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Wednesday 14 April 2010

Mercredi 14 avril 2010

Speaker
Honourable Steve Peters

Président
L'honorable Steve Peters

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 14 April 2010

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 14 avril 2010

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RETIREMENT HOMES ACT, 2010

LOI DE 2010 SUR LES MAISONS DE RETRAITE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2010 on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to regulate retirement homes / *Projet de loi 21, Loi réglementant les maisons de retraite.*

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Further debate?

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have 27 minutes left. I had completed my presentation in regard to Bill 21, An Act to regulate retirement homes, and with your indulgence I will share my time with my good friend and colleague John O'Toole, the member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm very pleased that the member from Cambridge has allowed me to share his time on this bill. Perhaps he and I are two of the people most qualified to comment on the process of aging and the accommodations that will be made in our Ontario society.

I would also say that the bill itself—if you look at the bill as a starter—is a fairly significant bill, about 75 pages. So there are about 35 pages in the English language and a similar number in the French language, and there are nine sections to the bill. What it does is set up a framework for a self-regulating organization to regulate retirement homes.

Now, people could quite easily be confused. Their retirement home is not the same as a long-term-care home. Long-term-care homes in that association, both private as well as not-for-profit long-term care, are regulated today by the government. They set standards and the government funds them, to the tune of—each bed costs around \$40,000 a year. On the long-term-care side, I'm very familiar with it. I'm in a long-term-care home, at least one, every week, as I have power of attorney for my mother-in-law, Madge Hall, who's in Centennial Place in Millbrook. Mr. Leal, the member from Peterborough, knows quite well where that is and probably has been

there as well. I know a lot of people there, because I'm there pretty well every week. It's a stage in life that I don't look forward to, to be quite honest.

They are very, very nicely run. In fact, when we were in government, in the terms of the day, we recognized, coming after 10 years of no investments in aging and long-term care to any great extent—we created 20,000 new long-term-care beds and modernized and renovated an additional, I think, 5,000 or 10,000 long-term-care beds. But you know—and Mr. Speaker, you would probably know this as well—there's a long waiting list for people to get into long-term care. It's a significant problem, because we have an aging population. The demographics, with the baby boomers coming along—we know that we've got an aging population. We've got a problem stacking up how we will take care of these people in the latter stages of their life—and some of them live quite a bit longer than traditionally. I think people used to live to between 75 and 85, and now you'll find many people who are 100 years of age in those facilities.

I'm surprised. I did a little survey in the long-term-care home that I'm familiar with. I went to a party for a 100th birthday. I had a little scroll to present, and I presented the scroll. There were probably 15 or 20 people in the room. Some of them were care providers: PSWs and nurses. So I said, "Mrs. So-and-So is turning 80 today. That's quite a remarkable achievement." She's a very astute lady. She's a former teacher, and quite articulate; in a wheelchair, but quite with it. I said, "Now, how many people in this room would be over 90?" Well, every hand in the room went up. They were all over 90. I said, "How many would be?"—I didn't expect there to be many 100-year-olds. Everybody in the room was 100. Unbelievable. In fact, one lady was 103. Unbelievable. So the population is aging, and the point I'm really making here is that we are dealing with a profound surge in health care demand.

On this bill that we are dealing with, Bill 21, I think the member from Cambridge eloquently summarized our concerns—our support, but our concerns for the bill. But if you also look at the budget from a few weeks ago, the Premier said, and he said again in the media yesterday, that in the next 12 years, 70% of all the spending of the province of Ontario will be for health care. They've started a bit of a protracted debate on health care costs. The media covered a bit of that today. The argument with the pharmaceutical companies is the first thrust in that confrontation of taking money away from the providers of health care. That's basically what it's about. We have two choices. We can restrict the amount of money, to avoid

the 70% that goes into health care and to the stakeholders in health care—which would include pharmacists, doctors, nurses, lab technicians and hospital administrators. There's been a lot in the media about how they're going to take on the health care sector. Well, it's clear from the media that they're going to, one by one, pick them off, and they're starting with probably the weakest group, the pharmacists. They're the weakest. They're blaming it on the pharmacists, technically, while we're finding that they should be really aiming at the big pharmaceutical companies, the large, multinational organizations that research and develop drugs. It's hard to figure out just why drugs cost so much. In fact, drugs are the fastest-growing—a 15% increase per year in health care costs.

0910

Getting back to the point here, the next big cost driver is the hospital: the stay in hospital, with all of the antibiotic-resistant things that are going on there, the new medications, the new technology, the new diagnostic equipment and the new intervention techniques of laparoscopic surgery. All these new techniques—MRI, CAT scan etc.—cost money. Technology in health care is growing rapidly.

What has that got to do with Bill 21? The real issue here is that what Bill 21 attempts to do, or gives the impression it is doing, is to provide more accommodation for aging persons. In fact, it is. But the subtle difference here is that the person who's going to the retirement home is paying, not the province. That's a huge deal. I can assure you that I am very familiar with the issue. I was in one of the more, I would say, opulent retirement homes in Peterborough—

Mr. Jeff Leal: They're all there, John.

Mr. John O'Toole: Well, there are a lot in Peterborough. I was looking there on behalf of another person I am helping as they age—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Jeff's on the waiting list.

Mr. John O'Toole: What is it called? The gardens?

Mr. Jeff Leal: Canterbury Gardens.

Mr. John O'Toole: Canterbury Gardens in Peterborough—Ross Smith, of AON. He has about five or six of them, and they're beautiful. In fact, Centennial Place is a Ross Smith AON development as well. Canterbury Gardens is \$65,000 a year. Let's put this in perspective—

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: I need quiet and attention here to make my point.

Here's the real deal: For a person who is retired—let's say an 80-year-old, like the person I know who is looking at it and has a reserve on one of the rooms. To get \$65,000 out of their RRIF, they have to take \$100,000 out, because you have to pay the tax on it—it's coming out of a trust or some kind of fund. So you take \$100,000 out to pay the \$65,000. If you're going to live 10 years, like from 80 to 90, you'd better have \$1 million—I'm serious. It's unbelievable.

If you are 80 years of age and you're being discharged from a hospital after breaking your hip or something like that, and you need convalescent care and there's no room

in long-term care, you may have to go to a retirement home. They're not all going to be \$60,000 or \$65,000, but let's say they're modest places.

The place where my mother-in-law stayed was modest—she was a very modest person from Lakefield at the time. She went to a place—what the heck was it called? It was in Peterborough. Alzheimer's is setting in on me, I suppose. It was about \$40,000 a year.

Any nursing she needed—she did need to have some medication and other medical attention—was paid for on top of the rent. The place was Jackson Creek in Peterborough. You would know it very well, a very lovely spot and all the rest of it. She was there for three or four years, and in that period of time it was \$3,000 a month or maybe a little over—that's \$36,000.

For her to get \$36,000 as disposable cash, she had to cash in \$50,000. In five years, that's 250 grand gone. This is the real point, the subtle point. If a person is going into the long-term care and they're elderly and frail and have no money, here's the very important difference: For the retirement homes that this bill is about, there's no government money at all—zero. To get into long-term care, which is what should be developing, they would take your OAS and your supplement and you would be in a common room—two beds in a room—and all it would cost you would be your old-age security.

You're allowed a personal care allowance—I think it's about \$80 or something like that. Out of all the money you have coming in, you're allowed a personal care allowance, which would cover chewing gum or getting your hair done or things like that. But the province subsidizes it by about \$40,000.

So is Bill 21 actually doing anything? I think Premier McGuinty is introducing private nursing homes; that's what he's doing. It might be the right thing. I think we'll have to debate the bill and hear from the stakeholders.

I don't think there's any flaws in the bill. I'm not qualified to say any more. There are nine sections that I've read; I've looked at the details in those sections only. Let me just comment here, and I'll stick primarily to the bill.

That's the difference: Bill 21 regulates retirement homes; retirement homes are like long-term-care homes but they are not long-term-care homes. If you're in a retirement home and you want care, you pay for it. Get the wallet out because you're paying the nurse or the physiotherapist, whatever, \$50 or \$100 to come and visit you—guaranteed. Aging in Ontario is going to become expensive, and if we think we're going to allow all these people who have income problems to come here and take advantage of that—good luck. We have probably lots of bills facing us in the future. I look at the young people that work here—staff, pages and others—and I'm saying, "Whoa, you're going to be paying for all these old people? Good luck to you." I hope they're thankful—that's all I can say.

I would say, though, that I think there are good parts, and that's what's most important about the bill that's specific to the discussion here. If you look at part IV, it sets

out a residential bill of rights for retirement homes—very appropriate. Now, what is the status of this today? Retirement homes today range from personal homes where the operator may live there—they may be a nurse, for instance; the ones that I'm thinking of, one of the people there is a nurse. They are very qualified, caring people—that's not the question. They have four or five beds. In fact, the whole house is turned into bedrooms, except the kitchen, basically. Even the garage has been converted into having walkers and appliances needed for the elderly: lifts and ramps and things like that. It's quite nice. I have been in two or three of them, and they are quite home-like. There's not the institutional feel, if you will. Those people are paying out of their pocket, through their old age security, savings and whatever else.

But this bill of rights will be something, I'm sure. "A licensee of a retirement home is required to enter into a written agreement with every resident of the home before the resident commences residency in the home and to give every resident a package of information about the residents' rights by that time. A licensee is also required to make that package of information, along with other information, available in the home. Residents of a retirement home are allowed to establish a residents' council for the home. The council has various powers, such as the power to inform residents of their rights and obligations under the act and to attempt to resolve disputes between the licensee and the residents." There is a care council in long-term care as well. So there are a lot of things that have been copied out of the Long-Term Care Act, which I think is appropriate.

There is more: "Regulations made under the act can set out standards for care and safety in a retirement home, including standards with respect to fire, safety and public health requirements and emergency evacuation plans. A licensee of a retirement home is prohibited from preventing a resident of the home from applying for care services from an external care provider of the resident's choosing." This is very important because right now you might qualify on a discharge plan from a hospital. That's when you are in a state where you've been in a hospital, having had a serious orthopaedic accident of some sort—you break your hip, your knee or your shoulder, whatever—and there would be a nurse and a doctor who would say, "Okay, here's the discharge plan." That plan is a plan of care that would either take you into the community or into long-term care, or in this case a retirement home.

When that happens there's another branch of the LHINs, the local health integration networks, called the CCACs, community care access centres; these CCACs would allocate a certain amount of time—that's another problem, by the way; we'll get into that too—for care in the community. That would be allowed, for them to go into a retirement home, which I agree with. It's important that they're entitled to those services, whether they're in their home or in a retirement home, which in fact is their new home; it's their permanent domicile. I think that's a good provision as well. I think the CCACs don't go into long-term care because they have their own staff, and

then you get into all the union issues about who does what in what location. It's a lot of unionized bunk, actually. Care that is provided by qualified individuals is what is most important, and it is important, in this case, for elderly people.

0920

This is very important, and this will be clarified, I'm sure, by the minister. It says here, "If the resident so requests, the licensee is required to make contacts for the resident with respect to those alternatives." That is, the types of care. "When a resident commences residency in a retirement home, the licensee is required to ensure that the resident is assessed and that a plan of care is developed..." Here is the key: that a plan of care is developed. Who is qualified to do it? Not the person who runs the place, essentially. The province has an assessment process itself—it used to be called the case mix index—to determine how much they paid them per resident per day, based on care. There is a new assessment tool they use, and I think this is really what's important here: how much care is required and are they getting it.

Now it's getting into a bit of the Premier McGuinty nanny-state attitude towards almost everything, really; it's regulating it. Whether it's sushi or what kind of dog you have or you name it, these guys think Father Knows Best has taken over the province, basically, unfortunately. This is a case where I believe there is a reasonable responsibility of the government to provide security and oversight, and this might be stepping right over the top. We'll have to see at the end of the day.

If they were paying for it, it would be different. Really, the departing argument is this: If they recognize there's a problem in the hospitals today with ALC beds—ALC is a common term for alternative level of care. These are often referred to in a very selfish way as bed blockers in the hospitals. That's why people are still on stretchers in the emergency room: because they have people in chronic care in hospitals who should not be there. These alternative-level-of-care beds are basically people who should be in retirement homes, mostly, or in long-term care—more probably long-term care. So where is the money for the long-term care? Where's the money for the aging? Where's the money for seniors? I think this bill is admitting they have no time for seniors.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: No, look. They have a lot of time for children, for the all-day kindergarten, which is off the rails too, because there's no money in the budget for it, really. There's no money for autistic children, and there's no money for seniors. I think they're only dealing with—I hate to say it; it sounds cruel and harsh—the ones who are vocal and vote; I really do.

I digress a little bit there, but I think I'm bringing it back to the point where I'm looking at the bill. There are some good sections in this. I'm not being critical of the bill, essentially; I'm being critical of the government's shell game of actually not putting any money into seniors' comfort in the waning years of their life. How selfish. Yet we've got hospital administrators making

\$700,000 a year. Half of them make over half a million. Almost all of them make \$300,000 and more. What the heck is going on here? Yet seniors want a few dollars—even if they were to give them a care allowance. I see in the Income Tax Act—I’ve looked into this, because I’m rapidly approaching this point in life where I need to know these things—that there is a provision where there will be, through the Income Tax Act, federally and provincially—this is very important, and I want the minister to pay attention; there are a couple of ministers here—the caregiver allowance.

Interjection.

Mr. John O’Toole: No, no. See, the member who is raising the taxes, the tax increase member, Wilkinson—he’s the HST king—is now chirping up. With all the money he’s collecting, why doesn’t he give some of it to seniors?

Let’s get back to the serious point here. I really feel there’s a caregiver allowance opportunity here, federally and provincially. Let’s look at the sandwich generation. That’s the generation between the grandparents and the children. The grandparents are living at 90, the parents are 70 and you’ve got the children. The intergenerational group, the sandwich generation, is taking care of both of them to the best of their ability while trying to maintain a lifestyle, educating children to university, having an adequate home, trips and all the things we all want today.

I feel that that generation should get this caregiver allowance. If they want to bring their mother, father or loved one into the home and provide appropriate care at the appropriate time in the appropriate place, I think there should be an allowance for modifying their home so the person can get along, or even to make or create a room on the main floor or something—whatever. I think those assistive devices and those kinds of programs should come first, and I think the love and care of a child or family is very important and part of the solution here. I think that is as important as the retirement homes we’re discussing in Bill 21.

So I put the caregiver allowance tax credit on the books for the minister to incorporate into this, because that retirement home is their home, and it’s going to cost them, as they age, for physiotherapy and even for counselling—counselling of the aging process and being properly cared for. Being cared for is being cared about. It’s not just getting your bandage changed or your medication delivered; it’s being cared about. Accommodating the family in all this is so important. It even ties into my remark on section 4, dealing with the care plan.

This Thursday, tomorrow, I am doing Bill 3, which is on the Substitute Decisions Act, assigning a power of attorney. That’s another case where this should become part of that, because when a person is still in full control of their life and their faculties, they should make decisions about who is the decision-maker for their financial as well as their personal needs, going forward. I think that’s very important to avoid abuse of another sort: the abuse of neglect or of someone coming in and taking advantage of a frail person. So I’d like to put in there as

well that there should be some mechanism, perhaps through the doctor when they first notice it and prescribe an anti-dementia drug of some sort. They should be required to advise the family to take some measures to set up a power of attorney option—not mandatory, but an option.

My bill will be debated tomorrow, and I expect that members look forward to trying to eliminate opportunities for abuse in the circumstance of an aging population. I am working with the Durham Regional Police detective John Keating as well as Tammy Rankin from the elder abuse committee in Durham. So I am working on that as well, and I see a lot of this as being good.

In the next section, “a licensee of a retirement home is required to screen applicants” when hiring people as well as volunteers. This is very important, because it’s a special requirement, like teachers. I believe that teachers are special people who are gifted and focused on children, and I don’t think we need people who have a record of any sort with the legal system. The same thing goes here with a licensed retirement home.

I would also say that inspection is very important: “Part V allows the registrar to appoint inspectors who have certain powers to enter and inspect a retirement home both with and without a warrant....” Warrantless entry? Yes, I guess a person could, with cause, go to court or something and find out why the registrar is picking on them if they’ve had prior conflicts, if you will.

0930

The other part: “Upon receiving a complaint about an alleged contravention of a requirement under this act with respect to a retirement home, the registrar is required to review the complaint and can exercise certain powers....”

“Independently of receiving a complaint, if the registrar believes on reasonable grounds that a licensee has contravened a requirement under the act, the registrar has the power to make certain orders, such as an order to require the licensee to do something....”

I suspect it will be a good system of having a way of resolving disputes, but also due notice to the power of attorney should be appropriate in this bill, not implied. Often these things happen, and it’s less and less engagement of the family. The family needs supports to help their aging parents but they also need to be considered as part of the solution. Let’s not let Big Brother take over the whole business.

Part VII deals with general matters. There’s a provision here on the restriction of disclosure of personal information. This old eHealth—as we all know, the government spent billions of dollars on eHealth, federally and provincially, it turns out, on these Health Infoway administrators. Anyway, there’s more to say on this bill and I look forward to the comments on it.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I’d like to commend the member from Durham for his comments. It appears that he is con-

cerned about his future and where he's going, and he's helping to pave the way for a better environment, I think.

I would have hoped that they would have gone a little more in-depth. When we present our position on this we're going to go into a little more depth. We've done extensive research on this situation and we'd like to share it with the House.

I personally have seen some of the horror stories in old folks homes over the years but I must confess that my mother-in-law was in a facility in Hamilton that was actually quite good. Unfortunately, they were at times understaffed, stressed out and did face some financial problems that the community stepped up and helped out. So there are a lot of things that have to be done in this situation and a lot of things that we want to address.

We're very concerned about this regulatory body that they're forming. We feel it doesn't go far enough. It's almost self-regulating. It's almost like getting the fox to guard the henhouse because it's all industry-motivated and industry people involved in this regulatory body. It's not a fair process. Public consultation will be at a bare minimum. We don't like that either, and we'll be addressing that in the upcoming comments.

The member from Welland will be doing a two-minute hit on this situation as well. I'm sure that with his expertise, his lawyer background and his exposure to people in his community, he will endeavour to enlighten us with some of his famous stories.

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

Mr. Jim Brownell: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes this morning to speak to the bill and certainly to make comments. I did listen intently to the member from Durham. He made a comment about how "the government has no time for seniors." I challenge him to come to eastern Ontario and visit a lady who lives at 4 Gray Avenue in Long Sault—that lady being my mother. She told me last week, "You go back and you tell Premier McGuinty and the Minister of Health what supports I'm getting and how appreciative I am of the supports that I'm getting from the government that Mr. McGuinty leads." I did that last Friday. And I can tell you she is aging at home; she is living in her own home.

Let's get to this bill. You said, "Is there anything in this bill? Is it doing anything?" It certainly is. This bill is establishing mandatory care and safety standards; requiring emergency plans and infection controls and prevention programs; assessing the care needs and care planning for the seniors and whatnot.

You commented about visiting your mother-in-law. I have had many opportunities—I won't anymore because Annie Webber, my grade 12 teacher, passed away on March 30. She was in a retirement home in Cornwall, Chateau Cornwall, an excellent retirement home that would have absolutely no problem with this bill, because they have set their standards high. Annie Webber lived there until the age of 101. I regularly visited with her, and she often commented about the wonderful standards that they had set and how comfortably she was living. But all

across Ontario now, there will be residents' rights. They will know what to expect. This will give the families the comfort, knowledge and understanding that things are being operated properly in the retirement home. So I can speak from experience, and I say our aging at home—

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

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I can't agree more with my colleague from Durham that this is a sidestep to actually providing the kind of care that there are majorly long wait-lists for in Ontario, and that is long-term care. In my area alone, in the LHIN that Burlington belongs to, we have over 3,000 people waiting for long-term-care facilities. People would love to be able to live in their homes, be cared for in their homes and live that independent kind of life, but not all people can do that. This, in my opinion, is a sidestep to dealing with the issue that's really at hand, and that is how to create more long-term-care beds. All this is doing is putting some kind of little fix on alternative care patients being able to move into nursing homes now instead of staying in hospitals, where they're costing us about \$200 million a year for care.

