There's no sense in going into deficit if we're not going to resolve the problems that are on hand.

The history of the finance committee of this Legislature is, I would say, not that great. We have, really, three different finance committees that are in our structure. We have the finance committee, which does pre-budget consultation; we have the estimates committee, which looks at the budget allocations of ministries—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Can I just ask the members to keep their conversations to a minimum. I'm having a difficult time hearing the member. Thank you.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling: Perhaps, Madam Speaker, that's one of the disarming parts about this Legislature.

The government has made up its mind and doesn't listen to debate, and makes up its mind prior to the debate and, therefore, a lot of the public and members wonder why we do debate.

Notwithstanding that, we have three finance committees of this Legislature, three standing committees. One is the finance committee, which we're talking about today; the second one is the estimates committee, which deals with the ongoing budget; and the third committee, of which you are a member, Madam Speaker, is the public accounts committee, which deals with expenditures that have been made and the auditor has criticized, and so we look back. So, one is forward-looking, one is supposed to be present, which is the estimates committee, and one is after the fact, which tries to go back and say to the ministries and the bureaucracy, "How can you address the problems brought forward by the Auditor General?"

I want to talk briefly about what happens on the finance committee. I served on this committee for a couple of years in the early 1990s. Other members of this Legislature who have also been members of this finance committee find that, in a given day, you would have maybe 15 or 20 people come in in front of the committee, and there might be a couple of interesting briefs with regard to a particular matter but, generally speaking, it is those people who are receiving money from the government—the transferees, agents, municipalities, hospital sector, education sector, social services sector—who all come to that particular committee and say, "We need more. We want more money." That's basically the tenor of what happens in the finance committee. So you're sitting there as a member of the Legislature and saying, "Okay, we're going to get another request for more money." I really wonder, what is the purpose of listening to all of this when we're not going to have any more money to give? In fact, given even the expenditures this year—which, I might add, according to the last statement given by our finance minister, are going up by 6%—there just isn't going to be any more money. So what is the purpose of all of this in terms of what we're going to do?

Having said that, it's part of the tradition of this Legislature to have the finance committee and listen to it. Now, my suspicion is that the reason the government wants to do this before Christmas is that the revenues of this province are plummeting so quickly that the news is going to get out in February and March, and if you opened up a meeting to the public to come forward, this government would get dumped on big time by the people who have watched the irrational spending increases that we've had over the last five years by this government, increases of 8% per year of spending. That's what they've done: 8% per year of spending. When the economy has expanded, nominally, by 4%—that doesn't take into account inflation—they have increased spending by 8%.

Peterson did the same thing as McGuinty did. It's a mirror image of what David Peterson did from 1985 to 1990. He increased spending dramatically, creating ex-

pectations in the public that we could sustain that kind of spending, and offering more and more services, expanding more services, being less careful with the taxpayers' dollars than ever before. And we've seen exactly the same thing happen here. We all know what happened in 1990. The revenues dropped like a bombshell, and that's what's happening right now, here, as we speak.

But here's what's going to happen, what I predict is going to happen in the next month or so. We're doing this now because the committee is not going to be able to sit in January and February, because we're going to be prorogued. That's what's going to happen. When you prorogue a Parliament—and I was asked by one of the newer members, "What does 'prorogue' mean?" What that means is, you end this session of this Parliament. You cut off all the bills, and all the committees are cut off, save and except if you pass a motion before we leave here, perhaps on December 11, to retain that committee sitting during the intercession.

What this government is going to do is, they want to have these hearings so they can say they've had these hearings and talked to the public about the budget process, when in fact it won't be anything about the key questions which I outlined before, which are: What spending should occur? What things can we hold up or wait for? How can we create jobs in the interim that will have a long-term good effect on our province of Ontario?

Once January comes, this government can prorogue—not only when they're sitting in the Legislature here, but the Premier can prorogue at any time he wants. What's going to happen is that Dalton McGuinty is going to prorogue this Parliament on January 15 or some date like that. That will mean that we don't come back on February 17, which is what the parliamentary calendar says we do, and the Parliament will be called sometime near the 1st of April, when they can figure out what to do next.

In the three months that we're talking about, from the time we leave here on December 11 and when this committee would sit, or whatever it is, there's not going to be an opportunity for any member of this Legislature or a committee of this Legislature to be engaged in debate about the problems that are going on. There will not be a question period, because when you prorogue, you put the calendar aside and you have to start over with a new throne speech. I'm sure what the government has in mind is, "Let's end this particular session and we'll start afresh with a new throne speech in April, when we know better what's happening on the economic front."

My view of this is exactly the opposite in terms of what Dalton McGuinty and this government should be doing. I believe that we should not be just talking—first of all, the finance committee is not even going to deal with any of the real problems. We have real problems with our auto sector. We have real problems with our high-tech sector. In an area which I represent in this Legislature, the city of Kanata in the west part of Ottawa, the high-tech sector is having problems, and we need to deal with that sector. We need to deal with the agricultural sector. We need to deal with a whole number of sectors that are facing a real problem that's coming on.