This government doesn't do the right thing. It patches things up. It weaves and bobs and tries to make it look like it's addressing an issue, and it isn't. Seniors are a huge, formidable, growing population in this province. This government has no idea of how to handle it. Their answer to it is to create regulations for nursing homes. Who can argue with that? That's a great idea, but—

Mr. John O'Toole: Retirement homes.

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: Sorry, retirement homes; create regulations for retirement homes. But you know, what's happening here is that this move is the first step in creating beds in retirement homes for people on long wait-lists for long-term-care facilities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Welland.

Mr. Peter Kormos: I'm grateful to the member from Durham for his contribution to this debate. I listened carefully to his commentary. I'm even more eager to hear from the NDP critic on seniors' issues, Paul Miller, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I know he's frustrated because he's going to get around 35 minutes of his one-hour lead in today. He was disappointed in the fact that the lead is only an hour, because he has so much to say after his analysis of this bill, and the bill is so flawed.

It's Pharisaical, I tell you, for the government to talk about creating a charter of rights for seniors when there's nobody to advocate for those rights. The seniors who are most at risk are the seniors who are frail, the seniors who, as we understand, have begun to suffer from dementia, full-blown dementia or Alzheimer's; seniors who don't have family or friends to support them in their senior years; seniors who are alone. And we ain't seen nothing yet, because the first of the baby boomers are going to turn 65 next year, in 2011. Whether it's health care, whether it's pharmaceuticals, whether it's seniors' care, we ain't seen nothing yet, until 2011, when the first of

those baby boomers, my generation, start to turn 65. For this government to suggest that somehow a charter of rights is going to solve issues of abuse and underservicing for seniors is beyond naive; as I say, it's Pharisaical.

So I say as well that we've got to understand that what this bill does is provide the foundation, the groundwork, for a growing private, for-profit seniors' care sector. This government is throwing in the towel on public services for seniors, and it's prepared to abandon our seniors, now and in the future, to the profit-motivated private sector operators—not little mom-and-poppers; the big corporate operators coming out of the United States. Shame on Dalton McGuinty. Shame on him and his caucus.

0940

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Response? The member for Cambridge.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: On behalf of myself and my colleague the member for Durham, I'd like to thank the members for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Burlington and Welland.

I will be supporting this bill with a number of provisos. Regulation of retirement homes is long overdue; however, this is just another step by this government to privatize our health care system. Their lack of concern for seniors and long-term-care facilities—they don't even give us the right information as to the number of long-term-care facilities built during their tenure. If you read one website of the government and another, they contradict each other. The fact is, they have basically frozen the building of new long-term-care facilities, and these seniors, over the next 10 years, will be flowing into retirement homes.

Let there be no misunderstandings. These privately owned retirement homes will be raising their rates as a result of this regulation. It will be more expensive for seniors, just like what's going on with the drugstore wars with this government. The drugstores are going to get their profits somehow and they're going to raise their prices in other fields, and seniors are going to be paying more for retirement homes. They're going to be paying more at drugstores. We know that they're going to be paying a lot more on their hydro, on their heat, and I'm not even covering the HST and its devastating effect on—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: New Democrats have long called for a regulatory system for retirement homes that protects the rights of vulnerable citizens, ensures adequate services and prevents the abuse of Ontarians living in a retirement home, and would prevent acutely ill patients from being placed in a home that is unable to properly care for them. This government has long told our party and Ontarians that legislation addressing these concerns was on its way and that we'd be happy once it was drafted. We sadly knew that this was not going to be the case—yet another promise not quite kept.

In 2007, the government held a public consultation process, and they've been patting themselves on the back

ever since—a public consultation process that was deeply inadequate. Our concerns that this flawed process would be the basis for the act were well-founded. The consultation process, according to the much-respected legal aid clinic, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, or ACE, would likely not assist greatly in developing public policy.

In their submission to the consultation process, they warned that this government was not getting it right in the questions you were asking, the definitions you proposed and the regulatory models you were considering.

On May 22, 2007, ACE wrote to the then Minister of Health and minister responsible for seniors, saying, "I am writing to you to express our concerns in respect to the consultation on regulating the retirement home industry that has been conducted by Ontario Seniors' Secretariat. Although we have long encouraged greater regulation of retirement homes, we do not believe that the present consultation and any proposal coming from this consultation will provide appropriate regulation of this industry or appropriate protections for the tenants who live in this type of accommodation."

ACE actually cautioned this government about many provisions that we see in the act today. ACE sent your government a sobering warning, but we see today that your government chose to ignore ACE's expertise. You ignored the expertise of one of the most pre-eminent legal clinics that specializes in these issues.

Again, I quote from the same ACE letter: "The right questions were not asked at this consultation. In particular the question of whether retirement homes are part of the continuum of housing or whether retirement homes should be a parallel system to long-term-care homes offering health services on a private-pay model was not discussed."

The failure to actually have this discussion has led this government to introduce an act that may well do more harm to Ontario's seniors than any good. These failures are evident in Bill 21.

Stakeholders in the early consultation and stakeholders today are extremely concerned with the most fundamental of provisions proposed in this consultation: the regulatory body it proposes. The model they were proposing in the 2007 consultation and, sadly, what we see today is a totally unaccountable, third party regulatory system.

Also, fundamentally, we see that this government has failed to fix the incomprehensible problem of not making fire sprinklers mandatory in all buildings. In spite of the best advice of firefighters and coroners' reports, this government has left the issue of sprinkler retrofits off the table. I will get into this issue in detail later in my remarks.

As I get into some of the details of this bill, I wonder if the government can tell me whether these situations could occur today. I think they could. These are all situations that the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly told the government about. They told you the following stories:

"ACE's clients report concerns about the way medications are stored and distributed. Some of our clients have even reported that volunteers at the retirement home

have access to medication cupboards and are responsible for distributing prescription medication despite the fact that they have no training or expertise.

“We have had clients who experience a health crisis and are taken to hospital, only to find that upon their discharge from hospital, the retirement home refuses to take them back, in effect evicting them with no legal cause under the governing landlord-tenant legislation.

“We have been told that what some retirement homes refer to as ‘quarterly nursing assessments’ are, in fact, opportunities for the retirement home to sell additional services to the tenants—services which they may or may not actually need.

“We have had clients who have been assaulted by other tenants in their retirement home, and the home’s administration does not respond appropriately or at all. One of our clients was sexually assaulted by another tenant in her retirement home, and the home’s administration did not call the police or otherwise follow up on protecting our client or the other tenants, because staff took the position that there is no ‘corporate policy’ on reporting such assaults.” Interesting: no corporate policy. Since when does corporate policy supersede the law of this province?

“We have had clients with mobility impairments who tell us that they are ‘not allowed’ to use the common dining room with the other tenants if they are using their wheelchair or walker, since these devices make other people feel ‘old’ or ‘disabled.’ Instead, tenants using wheelchairs or walkers are required to take their meals in their own unit, with an extra charge for ‘tray service.’ One of our clients, who used an electric wheelchair due to a severe mobility impairment, was told that she was not allowed to use her wheelchair in the hallways of the retirement home, and could only use it within her own unit.” I don’t know what use the chair would be, if that’s the case. “Aside from being a clear violation of human rights legislation, these reactions from retirement homes seem illogical given the clientele they purport to serve.”

Has your government introduced safeguards to make sure these situations could not happen after the bill passes? I don’t think so.

New Democrats and Ontarians have waited far too long for this bill, but we have waited in the hope that the McGuinty Liberal government would actually make some meaningful change for the vulnerable Ontarians who must live in this sector. For too long, seniors have been in retirement homes without adequate medical care and without safeguards in place to prevent abuse. We know that, tragically, Ontarians have lost their lives because of this government’s unwillingness to move on these important issues, from inappropriate transfers of high-needs patients to retirement homes, to sprinkler retrofits.

Ontario’s chief coroner released a report that talked about this in September 2009. He was looking at the death of an elderly woman transferred to a retirement home as an alternate-level-of-care patient with acute

health care needs. The recommendations of the chief coroner include:

“(30) Programs in private care or retirement homes in the province of Ontario providing care to frail elderly residents awaiting placement in a licensed long-term-care home should be held to the same standards for care and services as a licensed long-term-care home. Implicit in this recommendation is the need to ensure the same regulations and inspections with regular public reporting of findings that exists for licensed long-term-care homes.”

“(31) Private care homes or retirement homes in the province of Ontario should be subject to regulations, oversight, and regular inspection by a public sector agency in order to ensure that care and safety needs are met. The guiding priority should be the care and safety needs of the frail elderly, and not the type of facility in which the placement occurs.”

0950

Can the government tell me this: Have you implemented these suggestions? I don’t think so. Have you met the call of Ontario’s chief coroner? Sadly, while this government has dawdled, elderly Ontarians have been put at risk. In some cases, such as those noted above, some have tragically died. This should be the time that all of this changes. However, New Democrats are extremely frustrated that this is not the case.

The bill before us gives the illusion of regulation, but it will do nothing for Ontario’s vulnerable seniors. It introduces a toothless—I repeat, toothless—regulatory model. It does not deal with the reality of having health care services delivered in a facility that is not regulated by any appropriate standards.

This is what the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly had to say about the idea that retirement homes would offer the same level of care as long-term-care homes:

“Originally we assumed that the consultation would be in respect to retirement homes in a continuum, but after attending the consultation it would appear that the Ontario Seniors’ Secretariat and the retirement industry want to promote a particular understanding of ‘aging in place,’ which we take to mean that retirement homes could offer the same level of care services as long-term-care homes, as long as the tenants were willing to pay privately for that care. If that is the case, that would mean, in our opinion, that the government intends to promote what is in effect two-tier medicine.”

Let’s be very clear about this: This legislation simply defines retirement homes as a residential facility that provides two or more care services. There is no cap on the care that retirement homes can offer. There’s nothing in this legislation that prevents retirement homes from offering the exact same level of care as a long-term-care facility.

Let’s be even more clear: This government and the NDP, of course, say they are in favour of a strong regulatory system for long-term-care homes. It is important to note that New Democrats are sadly disappointed by the long-term-care regulations that this government has recently finalized, but that is a different story. The point

is that the government seems to agree that Ontarians deserve an ironclad system of regulations to protect vulnerable residents in long-term care. For some reason, when a senior with the same health care needs is put into a retirement home, they do not seem to need the same protection—puzzling, to say the least.

In Bill 21, there is no cap on the care residents can receive, so all of a sudden Ontarians can receive health care services in a retirement home without any real regulations governing the kind of care they are being provided. This is insanity. It defies common sense. It will leave Ontarians vulnerable to terrible situations. How can the government purport to be protecting vulnerable residents in long-term-care facilities and presumably in retirement homes when they are not dealing with the very, very basic issue?

New Democrats have many concerns about this legislation. We have long called for a strong regulatory system, and we see virtually nothing here to be happy with. This is a consumer protection bill, and while we support consumer protection, this bill is not what we've been calling for and will not fix the problems we have today in the retirement homes sector.

Informing residents of the services offered is important, but it does nothing—I repeat, nothing—to ensure adequate health care services, if that is what the home will be offering. In fact, we know that under the care homes act, residents were already supposed to be given a package of information of services that were available, so what is new about these regulations? This government seems to be living in a smoke-and-mirrors fantasy world.

If retirement homes were simply residential facilities, this would be an okay piece of legislation. But the reality is that, increasingly, Ontarians are living in these facilities when they have serious health care issues. That is why there are provisions for a secure unit, something which I will talk about in a bit, but clearly there is an acknowledgement that there are individuals with dementia, for example, living in these buildings.

But instead of looking at this reality and planning for the increasing demand on both our retirement homes and long-term-care homes, this government is acting as if the world of retirement homes is not changing and will not change. New Democrats are very concerned that the bill before us today is setting the stage for a second tier of long-term care, just like the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly cautioned you about almost three years ago.

We are concerned because we see no cap on the health care services that could be offered by retirement homes—a system designed for the wealthy who can afford to pay for all the services they need. Because of Bill 21, staffing requirements and hours have been ignored. Continuity of care is also off the table. We hear that a care plan has to be developed—but again, no teeth, no enforcement; no staffing or training requirements; no regulations when it comes to issues like bathing, nursing care, dispensing of medications and so on.

We are very concerned that this weak regulatory system that places few obligations on operators will lead to

long-term-care homes deciding to re-designate as a retirement home to get around the regulations. There's nothing preventing them from doing this and they only have a huge profit to gain from moving to the retirement home sector.

We are concerned that this government will start relying on the under-regulated private retirement home market to deliver the care that should be delivered in a long-term-care facility. This could easily be a slippery slope in a two-tiered system of long-term care. Why do we bother regulating long-term care so strictly if we have no strong mechanisms to regulate a retirement home? And they may be essentially delivering the same services.

Once again, as ACE says, "One of the reasons the public is so concerned about retirement home regulation is that some retirement homes have been running as 'bootleg' or underground long-term-care homes, in effect serving people with the same high health care needs as in long-term care but not subject to any of the oversight or rules associated with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Although retirement homes are essentially a 'private' relationship between the operator-as-landlord and the tenant, it is the health care aspect of the retirement home that gives it a 'public' character to many observers."

But there is no action on this today, in spite of the fact that many stakeholders have told you the same thing: Ontario has long needed regulation of retirement homes because of the increasing health care issues. Yet this bill totally ignores the reality of health care in these facilities. It's alarming.

Can this government say that Ontarians are happy with the care of elderly and vulnerable residents to be transferred to what will remain a totally unregulated health care environment? I don't think so.

There are a number of serious omissions in this legislation, and I now want to talk about the regulatory model that this bill creates, because New Democrats think it is inherently flawed. We see no mechanism for ensuring adequate transparency or accountability. There is nothing preventing it from being an industry-dominated board that only answers to itself—once again, the fox guarding the henhouse. In fact, it seems designated to do exactly that. It is a regulatory body that will be setting its own regulations—interesting. It will be hiring its own inspectors—very interesting—employees who will depend on the regulatory body for their paycheques. That's interesting: "You answer to me, and I pay you." Did you forget to look at something? I don't know. It will be dealing with residents' complaints. In fact, residents will have no other recourse if something goes wrong other than to go to this unaccountable, industry-dominated regulatory model. Whoa. That kind of cuts off your options, doesn't it?

It is no surprise, then, that the system of inspection and compliance looks very weak. There are no teeth in this model. One would hope that the government has learned from its mistakes from models like the Technical Standards and Safety Authority. New Democrats warned that

this would be a deadly model, that there was too much room for abuse and shortcuts. We knew the safety of Ontarians was threatened, and, sadly, we saw this become a reality with the explosion at Sunrise Propane in August 2008. It yet again emphasized the need for accountable, third party oversight. Why has this government decided to bury its head in the sand and create a terrible opportunity for abuse and human suffering yet again?

As I was speaking about earlier, New Democrats want a regulatory system that ensures Ontarians in retirement homes who are receiving health care services are entitled to the same standards and regulation that they would find in another health care facility. The government has totally ignored these issues.

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The issue of downloading the ALC patients to retirement homes is not dealt with. I was told that downloading of ALC patients to retirement homes is dealt with in the Long-Term Care Homes Act. This doesn't make sense. There needs to be explicit provisions in the act that account for these kinds of transfers.

As I go through the act, I see many other concerns and oversights. For quite some time now, I've raised my concerns about mandatory sprinkler systems in every retirement home and every resident suite. A review of the newspaper stories about retirement home fires and the injuries to and the deaths of too many seniors have prompted not only family members but those emergency services personnel who worked those fires to call for mandatory sprinkler systems in retirement homes. These government members know that even the coroners' inquests recommend mandatory sprinklers in retirement homes. Despite knowing all of these well-investigated and well-thought-out recommendations, the McGuinty Liberals have not taken even a baby step toward implementing these life-saving recommendations.

There have been three coroners' inquests: for the 1980 fire at Extencicare Mississauga, where 25 residents died; for the 1995 fire at Meadowcroft in Mississauga, where eight residents died; and for the 1997 fire at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in the veterans' wing, where three died. Each of these inquests called for retroactive installation of sprinkler systems in all retirement, nursing and long-term-care homes. It didn't happen, and it still isn't going on today.

Will this government be held responsible for the next tragedy that happens in our province for lack of regulations and lack of supporting safety and health that they claim they do all the time? Are they going to be responsible for the next set of seniors that unfortunately are exposed to these types of situations and meet with death or serious injury? What are they going to do? We're bringing it to their attention now. We're telling them to do something now to stop this from happening. I'll be the first one to stand up if another senior dies because there's no sprinkler system. I'll be the first to go after them, and I'll remind them about this day, about this speech and about this request. Let's hope it doesn't fall on deaf ears as we continue.

I look at these statistics, these recommendations, and at Bill 21, and I can't help but ask this question: Did those 36 seniors die in vain? Last week, in a response to my question in this House, I said, "How many more lives have to be sacrificed before this government does the right thing, steps up to the plate and legislates mandatory sprinkler systems in all retirement homes immediately?" The Minister of Community Safety responded this way: The Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association President Fred LeBlanc wrote to him, saying, "We are concerned that there will be too much emphasis on and faith placed in technology, resulting in a false sense of security." The minister continued:

"They are not a magic bullet. They are only one of the many tools required to adequately protect the residents in the event of a structural fire.

"We agree with the professional firefighters that they're an important tool, but they are only one tool in the arsenal to fight fires."

That's an interesting statement by the minister. Apparently, there appears to be a difference of opinion. I'd like to know why the minister has chosen to ignore the three coroners' inquests and the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs? Both of them call for mandatory sprinkler systems in retirement homes. I would like the minister to explain, in the circumstances of these specific retirement home fires, what tools other than automatic sprinklers would have saved those 36 seniors? If it's not so important, what would they have in place that would have prevented this?

Their own people are telling them—the Toronto and Mississauga fire departments are two of the largest staffed fire departments in Canada. The response times to these fires were well under industry standards, and the buildings complied with the existing codes. Yet 36 seniors died.

If the minister is really concerned that there will be too much emphasis on and faith placed in technology, resulting in a false sense of security, why did this government amend the Ontario building code to require the installation of sprinklers in all new residential buildings three storeys or higher? What's good for the goose should be good for the gander, but it doesn't appear that way.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, NFPA, there has never been a multi-fatal fire in a retirement home that has working sprinkler systems. I'm going to repeat that: According to the National Fire Protection Association, there has never been a multi-fatal fire in a retirement home that has working sprinkler systems—never. So I guess that tool is a very important tool. Those fire victims should have been able to depend on mandatory government legislation so that their lives might have been saved.

More recently, just two years ago, in April 2008, there was a Rowanwood retirement home fire in Huntsville. Thank heavens for the staff and two off-duty Hamilton police officers who were driving by and helped to evacuate the 56 residents without injury. Without the good fortune of those police officers driving by late at night

and being able to help, what would the outcome have been? No one knows. Just 14 months ago, the retirement home fire in Orillia where two residents died and 11 were sent to hospital—the firefighters who were on the scene at these horrific retirement home fires said that the retirement homes should have had sprinkler systems. The firefighters who were at the fire said they should have had sprinkler systems.

In the Toronto Star, on January 19, 2009, Fire Marshal Pat Burke is quoted as follows: “This is an extremely tragic fire because it occurred in one of Ontario’s most vulnerable occupancies.... This fire has been overwhelming to the fire service, the families and the community.... We want to look at ways to prevent this from ever happening again.” This is an opportunity to prevent this from ever happening again. This is the opportunity to amend Bill 21 and to include mandatory sprinkler systems in every retirement home in this province.

CBC news on January 21, 2009, referring to the Muskoka Heights retirement home fire, notes that “the fire has also raised the issue of sprinkler systems inside care facilities in Ontario.

“Under current legislation, only newly built facilities are required to install sprinklers. The Muskoka Heights retirement home was more than 50 years old and did not have a sprinkler system.

“John Galt, of the Fire Sprinkler Alliance, said the injuries and deaths in Orillia are ‘another needless tragedy that didn’t need to happen. These are lives that could have been saved with modern sprinkler technology.’”

Referring to the 1995 Meadowcroft inquest, once again the CBC reported that “in the wake of the fire, a coroner’s inquest recommended all new nursing homes should install sprinklers. But it also said all existing nursing homes should be retrofitted with them.”

The media gets it. The fire chiefs get it. Senior organizations get it. We get it. But they don’t get it. The government doesn’t get it or is ignoring it. I don’t know how much more proof they need. Let’s get on with it. Let’s protect our seniors. It’s just amazing. How many more lives are going to be lost before the McGuinty Liberals, the majority government, finally do the right thing and amend Bill 21, your act to regulate retirement homes, to make sprinkler systems mandatory in every retirement home in this province?

In addition to this terrible—I repeat, terrible—oversight, the government has not dealt with the contradictions among various pieces of legislation. For instance, can a person be detained in a secure unit—this is permitted in the act—although retirement homes continue to fall under the Residential Tenancies Act? Can a person be detained in their own home? I don’t see anything in the legislation that will ensure that the financial security of seniors is protected; nothing to prevent the abuse of seniors by homes who have taken over their financial matters. Again, no public oversight, no transparency and no accountability.

I think there’s also a serious issue when it comes to the resident councils that this act creates. It does not

make sense that if a resident wants to pass on their seat to a family member or appoint a person to sit on their council on their behalf, they’re not allowed. Why is this? What reason can the McGuinty government provide for this? I don’t get it.

In general, this is a very weak bill that treats retirement home residents as nothing more than tenants with a few extra services on the side. The reality is that the population of Ontario is rapidly aging, and many of these homes are increasingly providing health care services. I look at this and it just boggles my mind that the oversight is terrible. They don’t deal with the issues that are extremely important. The government is ignoring the realities and is failing Ontario’s most vulnerable seniors.

All that New Democrats have long called for is the regulation of retirement homes. We’re not happy to have this less-than-adequate bill in front of us today. Instead of strong regulations and protections, we see more of the same from this government: evasion and lip service to life-and-death issues.

New Democrats will be working with groups like the Registered Nurses’ Association, the Service Employees International Union and the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly to make sure that this government gets this regulatory model right. We want to make sure that there are full public hearings on this legislation. We want to hear from all the seniors’ groups, the resident councils, the health care experts, the front-line workers, the legal aid clinics and so on about what this bill has failed to provide and how it can be fixed. New Democrats sincerely hope that this government is willing to acknowledge their oversights in this bill and consider the amendments that we will be proposing. We are deeply concerned that Bill 21 is going to leave vulnerable Ontarians even worse off than before. That would be a huge tragedy to all in this province and in this country.

Hopefully, once again, we’ll be going to committee. Once again, it’ll be five Liberals, two Conservatives and one NDP, and I’m pretty sure that all our amendments will fall on deaf ears even if they’re good, even if they’re positive, even if they make a difference.

Once again, I’d like to say—I’ll reiterate—that when I came to this Legislature for the first time, in the first week I was here the Premier stood up in this House and said, “I welcome the new members to this House. We are here to serve the people of Ontario. We are here to work together to help the people of this province and improve the living conditions in this province.” Well, I must confess I’ve been extremely disillusioned since that statement, because everything we bring forward gets shot down unless it’s their idea—and you know what? Amazingly, a few months later, our ideas show up and it’s the government’s brilliant idea that they came up with. Unbelievable. You know, he stated to me that we had to work together—no partisan politics; he wanted to work together. That’s a myth, sir; it’s a myth. It’s not that way. And the sooner the public realizes that, the better off this province will be.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 8, this House is in recess until 10:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Introduction of guests?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, just bear with me.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I could rule the honourable member out of order for using that BlackBerry to give those names.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park today a couple of constituents who came down to have lunch with me, Mr. and Mrs. Upton.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to ask unanimous consent for all members of the chamber to wear the Save Transit City buttons today during this session.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Agreed? I heard a no.

The member from Mississauga South.

Mr. Charles Sousa: My colleague Mr. Dan Schiedel, owner of Advanced Battery Systems Inc., and an old schoolmate of mine from university, is here in the House. I'd just like to welcome him to Queen's Park.

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I believe the parents of the page for my riding are here in the Legislature, the parents of Khaleel Rajwani. There they are. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome to the Legislature today Rod Hurd, who is the brother of our Clerk, Deb Deller, and also Gregor MacAuley, from Australia, visiting today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Seated in the Speaker's gallery, from my riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London, I'd like to welcome Kory Preston and his colleagues from Wilfrid Laurier University who are visiting Queen's Park today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to introduce a number of people in the members' gallery who are here from the Save the Met Site Coalition. We have Ben Lefebvre, Denis Courvette, along with Gilles Nugent and Bill McGillis, and I forget—Brian? The other one, anyway. I'd like to welcome them, and I'm sure they are going to get themselves known by members around here. Thank you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. The Ontario PC caucus has a plan that sets out

straightforward and practical solutions to improve transparency in all corners of Ontario's government. Our plan calls for freedom of information to apply to all provincial public bodies and for proactive posting of government expenses and contracts over \$10,000.

My question is this: Why is Premier McGuinty ignoring our plan?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. I had the opportunity as well to chat a little bit about it here in this venue just yesterday. We will take a close look at the plan. They just put it out yesterday. I think, in fairness, we deserve a bit of time to gain a better understanding of what they're proposing.

But what I said yesterday, and I'll repeat today, is that we find it passing strange, given that all of the measures that we have put in place that bring about heightened accountability and transparency have been rejected by the official opposition. Whether it was expanding the role of the auditor, expanding freedom-of-information requests, putting in place our Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act or preventing a party from ever hiding a deficit, again, those have all been rejected in the past by this opposition.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Instead of adopting our plan, the Premier wants to play silly games with this. When asked about shining a light on contracts and expenses, he says he shines a light on class sizes and patient safety rates. Why is posting information on class sizes and patient safety rates a good thing, but posting government expenses and contracts over \$10,000 not a good thing?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: The fact of the matter is that we're moving in both directions at the same time. With respect to freedom of information, we've expanded coverage to cover OPG, Hydro One, universities and cancer care. We think those are good, progressive initiatives, and it would be nice to have the support of the official opposition in that regard. We've expanded the role of the auditor so that he can now conduct value-for-money audits on our hospitals, our schools, our universities and our long-term-care homes. Again, I would invite the official opposition to lend support to those kinds of initiatives.

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

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Ontario families have to wonder why the Premier is so strenuously resisting greater transparency about what the McGuinty Liberals are up to. Premier McGuinty was boasting about the merits of expanding freedom of information over OPG and Hydro One, but he doesn't want to apply it to all provincial bodies. He boasts about rules for travel and hospitality expenses for 22 of over 600 agencies, but he doesn't want to post the information so the public can police them. Why is Premier McGuinty okay with accountability some of the time and for some agencies, but afraid to let the public scrutinize what the McGuinty Liberals are up to across government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, I think our record speaks for itself. We've been making real progress when

it comes to introducing further accountability and transparency.

One of the things that we're working on of late, although it appears that the official opposition has not cottoned on to this yet, is accountability and transparency with respect to drug prices. We want to get drug prices down for our families. This is good news for the people of Ontario. Whether you're paying through the public plan as a taxpayer, through a private plan as an employee, or if you're paying out of pocket directly because you don't benefit from any particular plan, this is good news. It would be great to know where the official opposition stands on this effort on our part to introduce transparency and accountability and get drug prices down for Ontario families

LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Minister of Government Services. Yesterday in question period, Premier McGuinty said that his new rules for hospitality expenses applied to "our 22 biggest agencies and our LHINs." But the Integrity Commissioner's office told us that they do not review LHIN expenses. My question to you is, who do we believe: the Premier, or the Integrity Commissioner that we just reappointed yesterday?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I think it's important for me to recap what our government has done in terms of improving accountability for the people of Ontario.

As a part of our commitment to greater transparency and accountability, we have expanded the powers of the Auditor General. We have also brought Hydro One, Ontario Power Generation and Ontario universities under the freedom-of-information act. We have increased transparency for 22 agencies whose expenses will be reviewed by the Integrity Commissioner. That has already been done, and the processes are in place to make that happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The fact remains that Minister Takhar knows the LHINs are one of 600 public bodies that have no one monitoring their expenses. He knows that, and he didn't answer the question. That means no one is looking at LHINs and seeing if they're reimbursing limousine rides, like eHealth did for Sarah Kramer. No one is scrutinizing the LHIN expenses to catch claims of \$75 cupcakes or a staff outing like the one at Cancer Care Ontario that cost us \$10,000. No one knows if LHINs are reimbursing their boards, staff or consultants for GPS systems, like the WSIB did for Steve Mahoney.

My question, back to the minister: Why did the Premier say the Integrity Commissioner is scrutinizing LHIN expenses when she is not?

1040

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: My understanding is that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has already written to the LHINs, and they have agreed to post all their expenses online. In addition to that, the 22 agencies' expenses will be sent to the Integrity Commissioner and

she will be reviewing their expenses. If there are any expenses she is not satisfied with, those expenses will be reimbursed by those agencies. We have moved ahead to actually put a lot of controls in place to make sure that all these expenses are the right expenses and the right people are being reimbursed for those expenses.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Again, the Integrity Commissioner's office told us that she is not reviewing the expenses of the LHINs. Records that the PC caucus has obtained through freedom of information reveal that the LHINs are following the same set of policies that got the CEOs at eHealth and OLG fired. The South West LHIN paid over \$4,000 to Liberal-friendly consultants of Courtyard without any receipts. The North West LHIN reimbursed \$19,000 to consultants without any documentation. If expenses were posted online, the public could enforce the rules. Premier McGuinty is not adopting our PC plan for greater oversight and accountability for these types of expenses.

My question back to the minister, and I hope he answers it: How will Minister Takhar enforce travel and accountability rules at the LHINs and the other 600 public—

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

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar: I have a letter that the minister wrote to the LHINs on February 4, and she wrote it to all the LHINs. It says that, "LHINs should take the proactive step of posting the expenses of their board and senior management online on a go-forward basis. This is similar to a requirement for 22 of Ontario's largest agencies under the Public Sector Expenses Review Act." They have agreed to do it.

In addition to that, I think the member made reference to the WSIB. The WSIB is among the top 22 agencies whose expenses for the top five officials will be sent to the Integrity Commissioner.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Toronto families are feeling betrayed after being told that the McGuinty government is backing away from its promised support for public transit projects in their city. My question is a simple one: Did the Premier consult with Toronto MPPs in his own caucus before he derailed the plans for Toronto's new light rail system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: My colleague needs to understand—and I've said this a few times before, and I'm not sure how I can introduce further clarity to this. We remain absolutely committed to making the investments that we have spoken about in the past into public transit in the city of Toronto and beyond. What we have done is taken into account our financial circumstances. We've taken into account the consequences on our finances of a global recession. We've decided that we need to stretch out that investment over a longer period of

time. I would implore, once again, my honourable colleague to understand that that is the appropriate and responsible thing to do in the circumstances.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Let's be clear. What the Premier is saying is that Toronto families have to wait. They have to keep waiting at their stops, they have to keep missing dinner with their kids and they have to stay sitting in gridlock throughout the city. He thinks it's more important to hand out another corporate tax cut and build a private diesel train to the airport, but the member from Eglinton–Lawrence vehemently disagrees with the Premier on this matter. On his website it says: "Build the Eglinton LRT now." Did the Premier consult with this member, a former TTC commissioner, before he derailed the plans for the Toronto transit system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I'm not sure what more I can say, except that we plan to move ahead. We're waiting now for the best advice from Metrolinx with respect to how we might schedule that. There may be better news than my colleague is anticipating on that score, in terms of how quickly we can move ahead.

Let me tell you about what we have done as a sign of our commitment. We've invested, province-wide, \$9.3 billion so far in public transit, which represents about \$9.3 billion more than the previous government put in. With respect to the city of Toronto, we've also invested \$3.5 billion. We're also turning over a portion of the provincial gas tax, and that has provided Toronto with \$688 million, over the first five years of the program, for them to in turn invest in public transit.

So I think, by any objective measure, we continue to be seen to be very supportive of public transit.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Toronto residents were counting on the Premier to keep his word to improve their lives and build their city.

I'll quote one Toronto resident: "I know this new LRT will make a huge difference to the people living in my community, whether they're commuting home in time to watch a daughter's soccer game or looking for a better way to make a doctor's appointment."

That was the member for Don Valley East speaking about the Finch LRT. Did the Premier consult with him or the rest of his caucus of Toronto MPPs before breaking his promise on Transit City, or does he take his Toronto MPPs for granted the same way he takes Torontonians for granted?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Again, we remain absolutely committed, as a caucus and as a government, to moving ahead with public transit in the city of Toronto. I've listed some of our initiatives in that regard.

I'll remind my honourable colleague that there is digging under way at present for a new subway extension that their party voted against. We're talking about an \$870-million investment to extend the TTC subway to York region. Two tunnelling machines have been pur-

chased, the work is under way, and we look forward to doing more at the earliest possible opportunity.

PENSION PLANS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier, as well. Yesterday at a major pension conference here in Toronto, Jim Leech, the CEO of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, delivered a very important speech. He said, "The truth is that" defined benefit "plans are far better vehicles for pension saving from both a security and a cost basis for both employees and sponsors."

Ontario's finance minister is in fact addressing that very conference this morning. Will he lead a spirited fight for secure, affordable pension plans in this province? Or will this government cave to the banks and insurance companies and endorse the very option that Mr. Leech warned us against yesterday in his speech?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: This is an issue we've been talking about for quite some time, at least two years now. It's something that I've raised with my counterparts from across the country. It's something that I've raised directly with the Prime Minister.

I think we can take a little bit of heart in the recent initiatives put forward by the federal Minister of Finance, who is now on a tour across the country—there are at least three venues he's visiting—to speak to Canadians to get a better understanding of the consequences of the lack of adequacy when it comes to retirement incomes.

We look forward to being part of what I believe rightly should be a federal initiative, a national response to a national challenge. Again, we'll continue to work with the federal government and our counterparts across the country.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In his speech, Mr. Leech pointed out that the group RRSPs and defined contribution plans that are administered by banks and insurance companies carry very large administrative fees, fees that can reduce retirement savings by up to 30%.

There are only two sides to this historic pension debate: On one side we have the defenders of secure, public, cost-effective defined benefit plans; on the other, the expensive, private option being promoted by the banks and insurance companies. It's time for the McGuinty government to get off the fence. Which side is the Premier on?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I just think it's a little early for us to try to pigeonhole the various options here. I'm not even sure if all the options are yet on the table. I think it's a little early in that regard.

I think one thing that we need to be—and I encourage my colleague to do the same—is honest with Ontarians and Canadians. Whatever we do, there will be an additional cost to employees when it comes to setting some money aside. If there's any consensus among economists out there, it's that we are saving too little. We shouldn't be captivated by some imaginary notion that that saving

will be done by somebody else. We'll have to set more money aside in some way, shape or fashion, and that's part of the conversation we're going to have with Canadians.

1050

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: That honesty and clarity is exactly what I'm seeking from this Premier. In a few weeks, Canada's finance ministers are in fact going to meet to decide on the future of retirement savings in this country, and he knows that. For the two thirds of working Ontarians who have no workplace pension, the outcome of this meeting is extremely important.

New Democrats have come down firmly on the side of public defined benefit pension plans. We support expanding the CPP and have also proposed a made-in-Ontario solution in the form of our own, very-well-received Ontario retirement plan.

We stand with the four million Ontarians without pensions. Does the Premier stand with them or with the banks and insurance companies?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: I stand for a thoughtful consultation and deliberative process so that we can get the best options before us and we can do what is in the best interests of the people of Ontario.

I know that my honourable colleague is concerned about costs for our families. We've embarked upon a very important initiative to reduce the cost of drugs for Ontario families. At one point or other in our lives, we're going to need access to prescription medication. It would be great to know where the NDP stands on this very important issue. The initiative we put forward will save money for all our families, whether they're paying for drugs directly out of pocket, through an employment plan of some kind or as a taxpayer through a public plan.

It's in everybody's interests that we find a way forward on this. It would be great to know whether the NDP is in fact on the side of families in this important initiative in getting their drug costs down.

PHARMACISTS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier. You are cutting almost a billion dollars in health care in the front-line services that pharmacists provide. That's a billion-dollar cut. That's what Premier McGuinty wasted on the Liberal-friendly consultants in the billion-dollar eHealth boondoggle. What front-line health care should Ontario patients expect Premier McGuinty to cut next?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm very happy to have the opportunity to talk about the reforms we're making in our drug plan in the province of Ontario.

Let's be really clear: This is all about getting fair prices for drugs for the people of Ontario. It's about getting lower prices and it's about expanding the access to drugs for people in this province who need drugs to be

healthy or to stay healthy. This is absolutely the right thing to do.

It's also about cleaning up a system of payments that were paid from generic companies to pharmacy owners in exchange for stocking those drugs on their shelves. It cleans up that system. It allows us to pay directly for those front-line services that are so enormously valuable, services provided by those front-line pharmacists.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mrs. Christine Elliott: We think it's important for Ontario patients and families to know that, in actual fact, the McGuinty government is holding Ontario patients hostage in its PR war against pharmacists. The McGuinty Liberals are vilifying pharmacists, but most of these trusted health professionals operate in small operations and can't afford the costs that you're downloading onto them. Some will have to reduce the number of hours they're able to open, but the fact of the matter is that others are going to be forced to close. Ontario patients are going to pay the price for this.

Why are you holding Ontario patients hostage in your fight to cut the front-line services that our pharmacists provide?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am frankly astonished that the Conservative Party has chosen to side with Big Pharmacy on this issue. I tell you, we are on the side of patients on this issue, and that is why, standing with us, we have CARP, the advocacy organization for seniors. We have the Canadian Cancer Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation supporting this. We have organized labour—Sid Ryan stood with me as we announced these changes.

These are the right changes. It will allow us to offer more drugs for more people. It's the right—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me describe—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Renfrew: You silenced, I sat, and then I heard you again. Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me demonstrate what a difference this will make for people once these changes are implemented. A person diagnosed with depression on a drug called citalopram currently pays \$346 a year. Under the new plan, they will pay \$114 a year. That is a savings of \$232 for a person who needs the drug to be healthy.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Premier. On February 17, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal ordered the government to increase special diet allowance rates for special assistance recipients with various medical conditions within three months. Instead of increasing those rates, the McGuinty government, through the Ministry of Community and Social Services, is asking for a one-year

extension so it can eliminate the special diet allowance and reduce the same benefits that were awarded.

Why won't the government comply with the Ontario Human Rights Commission ruling and provide adequate special diet allowance payments as ordered?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This is a very good question. The government will comply with the decision of the Human Rights Tribunal. We need more time to investigate and to see who qualifies for this new addition, to respect the decision of the human rights. That's the only reason we will comply with the decision of the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: That is not the case at all. The assistant deputy minister has filed an affidavit that set out exactly the opposite of what you have just said: that they are asking for the year in order to eliminate the program.

This minister is refusing to answer the question. She implies that the current special diet allowance is not medically based, and she has said that before. Of course it is. Recipients must have specific medical conditions in order to receive the allowance.

The tribunal decision clearly states that the special diet allowances are inadequate. This arrogant government responds by doing away with the allowance altogether and effectively cutting the special assistance rates up to 20%. This is nothing less than cruelty. Why does this government think it is above the decision of the Human Rights Tribunal?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The question that was asked by my colleague was: Why have we asked for some time? First of all, you're partly right. We will appeal part of the decision, but there is another part that we will comply with, so we're asking for more time. Why are we asking for more time? It's because we need to review all the applications for a part of the special diet, and we need more time. We'll appeal one part, but the other part we will comply with, and we need more time to make the right decision and give those claimants what they deserve under the decision of the human rights.

PHARMACISTS

Ms. Helena Jaczek: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I've been hearing from my constituents a lot about the government's proposed drug reforms, many of whom are supportive of lower generic drug prices. I've also heard from some pharmacies that are concerned about the proposed removal of professional allowances, the payments from generic drug companies to pharmacies for stocking their products. Some have said that they use this money to provide services and are concerned about how they will continue to provide those services. In fact, just last night at an event I attended, I heard from a pharmacist who owns a couple of Shoppers Drug Mart franchises. He is concerned he will not be compensated for the counselling and educational services he provides to his clients.