We should sit together and hear experts and economists and try to act as best we can in a non-partisan way to try to seek logical, reasonable, intelligent resolutions to these problems.

1750

I know last week I was talking to a number of young people who had graduated from school and were looking for a job. One of our local councillors in Ottawa is looking for a new political assistant. I was told on Saturday night, when I was in the town of Almonte, where they were celebrating the 10th anniversary of the township of Mississippi Mills, by one of the people who was there about their daughter applying for this job with a local councillor in the city of Ottawa. I don't know what the job would pay, but it was probably \$30,000 or maybe \$40,000. The councillor had over 1,000 applications for the job—1,000 applications from young people for one job.

I have a relative who runs a property management company which offers property management services right across Canada, and because his particular business is expanding, partially because some of the larger institutions like banks are getting rid of their employees who are involved in that particular matter and saying, "We need somebody else outside to do that for less money," he's in a mode of hiring. He put out an ad for many of the positions that he's looking for, and he is getting thousands and thousands of people applying for those jobs. Jobs are very scarce. In fact, for two relatively senior positions for people who are very skilled, two people who are presently working in the auto sector are willing to come and work for him for 40% less than they are receiving from the auto sector. That's because they know it's inevitable what's going to happen to them, but it also shows perhaps the market value of some of the staff working in the auto sector, what they are being paid, and it may be perhaps part of the inefficiency of those organizations.

Notwithstanding that, we should have some select committees of this Legislature dealing with the real problem. We should be listening to people who come objectively to the table, people who want to help and find real solutions to these real problems. We don't want to hear only from the people who are receiving money that they want more, which is what this committee is going to be all about. We need to receive information from third parties who are not receiving money, who are not necessarily directly benefiting or losing from a sector's particular problem at the time. We want to talk to those people about how we can help to resolve the problem.

Today in this Legislature, there were issues raised about pension liabilities. Do you think that this finance committee, in five days of hearings where they will be hearing probably 12 or 13 submissions a day, is going to be able to come forward to this Legislature with recommendations about how to deal with the shortfall in the pension funds and the liabilities that these pension funds have at the present time? How are we going to assure the retirees from General Motors, where the pension fund is

\$6 billion in the hole, not today but over the future as they go out to pay those pensions? How are we going to deal with that problem? How are we going to make decisions about it? How are we going to protect the people who are on the pensions? And what is fair to rest of the people of Ontario with regard to that issue? We should be talking about those tough issues.

This is a time in the Legislature when we have to get rid of the spin. We have to talk about real facts. We have to talk about hard decisions. We've got to be able, as legislators, to come together and make recommendations as to what those hard decisions might or might not be. It's not going to be fun. Politicians are very reticent to say no to somebody who comes with their hand out. Politicians are very reluctant to say, "Well, you know, you're going to have to compromise your desires with regard to what you're going to get out of this bailout package, or whatever it might be, in order for us to make it work for everybody." But you can only do that as legislators if you have some good facts in front of you, if you have good research, if you have good consultants who are working with you to bring forward recommendations that we can, in fact, use.

Quite frankly, this particular motion and the idea that the finance committee can deal with our present economic crisis in five days is naive and insulting to all of us. It's preposterous. We should be getting together and saying, "Okay, let's set aside a week in January and February as we go forward, or two weeks or three weeks or whatever it is, one for the auto sector, one for the agricultural sector, one for the tourist sector, one for our municipalities and how they're going to cope through all

of this, because their revenues are going to be very difficult to get." They're going to have a lot of defaulting people, property taxpayers, as we go forward. How are they going to deal with that? How are they going to deal with their infrastructure needs when this government has failed to provide ongoing substantial, sustainable funding for our municipalities? Even though they promised about a year and a half ago, and we now know that it's out and it's a joke and nothing happens for two years and it isn't completed for another ten. We need to be serious about this economic crunch and crisis that we're involved in here, now, in our province of Ontario. There are a lot of people suffering now—not nearly as many as are going to suffer in the next oncoming months.

This motion and the attempt to deal with it prior to January 1, the idea that we're giving over to the government the right to just wash its hands on January 1 and say, "Boys, you're not meeting for three months even though our economy is going down the tubes," is absolutely insulting to the members of this Legislature. It's for that reason that we feel so strongly, that we're speaking in this Legislature, that we're speaking against this motion and will vote against this motion, because we believe much more is needed and we need much more time and concentration on this most important issue for the people of Ontario.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): The time being almost 6:00 of the clock, I'm declaring this House adjourned. The House will reconvene tomorrow morning, Tuesday, November 25, at 9.