I understand that the government's plan includes new funding for professional services. Can the minister please provide more details about this funding?

1100

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to make it very clear that pharmacies will be fairly compensated for providing the patient care they provide. Lowering the cost of drugs puts us in a better position to fund these kinds of vital patient services in the future.

We know that pharmacists want to use their full range of skills. Pharmacists are highly trained health professionals and a vital part of our health care system. Through our reforms, we are ensuring that pharmacies are fairly compensated by helping patients, by increasing dispensing fees and by paying for additional services provided to patients. We're committing \$246 million for the following: \$124 million to increase dispensing fees to pharmacists; \$100 million in new investments to compensate pharmacists directly for services they provide, in addition to the \$50 million already allocated—

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

Ms. Helena Jaczek: I'm glad that I'll be able to provide more details to my constituents and ensure them that we will be fairly compensating pharmacies for the important services that they provide.

Pharmacists are professionals who have the training and expertise to play a larger role as health care providers. I understand that, with the passage of legislation in December, medical professionals, including pharmacists, are poised to take on expanded scopes of practice. Fully utilizing the skills of our medical professionals is critical to providing the best health care for Ontarians.

With the new funding for pharmacists' professional services, my constituents will want to know what services they can receive from their local pharmacists. Can the minister please tell this House about the changes to the scope of practice for pharmacists?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member for her question. These changes, these reforms, build on Bill 179 that was passed last year to give Ontarians better access to health care and more choices in who provides it. The changes expand the scope of practice for pharmacists, enabling them to more fully utilize their skills for the benefit of Ontarians. For example, pharmacists will be allowed, under Bill 179, to prescribe certain drugs, to renew prescriptions—that would save people a visit to their doctors. This is the kind of change we envision for our health care system in the province.

We look forward to working with the college of pharmacists to implement the regulations that will make these changes a reality. These reforms are the right thing to do. We're committed to harnessing the enormous ability of pharmacists to benefit the people of Ontario.

TAXATION

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. Ontario families are just 78 days away from July 1 and

the McGuinty Liberals greedy new HST tax grab being applied to everything.

In Brantford, Jim Todd says, “Being on ODSP, I’m barely able to make ends meet as it is. And now, I’ll have to add as much as 13%.”

The member for Brant won’t stand up for Jim Todd, so I will. Premier, will you scrap your greedy HST tax grab so Ontario families, like Jim Todd’s, can afford home heating fuel, gas and the items they need every day?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: To the Minister of Revenue.

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank the new member for the question. I’m delighted to answer your question.

I think it’s important, particularly in your riding, that the good people of Leeds–Grenville know that the marginal effective tax rate on our side of the river is going to be half of what it is on the other side of the river, which is where we need the jobs: on this side of the river.

What we’re doing is ensuring that the people with the least benefit the most by our tax reform. You referenced people on ODSP. They receive the GST rebate from the federal government. They’ll continue to receive that, but now they’ll receive the HST rebate, up to another \$260 for every adult and child in that family, whether in Leeds–Grenville or anywhere in the province of Ontario. That is something, unfortunately, your party voted against, but that is something that we are proud that we’re doing.

Interjection.

Hon. John Wilkinson: That’s why it’s important, despite the fact that your colleagues are a little caffeinated today, that we are making sure that we’re reforming our tax—

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

Mr. Steve Clark: It’s not only in Brant where they’re looking for their provincial representative who stands up for their community.

In Sudbury, Leo Bisson is questioning how the McGuinty Liberals can say that the HST is good for everyone when it looks like the \$25 million in bonuses for tax collectors is only good for tax collectors. He says, “Look into the HST and you will see it’s no good for Ontario. If the local MPP reads this, I hope he will do something for the first time in a long time.”

The member for Sudbury won’t ask, so I will: Will you scrap the greedy HST tax grab? Yes or no?

Hon. John Wilkinson: I want to thank Prime Minister Stephen Harper for the work that he has done in regard to reforming our taxes, working with our Premier. I want to thank the federal Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty, who is known better by some than others in this House, and particularly our Minister of Finance, Dwight Duncan.

Particularly, I want to thank your predecessor, Senator Robert Runciman, whose job it is to deliver the HST in the Senate of this great country. I would say that Senator Runciman is showing tremendous leadership in his new role of shepherding the HST legislation through Canada’s Senate, and I know it’s a job that he agreed to take on

when the Prime Minister gave him the privilege of serving in the Senate.

I say that we work together for the good of Ontario. You cannot have a strong Canada and a weak Ontario. That’s why—

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

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure. Minister, last Friday, a number of projects were announced under the FIT program. Specifically, there were two particular projects: one in Hearst that’s a biomass project that you would know about because we’ve met and we’ve discussed this particular project, as well as A&T Energy, who are putting forward a project on solar panel construction in the Val Rita area.

Can you tell me why two locally owned projects that are community based were bypassed in favour of an international project?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The Ontario Power Authority makes the decisions as to how these projects move forward, and they make them based on a large number of criteria. But I’m sure the member joins me in celebrating the fact that what we announced last week is going to create 20,000 jobs in every corner of this province. What we announced last week is the equivalent of a \$9-billion private sector investment in Ontario’s economy: 184 new green projects that are going to deliver 2,500 megawatts of clean, green power to the people of Ontario. It was a good day for green energy in Ontario last week when the Premier and I made these announcements.

There’s more to do and there will be more projects moving forward, but I think we’re off to a pretty good start. We’re leading the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, “a pretty good start” depends on where you stand. In the case of Hearst, you’ve got a locally owned project where they are going to basically clean up an area that has been polluted for a number of years. We’ve met on this issue before. It’s locally owned, locally operated and locally sourced. In the case of Val Rita, all local ownership—again, sourced all within the province of Ontario.

Tell me what the downside is for the Ontario government to say that we’re not going to favour those very projects that are community-based projects that come from Ontario in favour of projects that come from outside of this province.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The member is right: I’ve had an opportunity to meet with the mayor and himself on this particular project, and I’ll continue to work with them. I think there’s a lot of potential there.

At the same time, the Ontario Power Authority, when they make these decisions, make them on a number of criteria, one of which is shovel-readiness. I’m not going to speak for them in terms of the criteria and their judg-

ment on this, but I think the project the member raises has potential, and we're going to continue to work with them.

There is potential for expansion of green energy right across this province. There are lots of good opportunities out there. All I can say is that 184 projects were moved forward last week, a \$9-billion investment when you include the mid-range projects we announced a month ago; 20,000 jobs—green jobs, new generation jobs—being produced across this province. That's something that every member of this Legislature should be—

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

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. In the riding of Algoma–Manitoulin, in ridings across the north and, as a matter of fact, in ridings across the province, aboriginal communities face a number of unique challenges. Children and youth face particular challenges, including high levels of youth suicide and a high number of children in need of the protection of children's aid societies.

In fact, this week, the ministry posted a report on the review of the Child and Family Services Act. In the review of the provisions related to the protection of aboriginal children and youth, feedback from the aboriginal community told us that there is much to be done to better support those facing these challenges.

What is the ministry doing to address these concerns about strengthening support for Ontario's aboriginal youth?

1110

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: I want to thank the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for his question and his advocacy for his community and others on this important issue. I'm very pleased to speak to this issue. As the member said, we have come to the conclusion of the Child and Family Services Act review, and we continue to make progress with respect to ensuring a better future for aboriginal children and youth across the province.

Just this morning, I attended Native Child and Family Services of Toronto with my colleagues the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the member for Toronto Centre, where we announced the appointment of Chief John Beaucage as the first advisor to the Minister of Children and Youth Services on aboriginal child welfare.

We know that there is much more work to do. We need the advice, the guidance and the facilitation of someone in the role of John Beaucage. We look forward to doing that work.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I know all members welcome the appointment of Chief John Beaucage. I know that the province is making improvements for aboriginal children and youth; however, these challenges are not new challenges. Youth in northern remote communities, youth in downtown Toronto, youth in Algoma–Manitou-

lin and from across the province have been facing difficult circumstances for far too long. What is being done now to address additional supports for these youth?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten: The member is quite correct. These issues are not new; they are issues that communities have been grappling with for a very long time. We know that the solutions are not simple and that we need a broad group of passionate people at the table. That is what Chief John Beaucage will do.

We can be proud of the work that we have done to date. I want to highlight a few of the key investments we have made in Ontario's aboriginal youth, both on- and off-reserve: \$8.5 million a year in Aboriginal Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, a program for aboriginal fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, in 180 communities, on- and off-reserve; \$6.2 million to provide mental health and life skill supports for at-risk urban aboriginal youth; and \$17 million a year in child care spaces for on- and off-reserve aboriginal children.

We have done a great deal, but there is much more to do. We look forward to working with experts, leaders, aboriginal leaders and those who can help us find the pathway for a better future for Ontario's aboriginal children and youth.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Last Friday, the Premier delivered an astonishing rebuke of Ontario's colleges and universities. The headline in the *Globe and Mail* says it all: "McGuinty Gives Ontario Colleges and Universities an F in New Spending." In a startling admission, the Premier said, "I don't have measurable improvement in my colleges and universities for the funding that I put in."

Why is the Premier chastising our colleges and universities for his mismanagement?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: In my next life, I want to come back as a headline writer because there's so much fun to be had in that regard. They are unbridled.

We have had the great privilege of working with our colleges and universities and those people who deliver our apprenticeship training, as well, and we've got some really good news for them. The first bit is that we're going to fund another 20,000 spaces in our colleges and universities this September. We're doing that notwithstanding the fact that we have some real financial challenges on our hands.

Beyond that, we want to sit down with the sector and develop a new five-year plan to ensure that we can move from 62% to 70% of Ontario adults having post-secondary education. We very much look forward to working with the sector in this regard.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I say to the Premier: I read the transcript, and I'd say the headline is bang-on.

When the Liberal government grossly underestimated enrolment growth, colleges and universities filled the void. When the government failed to deliver on the Pre-

mier's promise to bring post-secondary per-student funding up to the national average, colleges and universities made do and didn't complain. When this government implemented a sloppy Second Career program to deal with massive unemployment that created a quadruple cohort in the system, Ontario's colleges came to the government's rescue. This Premier has the audacity to call our colleges and universities failures and give them an F.

Will the Premier apologize to our colleges and universities?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty: Just to be very clear—and my honourable colleague knows this—there was never any reference to a grade of any kind, and I did not use the F-word, “failure,” in particular, just so we are clear on this count.

I do, again, sincerely, very much look forward to working with our colleges and universities. We've got this new ambition we're setting before ourselves of taking ourselves from 62% of our adults having a post-secondary education up to 70%.

We want to go ahead with a new online institute to enable more Ontarians to access a quality Ontario university degree online. We also want to invite more international students to come and acquire a first-class post-secondary education that can only be obtained here in Ontario, Canada.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Labatt's decision to close Lakeport Brewery in Hamilton is another big blow to my city and the 143 families, of course, who counted on those good jobs to pay their bills. But there is a glimmer of hope: At least three interested parties are looking at taking over the operation. My question to the Premier, therefore, is a simple one: What is his government prepared to do to ensure that brewing operations and good jobs remain at the Lakeport site?

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

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I appreciate the opportunity to speak not just to the member opposite but to the people of Hamilton.

Members on this side of the House, of course—the member for Hamilton Mountain in particular is very concerned about the goings-on with the potential loss of jobs out of that Labatt's facility.

I think we have to remember that if there is a role that the Ontario government can play to facilitate any discussion, any opportunities, with using that facility for others who could come in to make a viable business, the Ontario government will be there. We anticipate that we may well have that kind of role to play.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's true; Hamilton has been hit very hard by job losses. The 143 workers and their families are holding out hope, however, that jobs might be saved by a new operator at the Lakeport brewery. But Labatt's says it is moving all the equipment—lock, stock

and barrel—from the brewery, a move that industry experts say is going to make a takeover practically impossible. Given the Premier's close connections to key Labatt executives, including the vice-president of corporate affairs, will he get on the phone to his friends at Labatt's and make sure that the equipment is kept at the brewery?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello: I can't comment on who is friends with whom, but I can tell you that we are very concerned any time we have a job loss or the potential of families who won't have jobs. That is a huge concern to us. In southern Ontario, which has been the hardest-hit in the nation during the worst recession of our times in generations, we worry in particular about anything like this happening.

We are determined that if the Ontario government can play a role in facilitating discussion where there could be a takeover or that plant could become viable, we are prepared to do that role.

I can tell you that for Labatt's, they certainly are their own corporation with their decisions to make. If there's a way for us to be influential, we intend to play that role.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Glen R. Murray: My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, today marks International Day of Pink, or Pink Shirt Day, which is observed every year in commemoration of a group of students at a high school in Nova Scotia who wore pink in support of a fellow student who was bullied for simply wearing a pink shirt.

I want to acknowledge the young people in our schools who are showing real leadership in creating respectful classrooms and playgrounds.

Mr. Speaker, as you will note, many members of the Legislature today are commemorating this by wearing an article of pink clothing. I think many are wearing boxer shorts.

Minister, can you outline what our government is doing to prevent acts of bullying in our schools?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: Bullying in schools has been a very serious issue, and that is why our government did take action. That is why we amended the Education Act to include bullying as an infraction for which a student can be disciplined.

Our safe schools strategy will help protect students and ensure that there are serious consequences for those who would be involved in bullying activities.

The Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act came into effect February 1, and it does require all board employees—if they witness an act of bullying, that must be reported to the principal. Principals and staff have been trained to understand this.

I would also want to thank the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, who has recognized the value of our safe school action teams in her resolution that requires these teams to recognize and organize Bullying Awareness Week in November. All members of this House—

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

1120

Mr. Glen R. Murray: Minister, I think the expression of support for this initiative is a great idea. I'm glad that so many members of all parties are showing their support for ending discrimination and for safer school environments.

Minister, Pink Shirt Day also represents a desire to end discriminatory behaviour and to ensure that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, feel included and are free of discrimination. Acts of discrimination and bullying based on these factors—and any other, for that matter—are entirely unacceptable. Homophobia, racism and other forms of discrimination do not belong in our schools at any time.

Would the minister tell us what her ministry is doing to ensure that students of all backgrounds are treated equally and feel included in their schools?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky: I know that parents in my riding have spoken to me on this very issue as well, and I'm happy to report in the Legislature today that in April 2009, we released *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. It does aim to have inclusiveness as part of the understanding in our schools. This strategy provides a framework to help the education community identify and remove discriminatory biases in their classrooms and in their schools.

We started our work on the equity strategy; when we started, only 43 of 72 boards had a plan in place. However, by September of this year all boards in the province of Ontario will have plans in place. I think that this is very important and I know it's something that parents would expect, and we can say in September of this year—

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

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Attorney General. In 2007, Dalton McGuinty promised to create a disability rights secretariat. It is now 2010, and despite the legal requirement to do so, this secretariat does not exist. Ontarians with disabilities want to know: Why did you break yet another promise?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the minister responsible for disability issues.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: This is a very good question; however, I'm very proud of what the Ontario government has done with regard to accessibility. As you know, we passed a bill in 2005 with the unanimity of this House for us to make sure that by 2025, Ontario will be fully accessible. We have been working so hard for the past two years to develop standards in accessibility, and we're very proud to say that the accessibility standards are almost all completed—some of them need approval from cabinet—and will be in place, and Ontario will be a leader in Canada and in North America.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: There's still no secretariat. Many people with a disability face barriers when trying to exercise a constitutionally protected right to vote in elections. Members of the disability community say that your Bill 231 will not address a number of these obstacles. The Premier says he is open to new technologies to assist disabled voters, but your legislation forbids these technologies and goes so far as creating barriers to the use of cost-effective voting equipment used in England and the United States. The disability community demands action. This afternoon, we will consider motions to amend Bill 231.

Will the McGuinty Liberals account for their promise to improve accessibility in our democratic processes and allow these new technologies to be used?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Bill 231 is proposing the most substantial improvement to Ontario's Election Act in the history of this province: to enhance accessibility in provincial elections. The reforms introduced in Bill 231 would significantly improve access to voting, particularly for persons with disabilities, while protecting election integrity. This is part of our government's ongoing commitment to improve the lives and participation of persons with disabilities in Ontario.

I am very proud to say that this bill, if passed, will make Ontario the first among the federal and provincial governments in Canada to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to provide accessible voting machines in every returning office for advanced polls so that voters with disabilities can vote privately and independently—very proud.

RETIREMENT HOMES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the minister responsible for seniors' issues. This morning, I spoke about Bill 21, An Act to regulate retirement homes. I raised several questions, particularly about mandatory sprinkler systems in every retirement home in Ontario. Government members know that three—I repeat, three—coroner's inquests have recommended mandatory sprinkler systems. Despite knowing of these well-investigated recommendations, the McGuinty Liberals have ignored this expertise and have taken no steps toward implementing these life-saving recommendations.

Can the minister explain why life-saving sprinkler systems in all retirement homes are not mandatory in Ontario?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: I'll take the first part. I may refer this to the minister responsible for the fire code.

Let me just say to the member that I share his interest in safety very much, and I think everybody here in the Legislature does.

I'd just say to the public: Recognize that for the first time in the history of the province we are moving to regulate, license and inspect retirement homes. That has never been done before. We will set safety standards and care standards—particularly safety standards. It's the first time ever for retirement homes that there will be stan-

dards set, and we will inspect, we will license, and we will ensure that they're carried out.

The advice I get—and I think the bill anticipates this—is that this will be a very substantial increase in safety in retirement homes. We take the advice very much of the fire marshal and the fire code. We intend that during our inspections—

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

Mr. Paul Miller: The results of the three coroner's inquests speak volumes about the absolute need for mandatory sprinkler systems in all Ontario retirement homes. The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs has fully supported these recommendations of the coroners' inquests. Thirty-six residents died in the 1980, 1995 and 1997 retirement home fires, which resulted in the coroners' recommendations of retroactive mandatory sprinkler systems.

Can the minister explain, in the circumstances of those three specific retirement home fires, what tools other than the automatic sprinklers would have saved those 36 seniors' lives?

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Again, I go back to the advice we get in terms of safety in retirement homes. Part of the bill anticipates the fire code being strictly enforced, all staff trained in fire prevention, regular inspections of the fire extinguishers in the building, regular training of the staff, posting of the emergency procedures, licensing of the homes to make sure they are following carefully the advice of the fire marshal.

I would say to the public that safety very much is anticipated as an integral part of the first-time-ever licensing and regulating of retirement homes. I believe we are making a dramatic step forward in retirement home safety, and very much following, I might say, the advice of the fire marshal as well.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Minister, our province has a long and rich tradition of volunteerism. Each year, millions of Ontarians benefit from the contributions of almost five million volunteers helping 45,000 non-profit organizations.

As all members in this House know, one of the distinct pleasures of being an MPP is that we have the privilege to meet, interact with and support volunteers and the organizations that assist almost every day in the course of our duties. These are generous, passionate and dedicated individuals. These are good citizens. In particular, many young people in my riding of Ottawa Centre volunteer their time and their youthful energy to build a stronger and better community.

With National Volunteer Week coming up next week, can the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration tell us how we as legislators and public figures can encourage more youth to volunteer in our communities?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Volunteerism is citizenship in action and makes a positive difference in the lives of millions of Ontarians.

This government is proudly sponsoring the third annual ChangeTheWorld Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge, working with the Ontario Volunteer Centre Network. This initiative will encourage more than 10,000 youth right across the province to volunteer for the next three weeks, from April 18 to May 8.

1130

To support the ChangeTheWorld challenge, I'm announcing today the first annual MPP volunteer challenge, which calls on all MPPs to volunteer their time in the coming three weeks in their communities and across Ontario. If every member of this House participates in the MPP volunteer challenge, we can inspire our youth to volunteer and get involved in their communities.

My office will be sending all members more information on this exciting opportunity shortly. I strongly encourage all of you to take the—

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

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I'm very excited to hear about the MPP volunteer challenge. I can tell my colleagues on both sides of the House that they're going to have some stiff competition from the member from Ottawa Centre.

But in all seriousness, as elected representatives of Ontario, we have a special ability to encourage more of our youth to volunteer in their communities. Clearly, this can begin by setting an example for our young people to follow. There are thousands of charitable and not-for-profit organizations which need volunteers to support the good work they do each and every day, but getting out there and setting a good example as legislators is just one gesture to our volunteers that we support them.

Minister, please tell Ontarians what action our government is undertaking to support volunteers and the volunteer organizations that are working so hard to make our communities better across Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Stop the clock. I trust that in this answer—and I'm going to use this as an opportunity to again remind members. This sounded very much like a ministerial statement. You made an announcement of a new initiative in the form of a question and answer in question period, which, in my opinion, would have been much more appropriate to have been made during routine proceedings or under ministerial statements.

Please proceed with the answer, but I do caution and remind all members that this is question period, which is to deal with urgent public business, and to not be making announcements.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The McGuinty government believes that the voluntary sector is a strong partner to all of us and one that shares the goal of building more vibrant and prosperous communities. The work of our volunteers and non-profits has been critical to Ontario's success, particularly in this difficult time, and has helped our province confront and overcome the global economic downturn. To further their support, my ministry invests in non-profits to explore such issues

as social enterprise and other new ideas that can ensure their sustainability.

Related to our volunteers, I was pleased to attend last night in Richmond Hill one of the 47 ceremonies in every corner of Ontario honouring our volunteers through the volunteer service awards. Our volunteers helped build this province and, in return, we support our volunteers.

PHARMACISTS

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Health. Sam Patel owns the independent Keswick Pharmacy in my riding. He delivers to seniors, holds clinics and makes up orders for nursing homes. Now, with your cuts to front-line medical care, he will have to cancel each of these special services.

Sam is not alone. Pharmacies across rural Ontario are in the same boat and many will be forced to close, depriving thousands of needed medical care and advice in their communities.

Why are you trying to cut access to the front-line care that pharmacists like Sam offer to my constituents?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I welcome the opportunity to talk about this. The first thing I want to say is that this is all about improving access to drugs for the people of Ontario at a fair and lower price. We are committed to supporting access in rural areas. We have put \$24 million into our plan that we will invest in pharmacies that provide that vital access to pharmacy services in their communities.

The other thing I want to make very clear is that we are committed to paying pharmacists directly for services they provide to customers. We want to pay pharmacies for providing those vital services to pharmacists. That is also part of our plan.

I would urge you to speak to your constituent and urge that pharmacist to embrace the new way of doing pharmacy services in this province by enhancing the services they provide, and we will—

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: On Monday, you told this House that we had to make a choice between pharmacies and patients. This is a false choice. Pharmacists like Sam Patel are front-line health care providers. They keep my constituents healthy and out of the hospital. You are more interested in spending health care money on your eHealth boondoggle and consultants and salaries at the LHINs instead of local health care. Then, when you are questioned, you attack pharmacies.

Will you explain to Sam Patel why he should have to cut services and possibly go out of business?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, we want him to provide more services. We also want to, on behalf of the people of Ontario, get fair lower prices.

Let me give you another example. There's a drug called pantoprazole that's used for acid reflux and peptic ulcers. Currently, a person would pay around \$536 for that drug. Under our proposed changes, the person would

pay \$178 for that drug. That would be a savings for that person of \$358.

We are paying too much for drugs in this province. I would put the question to pharmacists: Please explain why Ontarians are paying so much more than people in the United States, in France and in the United Kingdom. It's a remarkable inflated price we're paying. We're on the side—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. The member from Welland on a point of order.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Peter Kormos: Thank you, Speaker.

I'm referring specifically to standing orders 37 and 35 in making reference to the question posed by the member for Ottawa Centre earlier today. I appreciate that the Speaker has commented on it, but please, Speaker: 37, as everyone knows, requires that the Speaker disallow—it's not permissive; it's required. The Speaker "shall disallow any question which he or she does not consider urgent or of public importance." This is because question period, one of the most important parts of a legislative day, has as its focus maintaining the principle of responsible government, holding the government accountable.

It is obvious and it is a notorious fact that backbench government questions tend to be scripted questions. That is to say that there's a collaboration between the ministry, the minister of which is answering the question, and the person posing the question. We do not reject the proposition of backbench questions. We think they can be very important and very useful. I think over the course of my time here I've seen that put into effect. But there is standing order 37, where the Speaker "shall" disallow a question that is not urgent or of public importance.

Standing order 35 is "Ministerial statements," and that, of course, provides for a period of time where a minister can make ministerial statements as part of the routine proceedings.

I note in John Stewart, *The Canadian House of Commons: Procedure and Reform*, page 59, "Statements by ministers with regard to government policy, followed by comments by opposition spokesmen, are far from new." It goes on: "Out of fairness opposition spokesmen were allowed to comment on the statement."

Our standing orders, of course, contain that very provision. If there's going to be a ministerial statement, then there has to be an opportunity for the maximum five-minute response. With respect, ministers should not be allowed to circumvent that right of the opposition members by effectively sneaking a ministerial statement into a—dare I say it?—scripted and collaborative question and response by the minister.

You can't, of course, deal with this in terms of it being retroactive, but I'm asking you to be—and I appreciate your comments earlier. But to be very, very clear, I'm asking that this Chair find those questions out of order should they occur in the future—regardless of their source, I might add.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The government House leader.

Hon. Monique M. Smith: I would simply say that we in the government feel that recognizing volunteers and volunteer month is of public importance, great public importance, and that the question that was raised was about volunteers and how we recognize them. We are in the process of recognizing them across the province this month, and I think it was a valid question of public importance.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): The member from Whitby–Oshawa.

Mrs. Christine Elliott: The points with respect to rules 35 and 37 have been made very ably by the member from Welland, and I can't add anything more, other than to say that we concur with the points that he has made.

Though I certainly do appreciate the admonition that you offered earlier, we would respectfully ask that, in the future, you may consider being very firm in your rulings with respect to these matters and making sure that the rules are being followed, as we well expect them to be.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to thank the honourable member from Welland, the government House leader and the member from Whitby–Oshawa for their comments.

I have been reminded many times of standing order 37 from a number of members in the chamber. I have taken the liberty to review a number of questions that have been asked by members of the backbench as different parties have enjoyed the privilege of sitting to the right of the Speaker. I can assure you that in my review of those questions, for many of the concerns that the honourable members may raise about questions that are being asked today, one could say that those concerns could have been raised when the Conservatives sat over here and when the NDP sat over here.

But the Speaker is sitting here now and the Speaker has to deal with it as the Speaker sits here. I am conscious of standing order 37. As the members are aware, it's not for the Speaker to determine whether or not a question fits into that sphere of public importance. Where I do agree with the honourable member—and that's why I interjected and made those comments. That was clearly an announcement that was being made in here, and an announcement was being made that information was going to be coming to members.

I will endeavour to do my part to be cognizant of and alert to the requirements, and I would remind the members to try and do their part. I do listen closely to the government questions. Many of them are very good and are of urgent public importance. I'll cite the member from Toronto Centre today. I think the question that he asked of the Minister of Education was of importance to all members of this House.

As I've said before, remember that one man's pothole is another man's crater. I'll ask all members to be cognizant.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Michael Prue: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to correct the record from my question. Instead of a 20% cut to special assistance rates, which I said, I meant to say, "up to a 20% effective cut to social assistance rates."

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): As the honourable member just corrected his record, the Speaker needs to correct his record again today that it is for the Speaker to determine whether or not a question fits into the sphere of public importance. Be conscious of that.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I want to just take this opportunity to welcome some students who will be visiting the Legislature today from Bowmanville High School, and their teachers David Rempel and Al Velsa, visiting from Durham. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Also, I think it's important to acknowledge the brother of the honourable member from Cambridge who is here today: Mr. Robert Martiniuk; his wife, Lynda; and also his sister Rosemary. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to add to my answer given to the member from Beaches–East York. One of the reasons, also, for the extension is to give us more time to develop the new program—

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I can't allow that. You can stand up to correct your record.

Interjection: That was a good try.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): But, yes—thanks, to the honourable member—that was a good try.

DEFERRED VOTES

2010 ONTARIO BUDGET

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): We have a deferred vote on the amendment by Mr. Hudak to the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

The division bells rang from 1145 to 1150.

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

All those in favour of the amendment will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Chudleigh, Ted
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Hillier, Randy
MacLeod, Lisa

Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Savoline, Joyce

Shurman, Peter
Sterling, Norman W.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): All those opposed?

Nays

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bisson, Gilles
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Fonseca, Peter

Gerretsen, John
Gélinas, France
Gravelle, Michael
Hampton, Howard
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Johnson, Rick
Kormos, Peter
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Mangat, Amrit
Marchese, Rosario
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGuinty, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Paul

Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry
Prue, Michael
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Sorbara, Greg
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

Nays

Horwath, Andrea
Kormos, Peter
MacLeod, Lisa
Marchese, Rosario
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John

Ouellette, Jerry J.
Prue, Michael
Savoline, Joyce
Shurman, Peter
Sterling, Norman W.
Tabuns, Peter
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 65; the nays are 26.

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

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): There being no further deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1202 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SOCIAL WORK AWARD

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: I am pleased to stand today to congratulate MPP Elizabeth Witmer as the 2010 recipient of the Social Work Doctors' Colloquium fifth annual social work Political Award of Merit. Mrs. Witmer is being honoured for her long-standing advocacy on behalf of the profession in Ontario. Each year, the colloquium, with support from the Ontario Association of Social Workers, selects an elected official who in their personal and professional lives has exemplified the qualities that help to improve the well-being of the citizens of Ontario. To quote Dr. Dan Andraea, co-chair of the colloquium, "We believe it is important to publicly recognize elected officials who make significant personal and professional sacrifices to enhance opportunities for Ontarians to lead more productive lives."

Today also provides an opportunity to thank the social workers in Ontario. Human rights and social justice are the philosophical underpinnings of social work practice, and I applaud you for the work that you do in resolving the problems that affect the day-to-day lives of individuals. On behalf of my colleagues, I say thank you to our social workers and congratulations to Mrs. Witmer.

CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Mr. Bill Mauro: This Monday and Tuesday, a delegation from the Catholic Women's League came to Queen's Park. Canada's Catholic Women's League is a grassroots organization with nearly 55,000 members throughout Ontario. These women come from virtually every community and nearly every background and circumstance. Despite these differences, they are bound together by faith, fellowship and service.

The executive members of the league's Ontario provincial council have met with government on an

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):

The ayes are 16; the nays are 75.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): I declare the amendment lost.

On March 25, Mr. Duncan moved, seconded by Mr. McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1154 to 1159.

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

Ayes

Aggelonitis, Sophia
Albanese, Laura
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Best, Margaret
Bisson, Gilles
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Carroll, Aileen
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight

Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoskins, Eric
Hoy, Pat
Jaczek, Helena
Jeffrey, Linda
Johnson, Rick
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Mangat, Amrit
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGuinty, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol

Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziotti, David
Pendergast, Leeanna
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Sorbara, Greg
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Those opposed?

almost annual basis. This year, they came to share their concerns, to propose solutions and to congratulate the government for some of the measures it has taken.

This year, the delegation included the president, Shari Guinta; the president-elect, Marlene Pavletic, who is from Thunder Bay; the past president, Margaret Ann Jacobs; and the chair of the legislation standing committee, Anne Madden. I particularly want to congratulate Pauline Krupa, chair of the resolutions standing committee, who is also from Thunder Bay and an east-ender at heart. Pauline did a great job working with my office to organize this delegation to Queen's Park, and I want to thank her for that.

I also want to thank the Premier, Ministers Bentley, Broten, Dombrowsky, Gravelle and Phillips, as well as Minister Matthews' office, for taking the time to meet with this extraordinary group of women. This delegation was charming, impressive and purposeful, and they brought forward thoughtful proposals. I look forward to hearing more from them and working with them in the future.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I rise today to inform the Legislature about the tale of two hospitals. Both the Toronto Grace Health Centre and the Shelburne site of the Headwaters Health Care Centre provide care for complex continuing care and palliative care patients. But that is where the similarity ends.

As we all know, on the eve of the Toronto Centre by-election, the minister found \$15 million to save the Toronto Grace Health Centre. No last-minute reprieve was available for Headwaters, and so the complex continuing care beds are being transferred out of the Shelburne community.

In response to this transfer, which will reduce the number of acute care beds in our community, the Central West LHIN has initiated the Shelburne community health task force, to determine the health needs of the community, including the feasibility of the Shelburne health centre. Both the mayor of Shelburne and I are currently members of the task force.

Interestingly, when Shelburne mayor Ed Crewson attended the recent Ontario Good Roads Association convention in Toronto, he had an opportunity to ask the minister publicly if she would commit to providing funding to implement the recommendations of the Shelburne community health task force. Unfortunately for Shelburne, the minister has been unwilling to commit to writing a cheque, as she has done for the Toronto Grace. Instead, to the mayor's great disappointment, he received "health bafflegab" for an answer.

In Ontario, we pride ourselves in having a health care system that is accessible to everyone. I would ask the minister to remember that the residents in north Dufferin deserve as much of our attention and financial commitment as the residents of Toronto Centre.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Jeff Leal: On February 10, 2010, I had the pleasure of hosting our first Celebration 2010 event in my riding of Peterborough. The theme for this event was to honour the unsung heroes of sports. We wanted to recognize and thank those community members who work behind the scenes to promote sports in our area. Nominees included coaches, assistant coaches, Zamboni drivers, fundraising committee members, those who work at the arenas and the ball and soccer fields, and many more. It was a tribute, by those of us who participate in sports or who have children who belong to teams, to show our appreciation for the time these volunteers spend in providing athletes with the best experience sports have to offer.

I struck a committee of community members that included sports announcers, past athletes and leaders in our community. The toughest part was to choose, from the many nominations we received, the 50 most deserving of the Celebration 2010 award. The event was attended by over 300 people. It was a great success. More importantly, it demonstrates this community's recognition of how valuable and appreciated these volunteers are. It was a public thank you to all those who had given their time and talents in every sport that what they do has not gone unnoticed and unappreciated.

Our special guest that night was our colleague, the Honourable Peter Fonseca. He attended not in his capacity as minister, but in his capacity as an Olympic athlete. His message to those attending that evening was one of gratitude and thanks, because he experienced first-hand the vital role that volunteers played in his life and in the lives of all our athletes at all levels.

SIKH COMMUNITY

Mr. Ted Arnott: Earlier this month, Christians and those of the Jewish faith observed celebrations of renewal through Easter and Passover. Today, more than 30 million Sikhs in 161 countries around the world observe a celebration of renewal known as Vaisakhi.

In 1699, the 10th guru, Gobind Singh, created the Khalsa, the Sikh brotherhood. Through this brotherhood, the Sikh faith became unified. It did away with the caste system and created a code of conduct and discipline for members of the Sikh faith. The code is based on equality, justice, peace, courage, honesty, community service and the universality of the brotherhood, along with a visible identity and the five Kakars.

But Vaisakhi is not only a religious celebration of renewal and rebirth; it also marks the beginning of the Sikh New Year and the start of the harvest season.

In the Greater Toronto Area alone, there are more than 100,000 Sikhs who celebrate Vaisakhi. The festival is celebrated through music, dance, parades and the bringing of flowers and offerings to the gurdwaras and temples.

Celebrations of different cultures and faiths are part of the diversity that makes Ontario unique. On behalf of our

leader, Tim Hudak, and the Ontario PC caucus, I want to extend warm wishes and a wonderful, safe, happy and memorable Vaisakhi and Khalsa day.

1510

MAUREEN LINDSAY

Mr. Michael Prue: Yesterday friends, relatives and neighbours said goodbye to one of the true heroes of Beaches–East York, Maureen Lindsay.

Maureen Lindsay lived in East York for a long time and was adored by all of us who knew her. She was involved in literally everything: She ran the mayor's Christmas dinner for all those years while and after I was mayor. She was part of Team East York, which fought the amalgamation that forced us into Toronto. She was on the executive of Dentonia Park. She, even as an older woman, went out and flooded the ice rinks on the coldest days of the winter. She was part of the Beaches Easter Parade, fundraising for Providence Villa, and she took on politicians. That's probably what she did the best. When she came to Toronto city hall or to East York, you certainly knew she was there. She was a woman who knew how to get things done.

Unfortunately and sadly, she died two weeks ago in a tragic house fire. Our community mourns her loss. We remember everything that she did that was good: all of her good works and her commitment. We miss her enormously. We are saddened by her loss, but with the knowledge that she did so much good during her all-too-short life.

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Bob Chiarelli: There is justifiable outrage over the plight of Nortel pensioners, 800 of whom reside in my riding. I have been calling on our government and the government of Canada to help Nortel pensioners and also to take action to prevent this calamity from ever happening again. Although Ontario is the only jurisdiction in Canada with a pension benefits guarantee fund, unfortunately successive governments have underfunded it. So I am pleased that, as a first step, our recent budget invested half a billion dollars into the fund to assist Nortel and other pensioners.

I ask our government to continue to work with Nortel pensioners to find a way to ensure that their fund is not wound up. This is their priority request of our government. I also ask our government and the Premier to continue to call on the federal government for a national action plan on pensions. As requested by Nortel pensioners, the federal government must do the right thing and amend the federal bankruptcy laws to give Nortel pensioners and future pensioners a preference. Time is short, so the time for action is now.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Charles Sousa: As you know, on January 12 Haiti was struck by a devastating earthquake. It caused

incredible damage to property and catastrophic loss of life. Many nations, organizations and individuals from around the world responded quickly with generosity and compassion. I would like to recognize one such person and his team in particular.

Dr. Frank Lista, a surgeon and founder of The Plastic Surgery Clinic in Mississauga South, volunteered for a humanitarian mission to Haiti. Under an umbrella organization called the Life Enhancement Association for People, Dr. Lista and a team of five others travelled to Haiti on February 13, 2010. Once in Haiti, they provided on-the-ground medical assistance to victims of the disaster, most of whom were abandoned or orphaned children. Short on sleep and working in makeshift hospitals, they had performed 32 surgical procedures by the time they left Haiti.

Dr. Lista and his team raised funds, took time away from their jobs and families, and worked selflessly to help people they had never met in a country far from home. The actions of Dr. Lista and his team are truly inspirational. I commend Dr. Lista and all of those who are supporting the ongoing efforts to provide aid to the people of Haiti.

There remains much work to be done. The devastation suffered by the people of Haiti presents a long and challenging road to recovery. Thousands upon thousands are still in need of assistance. Our support must be unwavering as the people of Haiti fight to recover from this catastrophe.

Please join me in thanking Dr. Frank Lista, Dr. Zbigniew Wojtasik, nurse Lori Robinson, nurse Sue Duncan, nurse Tammy Mitchell and Leslie Gillanders.

TAXATION

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: It is my pleasure to update this House on the series of public information sessions I am hosting throughout my riding on the new tax reform. The goal of these sessions is to answer questions regarding the harmonized sales tax. To date, I have hosted 13 information sessions, and I have nine more to go.

Last week, at our session in Vankleek Hill, there were 85 people in attendance, including farmers, members of the business community, senior citizens and members of the construction sector. I have had very positive feedback from my constituents. People told me, "We finally have the truth."

What is obvious is the amount of misinformation out there. People were surprised to find out that right now, the PST gets embedded into the cost of doing business, and these added costs get passed on to the consumers. The HST will change that.

I am thrilled to be engaging in discussions with my constituents about the new tax reform, an initiative that is all about creating jobs and creating an environment where businesses can compete in the global marketplace.

VISITORS

Mr. Charles Sousa: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Will you permit me to introduce three visitors who just

arrived in the House? Would that be all right with everyone?