The House adjourned at 1758.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Brownell, Jim (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
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Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
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Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hampton, Howard (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kormos, Peter (NDP)	Welland	Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Kular, Kuldip (LIB)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
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McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	
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Moridi, Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	
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Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
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Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	Deputy Third Party House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de parti reconnu
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Ramal, Khalil (LIB)	London–Fanshawe	
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Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Ruprecht, Tony (LIB)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Monique M. (LIB)	Nipissing	Minister of Tourism / Ministre du Tourisme
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
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		Minister of Energy and Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Énergie et de l'Infrastructure
Sorbara, Greg (LIB)	Vaughan	
Sousa, Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	Minister of Small Business and Consumer Services / Ministre des Petites Entreprises et des Services aux consommateurs
Van Bommel, Maria (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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		Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
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Lou Rinaldi, John Yakabuski
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Bas Balkissoon
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Bob Delaney, Joe Dickson
Kevin Daniel Flynn, Sylvia Jones
Norm Miller, Mario Sergio
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jerry J. Ouellette
Laura Albanese, Ernie Hardeman
Andrea Horwath, Phil McNeely
Jerry J. Ouellette, Liz Sandals
Norman W. Sterling, Maria Van Bommel
David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Paul Miller
Bas Balkissoon, Mike Colle
Kim Craitor, Gerry Martiniuk
Paul Miller, Bill Murdoch
Michael Prue, Tony Ruprecht
Mario Sergio
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la 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
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Select Committee on Elections / Comité spécial des élections

Chair / Président: Greg Sorbara
Howard Hampton, Greg Sorbara
Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Continued from back cover

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**Family Statute Law Amendment Act, 2008 , Bill 133,
Mr. Bentley / Loi de 2008 modifiant des lois en ce
qui concerne le droit de la famille, projet de loi 133,
M. Bentley**
First reading agreed to.....4155

MOTIONS

Private members' public business
Hon. Monique M. Smith4155
Motion agreed to4155

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES**

Family law / Droit de la famille
Hon. Christopher Bentley.....4155
Family law
Mrs. Julia Munro.....4156
Family law
Mr. Peter Kormos.....4157
Family law
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....4158

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Workplace insurance
Mr. Norm Miller4158
Workplace harassment
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....4158

Hospital funding
Mr. Bob Delaney4158
Child care
Ms. Sylvia Jones.....4159
Hospital services
Ms. Andrea Horwath4159
Pope John Paul II
Mr. Bob Delaney4159
Innisfil early years centre
Mrs. Julia Munro4159
Lupus
Mr. Bob Delaney4159
Hospices
Ms. Sophia Aggelonitis4160
Logging route
Mr. Norm Miller.....4160
Child custody
Mr. Jim Brownell4160
Emergency dispatch services
Mr. Norm Miller.....4160
Tom Longboat
Mr. Mike Colle.....4161

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Committee sittings
Hon. Monique M. Smith4161
Mr. Wayne Arthurs4161
Mr. Tim Hudak.....4169
Mr. Michael Prue4178
Mr. Bob Delaney4181
Mr. Garfield Dunlop.....4184
Mr. Rosario Marchese4187
Mr. Yasir Naqvi4187
Mr. Randy Hillier4188
Ms. Lisa MacLeod4190
Mr. Norman W. Sterling4193
Debate deemed adjourned4195

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Monday 24 November 2008 / Lundi 24 novembre 2008

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop	4143
Mr. Joe Dickson	4143
Mr. Mike Colle.....	4143
The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters).....	4143

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Automotive industry

Mr. Robert W. Runciman.....	4143
Hon. Michael Bryant.....	4143

Road safety

Mr. Robert W. Runciman.....	4144
Hon. James J. Bradley	4144

Automotive industry

Mr. Howard Hampton	4145
Hon. Michael Bryant.....	4145

Pension plans

Mr. Howard Hampton	4145
Hon. Dwight Duncan	4146

Workplace insurance

Mr. Norm Miller	4146
Hon. Peter Fonseca	4147

Public health

Mme France Gélinas	4147
Hon. David Caplan.....	4147

Workplace insurance

Ms. Laurel C. Broten.....	4148
Hon. Peter Fonseca	4148

Public health

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer	4148
Hon. David Caplan.....	4148

Poverty

Mr. Michael Prue	4149
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4149

Poverty

Mr. Yasir Naqvi	4149
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4150

Child protection

Mrs. Joyce Savoline	4150
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	4150

Child care

Mr. Paul Miller.....	4151
Hon. Madeleine Meilleur	4151

Agricultural research

Mrs. Liz Sandals.....	4151
Hon. Leona Dombrowsky	4151

Environmental protection

Mr. Frank Klees	4152
Hon. John Gerretsen.....	4152

Alcohol and drug treatment

Ms. Andrea Horwath	4152
Hon. Margaret R. Best	4152

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Hon. Christopher Bentley.....	4153
Mr. David Zimmer	4153

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

School safety

Mrs. Joyce Savoline	4153
---------------------------	------

Radio communautaire

M. Gilles Bisson.....	4153
-----------------------	------

Cornwall Community Hospital

Mr. Jim Brownell	4153
------------------------	------

Road safety

Ms. Laurie Scott	4154
------------------------	------

Stardust Ball

Mr. Reza Moridi.....	4154
----------------------	------

Road safety

Mr. Ernie Hardeman.....	4154
-------------------------	------

Prostate cancer

Mr. Yasir Naqvi	4154
-----------------------	------

Affordable housing

Mr. Bas Balkissoon	4155
--------------------------	------

Long-term care

Mr. David Zimmer	4155
------------------------	------

Continued on inside back cover