Interjections: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): They agree. Who am I not to?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker and colleagues, please welcome to the Legislative Assembly Vic Cauchi, founder and president of Vengeo; Jennifer Kim of Vengeo as well; and a high school and junior high colleague of mine, Mark Healy. He's president of Canadian Tire as well as the chief creative officer for Vengeo. Welcome.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MINING AMENDMENT ACT (RESOURCES PROCESSED IN ONTARIO), 2010

LOI DE 2010 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MINES (RESSOURCES TRANSFORMÉES EN ONTARIO)

Mr. Bisson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to amend the Mining Act to require resources to be processed in Ontario / Projet de loi 36, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les mines afin d'exiger que les ressources soient transformées en Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Does the member wish to give a short statement?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The bill amends the Mining Act, which currently provides that all ores or minerals raised or removed from lands, claims or mining rights that are patented, leased or otherwise disposed of must be treated and refined in Canada. The amendment to subsection 91(1) of the act changes that by providing that all such ores and minerals must be treated and refined in Ontario.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty said he wouldn't raise taxes in the 2003 election, but in 2004 he brought in the health tax, the biggest tax hike in Ontario's history, but he still cuts health care services and nurses; and

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty will increase taxes yet again on Canada Day 2010 with his new 13% combined

GST, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty's new 13% combined GST will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day, such as: coffee, newspapers and magazines, gas at the pumps, home heating oil and electricity, postage stamps, haircuts, dry cleaning, home renovations, veterinary care, arena ice and soccer field rentals, Internet fees, theatre admissions, funerals, courier fees, fast food sold for \$4, bus fares, golf green fees, gym fees, snowplowing, bicycles, taxi fares, train fares, domestic air travel, accountant services, and real estate commissions;

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

"That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario's current economic reality and stop raising taxes, once and for all, on Ontario's hard-working families and businesses."

Pursuant to the standing orders, I affix my name thereto.

1520

ARTIFICIAL TANNING EQUIPMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yesterday, I introduced a bill about skin cancer prevention. I'm very happy that the Ontario Medical Student Association is circulating those postcards. They ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To enact legislation which bans the use of artificial tanning equipment by youths under the age of 18; prohibit the marketing of artificial tanning targeting youth; develop and maintain a registry of artificial tanning equipment in Ontario; ensure all staff operating artificial tanning equipment are trained on operation procedures, maintenance and how to identify people at greater risk of developing cancer, particularly those with fair skin; and require that signage be placed in clear view of each bed, clearly outlining the health risks of artificial tanning."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk with page Carrington.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Bill Mauro: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas we currently have no psychiatric emergency service at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to support the creation of a psychiatric emergency service in emergency at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario."

I support this petition, and I will affix my signature to it.

ONTARIO PHARMACISTS

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a number of petitions from my riding of Durham, which read as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus support public health care and protecting access to front-line care;

"Whereas Ontario families have already given Dalton McGuinty \$15 billion in health taxes, which was wasted on the \$1 billion eHealth scandal. Now the McGuinty Liberals are cutting front-line public health care and putting independent pharmacies at risk;

"Dalton McGuinty's cuts will:

"Reduce pharmacy hours during evenings and weekends,

"Increase wait times and lineups for patients,

"Increase the out-of-pocket fees people pay for their medication and its delivery,

"Reduce critical patient health care services for seniors and people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and breathing problems;

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

"That the McGuinty government stop its cuts to pharmacies."

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Tudor, one of the new pages here.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mr^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition from the people of Nickel Belt, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government is making ... PET scanning a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients ... ; and

"Whereas since October 2009, insured PET scans have been performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with the Sudbury Regional Hospital, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

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

"To make PET scans available through the Sudbury Regional Hospital, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Zachery to carry it to the table.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas violent crime and gangs have been a problem in our communities; children require safe schools and safe streets in order to thrive;

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

"To continue with their support of the guns and gangs program;

"To continue to recognize the importance of a strong and educated police force;

"To continue to support rehabilitation programs;

"To continue to keep education as a top priority; and

"To continue to make our streets and schools" a safer place to be.

I gladly sign this petition and send it with Khaleel.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario provided to me by the Cambridge Christian School of Cambridge.

"Whereas Cambridge Memorial Hospital and other hospitals in Waterloo region are experiencing substantial increased demands due to population growth; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's freeze on new long-term-care facilities has resulted in additional long-term-care patients in our hospitals; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government's cuts to hospital funding have resulted in a dangerous environment for patients and staff in Cambridge and across Ontario;

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

"(1) That the McGuinty government meet its obligations to introduce a population-needs-based funding formula for hospitals, as has been done in other Canadian provinces."

Pursuant to the standing orders, I affix my name thereto.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rick Johnson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is a unique opportunity to develop the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario and the Legislative Assembly [should] ensure that this valuable resource is used to advantage all Ontarians while respecting the environment and rights of the First Nations people;

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

"To develop the natural resources in the Ring of Fire for economic benefit for Ontario;

"To ensure that the development of the Ring of Fire does so only within the guidelines of an EPA report;

"To respect the rights of the First Nations people and communities; and

"To work with local industry to bring employment to northern Ontario communities."

I will sign this petition and present it to page Kate.

TAXATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I've got thousands of petitions here I want to get on the record from my riding of Durham. They read as follows:

“Whereas Premier ... McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it; and

“Whereas, by 2010, Dalton McGuinty’s new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy” and use “every day.” Just a few examples are: “coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming”; personal care; “home renovations and home services”; rent; “veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes and” last and certainly not least, “funeral arrangements;

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn’t raise taxes” in 2003, if you’ll recall, in that election. “However, in 2004, he brought in the” dreaded “health tax, which” now “costs upwards ... to \$900 per individual. And now” he’s set to raise your taxes again.

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

“That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario’s current economic reality and stop raising taxes on ... hard-working families and businesses.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this and present it to Tudor, my personal page here today. You’ve been here twice.

TAXATION

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a duplicated tax system puts our businesses at a” distinct “disadvantage by increasing the costs of doing business; and

“Whereas a single, unified tax system reduces the burden on businesses by removing the provincial sales tax on goods and reducing administrative costs; and

“Whereas both Conservative and Liberal members of the provincial and federal Legislatures have voiced their support of a single sales tax; and

“Whereas local chambers of commerce, economists and experts are also supporting the move to a single” sales “tax system; and

“Whereas the recent RBC Economics report found that the HST is improving the competitiveness of Ontario businesses by lowering the cost of doing business in Ontario; and

“Whereas a harmonized sales tax is expected to create jobs for Ontario;

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

“That all parties of the provincial Legislature support the government of Ontario’s plan to implement the HST and other tax reforms to benefit Ontario businesses and consumers.”

Since I agree with this petition, I’ll sign it and send it along with page Ara.

1530

TAXATION

Mrs. Joyce Savoline: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

“Whereas, by 2010, Dalton McGuinty’s new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy every day. A few examples include: coffee...; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming; home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements;

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn’t raise taxes in the 2003 election. However, in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which costs upwards of \$600 to \$900 per individual” ever year. “And now he is raising our taxes yet again;

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

“That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario’s current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario’s hard-working families and businesses.”

I agree with this petition, I will affix my name to it and give it to page Khaleel.

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Pat Hoy: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we never want to see another tragedy like Walkerton ever again. The health and safety of Ontarians can never come second to profit and greed. Clean, safe drinking water is a right all Ontarians should be able to enjoy.

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

“To continue to upgrade our current water filtration system;

“To continue to monitor and test our water systems;

“To continue to strengthen Ontario’s trust in the safety of our drinking water;

“To continue to invest in new systems and personnel to monitor and test our water;

“To never forget the mistakes of the past and always hold our water supply to the highest standard;

“To continue to invest in the health and safety of Ontarians through our water supply.”

I, too, will sign the petition.

TAXATION

Mr. John O’Toole: In the remaining time I have left, I’ll read one more of the thousands of petitions that we receive in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Premier Dalton McGuinty is increasing taxes yet again with his new 13% combined sales tax, at a time when families and businesses can least afford it;

“Whereas, by 2010, Dalton McGuinty’s new tax will increase the cost of goods and services that families and businesses buy” and use “every day. A few examples include: coffee, newspapers and magazines; gas for the car, home heating oil and electricity; haircuts, dry cleaning and personal grooming;” personal care; personal fitness; “home renovations and home services; veterinary care and pet care; legal services, the sale of resale homes, and funeral arrangements;

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty promised he wouldn’t raise taxes in the 2003 election. However”—we all remember—“in 2004, he brought in the health tax, which costs upwards ... to \$900 per individual. And now he is raising our taxes yet again;

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

“That the Dalton McGuinty government wake up to Ontario’s current economic reality and stop raising taxes on Ontario’s hard-working families and businesses.” Especially the pharmacists.

I’m pleased to present this to Kyle, one of the pages here at Queen’s Park.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CREATING THE FOUNDATION FOR JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2010 LOI DE 2010 POSANT LES FONDATIONS DE L’EMPLOI ET DE LA CROISSANCE

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

Bill 16, An Act to implement 2010 Budget measures and to enact or amend various Acts / Projet de loi 16, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2010 et édictant ou modifiant diverses lois.

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

Hon. Gerry Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be sharing the vast majority of my time with the member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Pickering–Scarborough East.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I’d love to invite my esteemed colleague the member from Scarborough–Agincourt back to his feet. Those who know him well know that he served in this place both in government, more than once, and also in opposition. I know that the then government of the day, a couple of members of which are here, always appreciated the role that the member played when he was a finance critic and held the government’s feet to the fire for a considerable period of time, and, I must suggest, with a tremendous degree of success.

But I’m very pleased to be able to follow him this afternoon and provide some time and some remarks in respect of Bill 16, the province’s 2010-11 budget bill, Creating the Foundation for Jobs and Growth Act, 2010.

It seems like a really good opportunity, given the fact that I had the opportunity to sit and hear some of the petitions that were recently read, particularly from the members opposite. I see the member from Durham is still here for the afternoon. He did have the opportunity to present petitions more than once this afternoon in respect to matters regarding the government’s plan for future tax reform. We might not necessarily agree in regards to the government’s tax reform. I support it; he doesn’t appear to—at least from the reading of the petitions he doesn’t appear to, but I’m not sure if that’s his personal position or simply the position from the petitions that he was reading.

This afternoon, in the time available, I wanted to speak more directly to our 2010-11 budget on behalf of the Honourable Dwight Duncan, the Minister of Finance, in respect of Bill 16. We all know the past year, and more than a year now, has been a challenging one economically and to do with policy structures in the province of Ontario and elsewhere, trying to respond to an ever-changing climate on almost a daily basis, certainly a very frequent basis, as we tried to steer through some waters that were and continue to be somewhat uncharted.

The global recession has been affecting most jurisdictions, if not all jurisdictions, in the world, and Ontario is certainly among those. Many countries and jurisdictions have been facing sharp declines in revenue and increasing expenses, as people would obviously turn to government for support. Ontario was not immune either to the needs of our constituents for government support or to the precipitous decline in corporate revenues in particular that we have been experiencing in the recent past.

In Ontario, though, we’re clear about what we have to do during these times. What we need to do is everything possible to create jobs and create the climate for job creation to help families in this province at a time when that is most needed, and to establish the foundations for future economic growth. On March 25, just a few weeks back, when Minister Duncan rose to deliver the budget speech, it was our seventh provincial budget, and, for the most part, one that’s going to lead us out of this recession into a much better fiscal place.

The budget has plans to take immediate action to make this province more competitive both now and certainly as we move forward in the longer term. Budgets are not just a point-in-time document; budgets are about the planning and strategy to ensure economic health and economic growth in the future.

We’re working hard to bring back to our economy the strength that we want to see while continuing to move to firm fiscal footing. Our 2010 budget details the steps that we’re planning to take to respond to the present challenges and lay out a clear plan to cut the deficit that we are now faced with in half in five years, and eliminate it

entirely by the 2017-18 time frame. For some, that seems to be an extended period of time, but we all know the depth of this recession and what that has meant to our economic condition. I will make comments as I go through in respect to the fiscal depth of the deficit that we currently face. So it's setting out a prudent plan, a plan that's not only achievable but, if things go well, one in which we will exceed our grasp in that regard.

1540

Since the McGuinty government took office some six years ago, we have remained firm in our commitment to a couple of things, but most importantly to improve public services that Ontarians have come to expect. We inherited, I would suggest, not only a fiscal deficit but, more importantly, a deficit in public services. It took a considerable number of years to create that particular hole in public services. Even when the fiscal capacity was there to support and grow public services, the former government chose a very different direction. We've spent the past six years rebuilding those public services, investing in them, in our health and in our education. We're making investments as well in infrastructure, specific investments in infrastructure as a stimulus for our economy to preserve and create jobs throughout this province.

We are also making investments in skills training, particularly to help unemployed workers as they prepare for new careers. I think it is common now to speak of a recovery that is unlike other recoveries we've seen. We're not necessarily going back to the same economy. We all think, and we all know, it's going to look different in some fashion, to some extent, more or less, depending on what sector of the economy you're looking at. So there's a particular need and a particular demand on those who find themselves unemployed to be able to retrain, not only to enhance the employment skills they may have had, if they're going back to that type of employment, to ensure they can do it in a more effective, efficient and productive fashion, but to give them opportunities to train for careers they might not have envisioned themselves being in at the beginning of this recessionary period. Within our communities, we need to keep Ontarians working, and particularly to help those who are vulnerable in our communities, as we have been doing and will continue to do.

These are the measures needed to establish the conditions for future economic growth. It's not simply a matter of tax reform, but there are some fundamental needs to ensure future economic growth. We do that as we work to lessen the impact of this particular recession. In providing that climate for economic growth, I mentioned skills training for those who have been in the workforce, and I mentioned the need for those quality public services, whether it's health services we need on a daily basis, on occasion, whether it's hospital services for our friends in the community who are sick or whether it's education attainment. I'll speak more about the educational opportunities this budget is going to create as well.

All these things are measures, as I say, to establish conditions for economic growth. This plan is working,

because we are seeing signs that the economy is recovering and is turning around. It's not just in Ontario; we are seeing signs in other jurisdictions where the economy is beginning to look better. As I drove in this morning, I listened on the radio to the economic indicators that were coming through. There are two major indicators coming out of the US today as to inflation and the retail sales sector. Both of those were expected to show positive signs, one from the standpoint of continuing low inflation, and secondly, some rebounding or stability and modest strength in the US retail sector. As much as that is indicative of what is happening south of the border, it also reflects on what's potentially happening here in Ontario, particularly since the US continues to be our major trading partner.

In the last quarter of 2009, Ontario's real gross domestic product—our GDP—increased by a very strong 1.6%. This was the second consecutive quarterly gain and the biggest single advance since the second quarter of 2004. That's important. It's important that we see some consecutive activity going on in GDP growth. But particularly when we look at it in the context of that magnitude and we look at it during that time frame since 2004 to now, this is the largest quarterly gain in the GDP. In January 2010, the Canadian GDP by industry advanced 0.6%. Even that exceeded economists' expectations, but Ontario, as I said, grew by 1.6%, a much better condition when one considers it on a national spectrum.

The growth in January marked the fifth consecutive monthly gain and the strongest increase since December 2006. Even at a national level, we're seeing all the indicators of a recovering economy. That doesn't mean it's a recovered economy. It doesn't mean that things are booming, by any means, at this point. But it means there is strength in the economy, it means there is confidence returning to the marketplace in a variety of sectors, and we look forward to good things in the future.

Ontario's economy is also on the rise. Just a few weeks ago, Honda Canada announced it will start up a second shift and add some 400 jobs at its second assembly plant in Alliston, Ontario, in early 2011.

Just before Easter, we had the opportunity to have the Japanese auto manufacturing association here in the legislative building doing a reception, inviting members of this Legislature to meet and chat with them. At that point in time, the Honourable Sandra Pupatello, our Minister of Economic Development, spoke to that particular group and welcomed them. I congratulated them and encouraged them to continue doing the good work they do here in Ontario and throughout Canada. At the same time, the president of Honda Canada spoke on behalf of JAMA to the assembled group that was there. They were expressing a tremendous amount of confidence about Ontario, as a place to do business in the automotive sector.

There's one thing I wasn't aware of that that particular sector—and so I don't misspeak, I'm going to cover myself a bit. I can't recall specifically whether the Honda president said Honda or whether he was speaking on

behalf of the Japanese automotive manufacturers in Canada and Ontario in particular, but he said there's this perception—and these are my words—that we import Japanese cars and that we bring in far more than we actually produce or would sell. The reality is, for every car they sell in Canada, they produce one. Some of the cars we buy are produced offshore and brought in, and some of the cars that we produce here are being exported. The reality is, all of those vehicles are being manufactured in Ontario, but their numbers are based on Canada-wide import-export. So Ontario is the hub of the Japanese automotive manufacturing sector in Canada.

I want to speak a little more about the Honda situation in Alliston. They attribute the second-shift announcement to the rebounding economy and obviously the increased demand for the Honda product. We hope, and we know, that the product that is being built there by Canadians with Canadian expertise and using offshore technology—those vehicles are not only being consumed here, but they are being exported elsewhere. So we not only have a domestic product, in effect, that we choose to use—many of us in this place may—but we also have a product that is being exported elsewhere.

The news from Honda in and of itself merely follows an announcement by General Motors. We tend to think of the Detroit Three as obviously being that homegrown North American product that has such a long history, that has gone through such troubled times of late. I know, as do some of my colleagues in this place, particularly from the Ajax–Pickering riding across from me and our friends from Whitby–Oshawa, Oshawa and Durham, the troubles that GM has seen over the past while.

When I first came to this place—and I'm trying to think of the project name that always escapes me as we move through these things—our government, at that time, strongly and adamantly supported investments in the automotive sector. There was a particular plan that GM was working on, and we had federal support along the way for that, and that helped GM at that point to plan for the future. As that program was moving forward, the bad economy took hold and GM found itself in a very difficult place. It was the support of the provincial and federal governments, along with the activities in the US, that allowed GM the time necessary to do some restructuring.

General Motors, just in the past few weeks, announced a third shift at its Oshawa facility, with many hundreds of employees being brought back to work, those who may have been laid off for an extended period.

One only needs to take a look as you drive down the road at the new Camaro—new now by a couple of years—or if you happen to see it going by on a truck. I was out of the country recently and, in doing that, as I see a Camaro go by on the road, I think of the fact that the only place it's made is Oshawa. It doesn't matter where you might go; if you see a new Camaro going by, you can think that that's kind of a homegrown product here in Ontario, just down the road from us, east of Toronto, in the Oshawa facility.

1550

General Motors is also going to increase production at its Canadian automotive manufacturing facility in Ingersoll. It's not just in Alliston; it's not just in Oshawa; it's in all of those manufacturing locations spread throughout Ontario that we are seeing the growth, the rebound in strength, and also the good products that are being made, the good engineering, but also the good workforce, the quality workforce, that's necessary to make the products that Ontarians want, that Canadians want and, frankly, that people want throughout the world.

This third shift in Oshawa will result in the recall of some 600 workers in October of this year, while the CAMI production additions will add about 700 new jobs in August of this year.

So we're looking, through the balance of 2010 and into 2011, whether it's the CAMI operation, the Oshawa operation or the Alliston operation, at hundreds and hundreds of new jobs or jobs being put back into the marketplace.

There are other indicators of recovery as well. Housing sales are at record levels. We only need look at the paper on a daily basis to see the activity level that's going on in the housing market. That's a good indicator of the economy. I think it's a good indicator of the economy primarily because it says that people are confident. They're confident about their jobs; they're confident about their capacity to make long-range plans. They are confident in the context of what they see for their families. That's a very strong indicator.

Not only is it a good indicator, but, frankly, it also invests a lot in the economy. When people buy homes, traditionally they will upgrade appliances. They may put in new carpeting. They will certainly paint; they will decorate. They will do landscaping at this time of year. So it's not only the purchase of the home itself but it's all the ancillary activity that goes with the purchase of a home. Whether that's a new home or a resale home, it really doesn't matter: There's a tremendous amount of investment going in, in the immediate marketplace that supports homes.

We've seen an increase in consumer and business confidence. They have been steadily increasing during recent months. Retail sales at the same time have been rising. I've mentioned this as it relates to housing, but it relates to a number of different sectors as well, where we're seeing a better retail market than we have.

Auto sales: We talked about the auto sector generally, about its manufacturing capacity, but auto sales have risen by some 23% from the December 2008 low point. So we've seen a considerable rebound in that marketplace.

The credit markets are stabilizing and the yield spreads are returning to normal, so we're seeing some degree of normality as well returning to the fiscal marketplace.

In March, Ontario employment rose by some 10,300 net new jobs. This was up for the eighth time in 10 months: a consistent growth in employment in Ontario.

Eight times in the past 10 months, we've seen growth, and in March we saw some 10,300 net new jobs in the economy here in Ontario.

Certainly, we here on the government side of the House are proud of that progress. I would suggest that probably members throughout this place are happy to see this type of economic activity going on, even if, for some reason, they may not fully, 100%, endorse the budget that the minister presented just a couple of weeks ago. I'm sure, during the course of debate over the next few days or more, that we may hear a dissenting opinion or two with respect to that budget, but there are few who could be unhappy with the economic situation and certainly the direction that the economic situation is currently taking.

That doesn't go to say, though, that many Ontario families aren't still coping with the degree of uncertainty that has been caused and continues to be caused by unemployment or underemployment. Companies big and small are still grappling with the new ways of doing business. Municipalities are struggling to respond to an increase in demand for services. Certainly, our work remains cut out for us.

The 2010 budget, though, is part of the McGuinty government's Open Ontario plan. It will benefit Ontario's families, its businesses and its communities.

We're going to build on the progress that is slowly but surely making steady headway towards the economic stability that we all want.

This budget lays out the measures to manage spending, to eliminate the deficit and to secure the province's long-term financial stability.

On March 8 in the speech from the throne, the Honourable David Onley unveiled Open Ontario, the McGuinty government's five-year plan to create new opportunities for jobs and economic growth.

We see the need for Ontario to be more open in a number of ways. We certainly need to be more open to global trade. We need to be more open to investment in this province, more open to new and fresh ideas, and more open to the people of the world. The McGuinty government's 2010 Ontario budget moves that plan forward and protects the progress that Ontarians have already made in our schools and in our hospitals as we work to eliminate the deficit that we find ourselves in, which has been caused by this global recession, and it sets out the government's priorities that will help people and help business.

The Ontario budget for this year details the government's investments in post-secondary education, as a priority; in jobs; and in growth in the north of this province, which has been an area hard-hit by the economic recession—not the only area but one that we all agree has seen a particularly bad situation because of the nature of the businesses that exist in northern Ontario.

We expect to continue our investments as well by establishing our full-day learning program and by investing in child care, and, given the time, I'll certainly comment more on our investment in child care, where we are picking up the slack that was left by the federal

government abandoning a program. We're investing some \$63.5 million in additional monies to make up for that loss of federal revenue to ensure that those who have daycare now, with help from the province and the federal government, will continue to have that help, but that help will come solely and singularly from the province of Ontario, not from the federal government.

We're going to continue working on our stimulus infrastructure plans and managing the economy of the province responsibly.

Ontario's colleges and universities play a very critical role in equipping people for success. That's why post-secondary education remains a top priority for our government. We will all well remember the Reaching Higher plan that we started some five years ago, or thereabouts now at this point, as a major initiative to give young people opportunities in post-secondary education by making significant investments in programs and facilities for post-secondary education. We want to continue that initiative. We want to continue that as part of the Open Ontario plan, so we're making a particular commitment this year by adding 20,000 new spaces to colleges and universities during this coming fiscal year, reflecting a new annual investment of approximately \$310 million in post-secondary operating grants.

We were discussing just a week or so ago—we wrapped it up today—the budget motion itself. I had the opportunity to speak in respect to the budget motion, and I mentioned the president of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology and the president of Ryerson University, both of whom were here at the time of the throne speech. We talked subsequently to that, and how delighted they were that we continue to see post-secondary education as such a priority. They were speaking on behalf of their students, but also on behalf of the 20,000 new spaces that we will be creating as a result of this budget.

We're aggressively promoting Ontario's post-secondary education abroad. We want to encourage the best students from around the world to study and settle here and contribute to our economy. What a great way not only for those young people to come and learn from us, but it's an opportunity for us to learn from them. If we can attract the best and the brightest to come here as a place to learn, think of what our young people are going to have: the opportunity to learn from them, not only academically, not only sharing the academic challenges, but the culture that they bring with them; the opportunity for us to learn more about the cultural atmosphere, for our young people to be able to integrate themselves in that way with young people who want to study here in this country, to use that opportunity to contribute to our economy.

We want to improve the students' ability to navigate the Ontario post-secondary system by providing additional resources to support the implementation of a credit transfer system. I've been hearing, as have others, over the past few years now, in particular in my case from university and college students who are very anxious

about opportunities to be able to do what they call “credit transfer.” Why is it that a college student who acquires a set of skills and knowledge can’t use that skill knowledge capacity in the fashion of a credit to transfer to a university degree setting? There’s lots of work to do on that, but it’s the right thing to do. It’s the right thing to do not only from the standpoint of young people who want experiences in both college and universities and want to grow their skill sets, but it’s the right thing to do economically as well, because why should a student who wants to have those skills necessarily have to go through two different sets of systems over a protracted time that might not be necessary? So I’m anxious to see us move forward on the credit transfer system initiative, because I think it’s an important one that will pay dividends in the years to come.

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One of the things that we are creating through this budget is the new Ontario Online Institute, which will bring the best professors from across Ontario, from its post-secondary institutions, effectively into the homes—or, if they Wi-Fi, it could be into the local Starbucks or Tim Hortons for that matter; it doesn’t need to be into the home—of those students who want to pursue higher learning and want the opportunity to be able to hear from, learn from and interact in today’s technology with the best and brightest professors available. The Ontario Online Institute will be the foundation, I think, for that type of learning environment. Students will have the opportunity, not only within the context of their own course work area but in a particular area, to access the best minds, the most trained, those who have committed themselves to very specific kinds of areas that otherwise they wouldn’t get to in the absence of having technology available for that purpose.

More than a million Ontarians rely each year on Employment Ontario for help in finding work and acquiring job training. That’s a vast number. There’s a large number of Ontarians who need the help of Employment Ontario. We are boosting Ontario employment spending on jobs and skills in a very substantive way through this budget, and the special focus issue will be on workers affected by this global economic recession, which only makes sense.

We’re planning a new one-stop access, which will be in place to make it easier for job seekers, employers and communities to obtain the full range of programs and services they need. One-window shopping is the only way to go with these types of initiatives. You can’t have people trying to access multiple programs and initiatives. They need to have the opportunity to focus on job re-training for the purposes of employment.

We’re also launching the federal-provincial Targeted Initiative for Older Workers agreement to support skills training in hard-hit communities. Any time in these days that we can work together with other orders of government—in this instance the other order of government is the federal government—to do things together, in this instance establishing the Targeted Initiative for Older

Workers, it’s what our constituents in Ontario want us to do. Increasingly, we know in this place that Ontarians want their governments to work together in their interest, that in a time of economic challenge, there is little opportunity in the minds of Ontarians for governments not to find a means for co-operative initiatives. This is one key indicator of that, particularly in communities that have been hard-hit by the economic recession. We look forward to this particular initiative to serve under-employed older workers in those vulnerable communities in Ontario.

We’re not only investing in workers who find themselves dislocated or those who are a little more aging in the workplace, we’re also interested in and concerned with summer jobs, those young people who need summer opportunities. We’re investing this year an additional \$39 million in the summer jobs program, including some targeted resources for youths in high-needs neighbourhoods. So young people, those who are under- and unemployed within the general workforce, those who are older in the workforce and may find it more difficult to find a placement, we have an eye on each of them in an effort to make opportunities available for all of those groups.

The Ontario summer jobs program, though, that \$39 million, will help support 110,000 jobs and services for students this summer. That’s a large number of students. If one were to think about a fairly substantive-sized high school with 1,000 students—that’s not a huge one, but it’s also not terribly small—that’s a lot of young people. That would be 100 high schools plus full of students out working under the Ontario summer jobs program.

I mentioned that the north is one area that’s obviously been particularly hard hit, and I know that during the budget debate on Bill 16, there will be members of the caucus who are from northern Ontario who will want to speak to the budget. I look forward to hearing their comments, as I did during the budget motion that we debated just recently. They know the area well and they can speak to these elements of the budget that service their constituents and their business community in such an effective way.

In recent years, Ontario’s resource-based industries in the north have faced significant challenges. These include high energy costs and global competition. But as part of the Open Ontario plan, the budget will strengthen the northern economy. We’re going to be creating a three-year northern industrial electricity rate program, which will average \$150 million annually, and this will be for qualifying large industrial facilities to reduce their electricity prices by an average of about 25%. That’s no small amount of impact on a business in northern Ontario, a large industrial business, by providing that kind of electricity rate relief.

We’re going to be creating an office with dedicated staff to work on the new Ring of Fire initiative. This coordinator will lead the collective efforts in advancing the economic promise that exists in the area referred to as the Ring of Fire. I see the member from Thunder Bay—

Atitokan is in the House this afternoon, among others, and I anticipate that he will have more to say specifically on how this is going to provide opportunity for northerners in Ontario.

We're providing \$45 million over three years for a new project-based skills training program that will help aboriginal peoples and northern Ontarians who can participate in and benefit from emerging economic development opportunities.

So the breadth of opportunity for northern Ontario in this budget is extensive.

I'm not going to use the entire time that's on the clock, another few minutes only at this point, but I want to talk briefly about the green economy. Green energy is going to be a significant source of employment in the not-too-distant future. You only need to be looking at the news, reading the paper and listening carefully to many jurisdictions who realize now the importance of the green economy. It was just a few years ago that Premier McGuinty made it very clear that he saw and understood that Ontario can and should be a leader, not just in Canada but in North America, in the green economy. This budget takes us in that direction.

The Green Energy Act assists in taking us in that direction. We are attracting new investments in renewable energy products and we're promoting conservation in this province. The program that we have in place under the Green Energy Act is anticipated to create some 50,000 new Ontario jobs over the next three years, and we're certainly anticipating new investments in renewable generation by paying renewable energy generators under long-term contracts. You have to invest in that regard to ensure that you will get the investment in return. I'm not going to speak to Samsung directly to any extent, but I think we have to be aware of the \$7-billion commitment in this province and the impact it's going to have on our economy, as well as those others who are looking at investment and saying this is the place to be. If Samsung C&T Corp. or the Korea Electric Power Corp. are prepared to invest \$7 billion in Ontario, that's a place we need to be as well. We anticipate that there will be more to follow.

We are initiating, through the throne speech and the budget, new clean water technology. We are anticipating legislation on water to come forward as well. We see that as part of a green economy. It's not just about energy or electricity; it's as much or more about the future of water. In any documentary you might watch these days on TV about water, you will see the challenges worldwide in respect to water quantity, water quality and the demand and need for high-quality water, both from a consumer standpoint—human—but also from an industrial standpoint.

I recently spoke to Eco-Tek in my riding and the work they do. I'm not going to speak to them again as such, but just to say that there are companies in Ontario that have shown tremendous leadership in providing high-quality water for industrial purposes, and we need to capitalize on that expertise. It's these kinds of initiatives

that will drive us to them and engage them in a fashion that will help us help Ontarians in their future.

We're going to look for new markets. We're certainly not fixated on our current marketplace; we're not fixated just on Ontario or Canada, or even our major trading partner, the US. We are going to look for other markets in which to sell not only our products but, more importantly, our technologies. We are going to sell our capacity to help others develop in their community, as opposed to just selling them some product or a particular service.

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The budget this year provides a very focused strategy as to where we need to be at a time when we are faced with a significant deficit, and we acknowledge and recognize that. We have a clear plan as to how to eliminate that deficit over a responsible period of time. We are not overstating the depth of the problem we have been facing and that we are slowly working our way out of. But more importantly we want to ensure that as we move out of this, we don't leave behind those who are vulnerable; we don't leave behind our health and our schools; we don't leave behind those who need university education; and we don't abandon our partners in the municipal sector and the infrastructure requirements they have and so desperately need. We're going to do those things. We're going to continue to focus on public service. We're going to support our partners. We're going to ensure that young people, those who are vulnerable and those who are out of work still have us there as their partners at their side and in support.

I'm proud to say that the McGuinty government has the right plan for the time. Plans always have to fill a spot in time, a period in time. Any given plan won't work in every instance, so we have to find the right plan for the right time, and this is it. Open Ontario is the right plan. It will invest in Ontarians by providing cornerstones for growth while creating the environment to nourish that growth. Our goal is education for all who seek it, jobs for those who want them and programs and supports for those who need them in this province.

Ontario has what it takes to overcome the odds we've been faced with, and already the province is acknowledged worldwide for the strength and stability of our financial sector, among others. Our workplace can compete with the best in the world. We look forward to doing that. We believe this budget will help us do that, and at the end of the debate I hope that all members of this Legislature can see their way to support the 2010-11 McGuinty budget as presented by the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Dwight Duncan.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to rise in the debate today. I know you'll be hearing from our finance critic, the MPP for Parry Sound—Muskoka, in a little bit from now. That said, we do have serious concerns with the way Ontario's economy is progressing to get out of this recession. Unfortunately, we do not believe this budget addresses those very significant issues; namely, I

might point out, it doesn't deal significantly with the debt nor the deficit.

As you recall, this budget has tripled our reliance on federal welfare payments. It has doubled the debt, and our deficit is now higher than that of the other nine provinces combined. So when you're looking at a road map to move our province forward, it certainly wasn't contained within this Liberal budget. It didn't give or offer much hope to Ontarians, much less those I represent in Nepean–Carleton, who are looking for some tax relief that would help them get through some of the rising hydro costs that are coming as a result of the Liberals' Green Energy Act. They would have liked to see some targets and focus with respect to education instead of just dumping money.

It is a privilege, as I mentioned, to be able to participate in the budget debate. As you know, we already spent some time debating the budget motion, which I felt privileged to be able to speak to for about 20 minutes on the priorities of the people of Nepean–Carleton. I was able to communicate their values and their views on the floor of this chamber. As you know, I've said several times that we care so much about strong families, safer streets and self-reliance in our community. Many of the values I carry to this place were built on those archetypal family values that were brought up on the farm. Again, I like to communicate those values and stand up for the people I represent, who are hard-working families, who are seniors and who are small business people.

Again, I look forward to hearing from our finance critic as we engage in the debate, and I look forward to participating in the debate more frequently.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To say that any budget doesn't have some good news in it would be wrong. I'm sure that if you look at this budget close enough, you probably can find something in it that somebody will like. But to position this budget as one that is going to be the economic be-all and end-all to fixing the economic problems in Ontario, I think, is a real stretch of the imagination.

We know that there are some structural problems within the economy of Ontario. We have seen de-industrialization commence in this province, in places across this province, north and south, when it comes to the jobs that are leaving Ontario and going offshore when it comes to manufacturing and the transformation of natural resources.

We have seen a change to the economics, as far as how money is raised in the marketplace, when it comes to being able to sustain the investments that are needed in order to allow companies to continue flourishing or to just survive, or for new ones to start up.

When I look at this budget, I say to myself: Where in this budget are we really responding to these issues? The reality is that we're not. We're not dealing with the fundamental problems that I think are key to what needs to be done in order to get the economy of Ontario turned around.

Under all of this is the problem that all Ontarians, including myself, want to be able to survive by knowing that we're going to have jobs in the future. To do that, we need to have a government that's prepared to put in place what needs to be done in order to make that happen. I will have an opportunity later on in debate to outline some of that, but I just want to say to my honourable colleague across, whom I have a lot of respect for: I understand the role that you're trying to play, and you're trying to spin this as being the best thing since sliced bread. But I've got to tell you: There ain't much bread there and there's not much spread to go on it. If you're trying to spin it that way, I think a lot of people are going to go hungry in the short term.

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

Mr. Pat Hoy: I'm pleased to rise and make comment to the presentation given by the parliamentary assistant, Mr. Arthurs, the member for Pickering–Scarborough East, as he was talking about Bill 16 and the Budget Measures Act and what will flow from it.

He had a wide-ranging discussion on what is contained in our budget, a lot of it flowing from our five-year Open Ontario plan, which is designed to attract new investment and create jobs here in Ontario.

He also spoke about not only jobs but the fact that the economy here and in other countries around the world, but particularly here in Ontario, is looking much improved. It is moving in the right direction, to say the very least. These modest gains that we are enjoying now need to be nurtured, and the government recognizes that through our Open Ontario plan.

Last week, in regard to education, learning and new jobs, the federal member and myself were able to provide some monies at a groundbreaking ceremony at St. Clair College, the Thames campus, which is better known perhaps as the Chatham campus, to open a new tech and trade centre. All of the discussion during that groundbreaking was naturally based around our need to compete through this college, and the opportunities that trades and technology will give to our young people, going into the future.

Certainly, we've built on that education component of enhancing our economy and giving people an opportunity to do what they do best, which is to succeed here and work in Ontario.

I'm so very pleased that, in this particular case, the federal and provincial governments came together to enhance this college. The campus is expanding in leaps and bounds. There will be good things coming from this, as we see new students moving into those jobs, particularly through our Open Ontario plan.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I was glad to be in the House for the presentation this afternoon by the member for Pickering–Scarborough East, who is also the Minister of Finance's parliamentary assistant. If I'm not mistaken, he has been the minister's parliamentary assistant since his election

here in 2003, so he has a lot of experience in that capacity. I enjoyed serving with him for some of those years on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. I have a high personal regard for the member, although we're on different sides of the House so occasionally we will disagree.

I would like to ask him a question, and that is: How would the member explain to this House that the government is going to be able to balance its budget by 2018, given the fact that the assumption that is being used in that balanced budget plan is that the government will contain and hold its spending to less than 1.9% per year after 2012? Given the fact that this government has never been able to hold its program spending increases anywhere close to that number; given the fact that it's highly unlikely, with the various pressures on the health care system, the pension system and the uncertainty in the economy going forward in the next few years, how does the parliamentary assistant expect us to believe that that balanced budget plan is credible, given the fact that that assumption exists? And, of course, that's in the budget papers. I know all members of the House had the opportunity to go through the budget papers, but it's sort of in the fine print of the budget. How does the member expect us to believe that the balanced budget plan is going to be possible and how does he expect us to believe that that is a credible plan? I would appreciate an explanation.

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

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: The time is limited. I certainly appreciate the comments from the members from Nepean–Carleton and Timmins–James Bay, as well as Chatham–Kent–Essex and Wellington–Halton Hills.

Just a couple of things in the limited time I have. The member from Nepean–Carleton was speaking a bit about families. I think that families, generally, will be very pleased with our initiatives on full-day junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten, as we plan for full-day learning to provide the best foundation for learning possible in the education system to prepare those young people for their longer-term future.

I think that families will be pleased with our commitment to post-secondary education as a continuing high priority so that their children have the best opportunity for the best possible jobs that this province and this country can create in the future.

I think they would be pleased even with the short-term initiatives, such as the summer jobs program, in which we're looking at opportunities for some 110,000 young people across Ontario. So I think there are a number of things that families would be very, very pleased with.

The member from Timmins–James Bay, I'm looking forward to his time. I think his comments are generally, "There's always some good news somewhere in some budget, if you look hard enough for it." I'm anxious; when he gets on his feet, he will have the opportunity to

tell us what, in this budget, for him as an opposition member, he finds as particularly good news, because budgets aren't intended to be all things for all people and the end of all problems. They are strategies that provide windows of opportunity for growth, for economic recovery, particularly at this point in time.

The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex spoke in part to the co-operation necessary by orders of government when he talked about the initiatives on federal and provincial governments.

I think I've run out of time, but I'm going to get back to the member across the way from Wellington–Halton Hills in respect to his question.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'll start out by saying that the member from Wellington–Halton Hills didn't hear his response from the parliamentary assistant to the question that he posed.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs: I only had two minutes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Would you like another two minutes to answer that question?

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: I don't think we'd get the answer in another two minutes, either.

Anyway, it's my pleasure to lead off debate on the budget bill, Bill 16, to provide some comments from the perspective of the official opposition.

Bill 16 is An Act to implement 2010 Budget measures and to enact or amend various Acts. In fact, it contains some 31 schedules, and I will be commenting on some of those. It's interesting that several of the schedules have nothing to do with budget measures, but I will elaborate on those later. I'm sure, this being the budget bill, I know, Mr. Speaker, you're going to give me free rein to be able to speak to the many different schedules. This is one bill that I should be able to stay on track with because it covers just about everything.

The PC caucus is very concerned about the state of Ontario's economy, and we're very concerned with the spending habits of the McGuinty government and this government's policies that continue to damage the economy and the prospective recovery of the economy.

In the PC caucus, we've been calling on this government to take steps to create jobs, curb their out-of-control spending and get serious with the deficit and debt. Just this afternoon, as a matter of fact, I met with a CAW coalition—they were just part of a coalition that was down at Queen's Park today—from Timmins, very concerned about the Xstrata Kidd Creek copper smelter there, and the pending loss of jobs in that area. I'll speak to that and the government's policies to do with the north, as I have time in my leadoff.

Ontario has one of the highest jobless rates in the country, at 9.1%. Those employment numbers are a serious concern for our caucus, and they continue to be a concern with the latest job numbers from March 2010. Ontario suffered a net loss of 3,900 full-time jobs. Even when replacement part-time jobs are factored in, the

McGuinty Liberals are still more than 100,000 jobs short of their own target. Mr. McGuinty is very good at promising jobs; he has promised many of them. He's not so good when it comes to actually delivering on those promised jobs.

When the previous Ontario PC government took office in 1995, there were 872,600 manufacturing jobs in Ontario. That number grew to 1,072,800 jobs by 2003; please note the trend going up. That was under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves. Dalton McGuinty inherited those 1,072,800 manufacturing jobs. Today, sadly, there are only 793,800 manufacturing jobs remaining, fewer than what existed at the end of the Bob Rae era. Of the 279,000 net manufacturing jobs lost by Mr. McGuinty, a full 206,000 disappeared before the recession hit—that's before.

But one sector that keeps growing under this government is the public sector. Under Dalton McGuinty, the number of high-priced public sector executives, managers and appointees making over \$100,000 since 2003 has tripled. The public sector has grown at a rate eight times the private sector. In 2003, there were 20,249 government employees who made six figures. That number has now skyrocketed to 63,836.

But I think what is most surprising is that last year, in what was a recession year, you'd think that everything was just wonderful in the province of Ontario, because in a year when there was a recession, this government increased by 19% those people making more than \$100,000 a year. I ask, is that responsible in the midst of a recession? In particular, they've greatly increased the number of people in their new health bureaucracy—the LHINs—who are earning over \$100,000.

The McGuinty government has done little to keep jobs from leaving the province. Small and medium-sized businesses are the only sector that has consistently created jobs. If you talk to small and medium-sized businesses, what's their number one issue? It's the red tape they have to deal with, and so one way to support them is through red tape reduction. Red tape costs money and kills jobs. In Ontario, red tape and regulation are at an all-time high.

The McGuinty government talks about its Open for Business and Open Ontario plans. What are the Certified Management Accountants saying about what is really happening on the ground? They did a survey of their members. Half of them said that in the past number of years it was the same, and half said that it's worse. So it's either the same or getting worse.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business's last report shows that red tape in Ontario costs businesses some \$11 billion a year—\$11 billion.

The CFIB's regulatory accountability progress report gave Ontario three thumbs—I might point out that three thumbs are not good—one for no publicly reported measure for red tape, one for no current measurement of red tape and also no permanent commitment to report on red tape. These are all things that our leader, Tim Hudak, and the PC caucus recognize as necessities.

Red tape reduction requires a change in attitude that starts at the top. It starts in the Premier's office. It starts with the Premier showing leadership, right through cabinet and down to the bureaucrats. There must be a change in the culture of government. This government is so prescriptive in the way they write their rules and regulations. I think they need to be much more outcomes-oriented rather than based on this prescriptive and, I would also say, punitive approach that they take to dealing with small and medium-sized business. We need to see it for the vitality of this province, the health of business, the creation of jobs in this province.

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We need to see that change of attitude where the government inspector, whether it's the Ministry of the Environment inspector, the labour inspector or the WSIB—I'm sure they probably go into small business as well. Instead of coming into the business with their infraction book and saying, "Here's what you've done wrong and here's your fine," instead of doing that, what they should be doing is coming around, first of all, and communicating what the rules are, because most businesses are buried under this huge number of rules. They don't know what the rules are and they're trying to run a business. So the McGuinty government needs to simplify those rules, communicate them much more clearly to business, and they need those inspectors, when they come around and show up at the business, to actually say, "Here are some new rules coming down the pipe and here's what you should do to try to comply with those rules." Because 95%, 98%, probably 99% of businesses out there want to comply with the rules, want to do the right thing, but when the inspector just shows up and tells them, "Here's your fine," that's not helpful. It doesn't achieve the desired goal of the regulation.

They need to be there to communicate the rules, assist the business in complying with the rules, maybe cut them a little bit of time to be able to actually comply with the rules and then be of some assistance. Then, along with simpler rules based on outcomes, I think we would see an environment where business would thrive, where they'd be hiring people, where they would be creating those jobs and the wealth that this government needs particularly with the next item that I'm going to talk about, the next item that needs a culture change, and that is the spending addiction that this government has. The McGuinty government has a spending problem. They do not have a revenue problem; they have a spending problem. I see some of the members smiling, but it's absolutely the truth.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Public services.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, we need public services, but there's an awful lot of waste in the spending of this McGuinty government, and I'd like to go through some of the numbers. It underscores what our leader, Tim Hudak, and our entire caucus have been saying now for years.

When this government came into power in 2002-03, the budget spending was \$68.8 billion. I'll just walk

through how the spending's increased in the last few short years. In 2003-04, it was \$73.9 billion; in 2004-05, it was \$79.4 billion; in 2005-06, it was \$83.9 billion; in 2006-07, \$88.1 billion, in 2007-08, \$96.5 billion; in 2008-09, \$99.9 billion. Then in 2009-10 it jumps up to \$117.7 billion, and it's projected to be basically \$126 billion this year and \$124.1 billion next year. I might point out that even in the midst of a recession, the spending is up 7% this year over last year. So Dalton McGuinty will have increased government spending by 70% from 2003-04—that was the first real budget year—from \$73.9 billion to the \$126 billion in 2010-11. Dalton McGuinty will have increased program spending by a shocking 95%, from \$59.39 billion to \$115.9 billion.

I pause in my notes because I noted that in one of the last comments the parliamentary assistant made he talked about full-day learning. I would say that on this side of the House we would agree that it's a good concept. It's also a very, very expensive program—estimates of \$1.5 billion to \$6 billion. If you're an Ontario family and your mortgage is run right up there or the credit card's maxed out, you don't go out and buy a shiny new car, no matter how much you might want it. Unfortunately, despite this year's \$21.3-billion deficit, the government's finding new ways to spend money despite the fact that they're not even meeting some of the most basic needs that are out there. They keep coming up with new ways to spend money despite having this massive deficit. Rather than hit the original 2009 budget target of \$104.7 billion for 2010-11 program spending, budget 2010 projects the Liberals will spend \$115.9 billion, an increase of 11% in projected program spending.

Even the former Bank of Canada head, David Dodge, has commented on this. A few weeks back, he told a Toronto business audience that Ontario's spending is outpacing revenue growth so quickly that the result will be a structural deficit—that's not a good term: "structural deficit"—equivalent to 3.5% of the province's economic output by 2020, even in good economic times.

Revenue is projected to be \$106.9 billion in 2010-11, and that's a provincial record high. So it's not a revenue problem. It's a spending problem. If they had stuck to their original budgets, they'd have balanced budgets. But they keep finding ways to spend more money, and a lot of it not necessarily getting great benefits.

Revenues are expected to rise at a rate of 5.1% between 2009-10 and 2012-13, but spending has resulted in record deficits and record debt. Ontario's \$21.3-billion deficit is larger than every other provincial deficit combined.

I'd like to talk briefly about deficit and debt. The deficit projection for 2009-10 is a bit of a moving target. Last year at the March budget, the budget papers said the deficit for the year that just ended on March 31, 2010—and that was after the recession had started, so there were no surprises there—was a \$14.1-billion deficit. Of course, we know that, I think it was in June of the year, suddenly the deficit went up to \$18 billion. And then, I believe it was in September, it went up to a projected \$24.7 billion. The day before the budget came out—

Hon. James J. Bradley: It came down.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, miraculously. The day before the budget came out, the deficit dropped \$3 billion. Surprise, surprise. And when you look at the magic that the government did to achieve that sudden surprise drop of \$3 billion—well, what was it? It wasn't any control of spending, that's for sure. It was that they didn't spend quite as much on H1N1 as planned, and there were a couple of other "just move the numbers around," and bam, there's \$3 billion.

The scary part, looking at this, though, is that budget 2010 projects that Dalton McGuinty's deficits will continue for eight more years. So that will be some nine consecutive years of deficits. That would total \$116.6 billion in additional deficits, with the balanced budget returning in 2017-18. Cumulative interest on debt payments by 2017-18—when the books return to balance, we hope—will be \$117.4 billion in interest. So the interest on the debt will equal, in 2017-18, \$16.2 billion. That's nearly double the \$8.6 billion from 2008-09. I say that that plan is just not credible whatsoever. When you look at this eight-year plan to get us back to a balanced budget beyond two elections, it's just not credible.

The other scary part about it is, we know interest rates are trending up, and for every 1% increase in interest rates, that's another \$500 million. So, yes—

Interjections.

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Mr. Norm Miller: I hear members opposite talking about spending. Well, if you'd been here earlier, you would have heard how I was talking about how you have no problem spending. You have no problem spending. Through you, Mr. Speaker, they certainly know how to spend. Do they know how to spend wisely? That is the question: Do they know how to spend wisely? I'd say the answer is no, no, no.

The debt: What is happening with the debt? The debt will increase from \$148.7 billion in 2003-04 to some \$289.3 billion in 2012-13. This confirms our assertion that, as we've been saying, Dalton is the debt doubler. Dalton McGuinty would double Ontario's debt by fiscal year 2012-13.

Also, sadly, the 2010 budget also confirms that last year Ontario became a have-not program. We received some \$300 million from the federal government last year. Ontario is now on track to get some \$972 million in equalization payments from the better-performing provinces this year—nearly triple over last year's, and who knows what it will be next year?

As I've been alluding to, you just can't believe the numbers. They changed four times in the past year. They changed four times in the last year.

You remember NUGs, non-utility generators? I seem to recall that in one of the first budgets this government did they had to make a revision of \$4 billion because of the way they tried to treat those non-utility generators' liability in the budget.

As I already mentioned, they made some interesting changes to reduce the deficit by \$3 billion the day before the budget came out.

I would also say: What is the math behind the \$500-million transfer to the pension benefits guarantee fund? I note there's a \$525-million line item that's funding the Ontario teachers' pension fund as well.

I'd also say, why is the WSIB unfunded liability not part of the books as well? There's some \$12 billion in unfunded liability at the WSIB. That has grown significantly under this government. Just a few short years ago, it was about \$8 billion. It has gone up 50% under this government in just a few short years. I'd say that points to the need for a review of what's going on at the WSIB. That's one of the things we've been asking for in our 10 for 2010 plan.

The unfunded liability has grown 50%, despite the fact that lost-time injuries are down. Despite those lost-time injuries being down, the benefits and the costs per injury are up significantly. Also, we have a much higher employer premium rate, especially when compared to provinces like BC and Alberta. There's something not right at the WSIB.

We've brought up, through freedom-of-information requests, some of the questionable spending that has gone on there, the untendered contracts. They're obviously not managing the WSIB very well at all, when you see that \$12-billion unfunded liability. That is not part of the province's books. Obviously, if that was included, it would affect the province's credit rating.

Health care: The budget increases health care spending by \$2.6 billion, from \$43.5 billion in 2009-10 to \$46.1 billion.

I should remind folks that there has been some \$15 billion that has been taxed from people through Dalton McGuinty's new health tax. Yet despite all that extra revenue, on the ground we're still seeing challenges in health care.

In Parry Sound–Muskoka, they're in the midst of a deficit reduction plan for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare. They're cutting back on the number of beds in Bracebridge. In Huntsville, they just shut down the Burk's Falls—what was a hospital; it became urgent care, and now it's closed. Elsewhere around the province, I know, as I travelled around with the pre-budget hearings, we heard about emergency rooms closing in Fort Erie and Port Colborne. Hospitals are at 100% capacity. Also, the numbers are all going the wrong way. In 2005, there were some 12,000 people waiting for long-term-care beds to become available. Now that number has hit an all-time record: It's 26,000. For five consecutive months, starting in September 2009, 17% of all hospital beds in province were occupied by alternate-level-of-care patients.

As we've been pointing out, some \$176 million has gone toward office supplies and salaries at the new health bureaucracy created by the McGuinty government, the LHINs, the local health integration networks, since 2006. We note that the number of people, as I previously mentioned, making the big dollars has gone up significantly at those local health integration networks—some of them not reported, some of them in the endnotes to the sunshine list.

Of course, \$1 billion was wasted by the McGuinty government on the eHealth agency, with very little to show for it.

The budget says the McGuinty government is committed to improving the accountability of the health care system. Certainly, I think you'd agree there's a great need for that. But when you look at the fine print, when you go to schedule 16, for example, of Bill 16, it delays the legislative review of the local health integration networks for several years. Under the Local Health System Integration Act, 2006, the McGuinty government is legally required to subject the LHINs to a full public legislative review by March 28, 2010. So rather than be forced to subject the LHINs to public scrutiny, the McGuinty Liberals, in the budget papers, on page 164, instead put in a provision that eliminates the obligation to hold this review. As I said, if you go to schedule 16, quite conveniently the LHIN review is essentially postponed till after the next election.

I would argue that the LHINs allow the Minister of Health to defer responsibility for health care decisions. That is, except on the occasion when there happens to be a by-election going on and it's becoming a big issue, as we saw with the Toronto Centre by-election, when all of a sudden, the Grace Hospital became a big issue. Then the minister stepped right in, \$15 million appeared, and that got beyond the election date.

During the pre-budget consultations, certainly we heard criticisms to do with the LHINs. I know in Niagara, their Yellow Shirt Brigade characterized the LHINs as being a siphon on the front-line health care dollars, so that instead of that money going to doctors, nurses and procedures, it's going to office space and bureaucracy, with very little value added.

I recall a few years back, when the LHINs were just starting, that Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare had a deficit of \$1.6 million. At the exact same time that they had this \$1.6-million deficit, guess what the local LHIN was spending on office space and renovations? \$1.6 million.

So that's a good comparison. I know, locally, the people would much rather see the money go to the front-line health service versus office space and salaries etc.

It's disappointing to see in the budget that the government is adding more layers of bureaucracy. They're spending \$8.5 million in 2010-11 to create up to 14 regional coordination centres to organize and manage local diabetes programs.

I'd like to go to schedule 5, because I'm certainly hearing a lot about schedule 5. Schedule 5 is the drug—there are actually two schedules. Schedule 5 is one that deals with the Drug Interchangeability and Dispensing Fee Act. I'm hearing a lot of criticism from people who depend on pharmacies. It's not just the small, independent pharmacies—certainly they are. It's customers. It's also some of the larger ones like Shoppers, for example.

I received this from Shoppers Drug Mart. They're up in arms. Spokeswoman Tammy Smitham said that the

Liberal government's decision to slash generic drug costs and pharmacy allowances could leave patients without timely access to their prescriptions.

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"The convenience, access to prescriptions and pharmaceutical services will be impacted," said Smitham, regional director for Shoppers Drug Mart. "At the end of the day, these cuts are going to hurt patients and customers most."

"The Liberals have announced plans to reduce reimbursement to pharmacies for generic drug costs under the Ontario drug benefit program from 50% of the equivalent brand-name drug to 25%.

"While this will lower drug costs and mean less spending on the province's part, Smitham said consumers don't understand what they'll be losing in the process....

"Smitham said these cuts could mean losing that 24-hour status and force reduced store hours, or even layoffs, if necessary.

"Those are definitely possibilities, and we don't want to do those things," Smitham said. "Things like free delivery—we might have to add a charge now. Allowances also pay for blood-glucose monitoring, and we were planning on hiring 350 summer students across the province."

So despite paying more for health care, that \$15 billion, Ontarians still continue to get less.

That's a big company, but I'm also hearing—and in fact, when I go back up to my riding this week, I've had a few people with real concerns contact me who want to meet with me on Friday, to do with this part of bill.

But just to give an idea of some of the concerns I've already received, here's a constituent writing to me:

"Dear Mr. Miller,

"I am one of your constituents, and I am also a Ontario community pharmacy customer and patient.

"I am strongly opposed to the Ontario government's massive \$1 billion per year cut to community pharmacy funding. I depend on the accessible advice and services I get from my pharmacy. I want to ensure that my pharmacist is there when I need them. I want to know that I can talk to my pharmacist after work, when I can't get to my doctor's office, or when my doctor's office is closed. I want to know that my pharmacy will continue to be able to provide valuable health care services in my community.

"So please tell Mr. McGuinty and Health Minister Matthews to stop the cuts to the neighbourhood health care my community pharmacy provides.

"Thank you for this, and for your ongoing support to the Parry Sound–Muskoka area!"

That's from Andrew Fisher, who lives in Parry Sound.

Another email I received from the area:

"Dear Norm Miller,

"I am deeply concerned about the new proposed cuts to pharmacies. The proposed discontinuation of professional allowances while allowing a minuscule increase in dispensing fees is concerning. Currently, pharmacists use professional allowances to compensate the actual cost of

processing a prescription and to enhance patient care. Two studies (one from Ontario and one from British Columbia) have found that the actual cost of processing a prescription is approximately \$12-13, so increasing the dispensing fee by \$1 to \$8 creates a large discrepancy.

"Furthermore, pharmacies use professional allowances to fund services and enhance patient care—such as delivery of medications, patient education material, and private counselling rooms. If professional allowances are discontinued, patients' care would be compromised, and patients would be required to pay for these services. Additionally, with the proposed decrease in professional allowances, it looks doubtful that pharmacists will be able to provide the expanded scope of practice that is outlined in Bill 179.

"Please let me know your comments on this topic."

That's from Ross Hamill.

I just received this email today—I'm sure the government won't be reading out this concerned email. This one's from Cliffside Pharmacy in Scarborough. It's addressed—I was cc'd—to Deb Matthews:

"Dear Minister Matthews,

"I am writing in response to your letter dated April 12, 2010"—so this was written April 13—"addressed to Mr. Dennis Darby, Ms. Nadine Saby and Mr. Ben Shenouda.

"Direct quote from your Honourable Health Minister Deb Matthews:

"Clean up the abused system

"Withheld their services—deny public access

"Hold patient hostage

"Widespread unaccountable and inappropriate practices,

"Lucrative and inscrutable source."

The author goes on to write: "I have been a pharmacist for 20 years. I always feel proud as a health care professional, a mentor for pharmacy students and international foreign graduates, a preceptor for future pharmacists and a business owner as a chain franchisee and independent owner.

"I have always heard words like friendly, caring, knowledgeable, and neighbourhood pharmacist to describe me.

"During the past 20 years, I can recall many incidents that I personally delivered medication to cancer patients, to seniors, to mothers with sick children during a snowstorm, and also delivered after the store was closed. I clearly remember that week my store was broken into three times. I went back to the store after midnight, had the windows repaired and then continued to work my eight-hour shift so that all my patients were being served.

"I worked on my days off, including Sundays, dispensing and delivering medication to nursing home residents. I spent my own time, unpaid, teaching my students. Throughout those 20 years, I never had the privilege of a meal break, and when we got busy, not even a washroom break.

"However, the above quote from your honourable minister is a direct insult to over 11,000 registered pharmacists in Ontario and a denial of all the hard-working,

dedicated, caring community pharmacists working day in and day out to serve patients.

“How can we engage in an honest, thoughtful challenge of your policies if you’ve already deemed all of us dishonest and portrayed us as criminals? How can we continue to negotiate with you when you already have your mind set? You are only asking us to confirm and acknowledge your policy.”

The pharmacist goes on to go through, point by point, the various points in the minister’s letter and concludes by saying, “I’m looking forward to a constructive and mutually respectful atmosphere rather than the inflammatory tone that has been utilized by your office thus far, to ensure a sustainable reimbursement model for all pharmacies so I can focus on my patient care.”

I’d say that the official opposition is just concerned about what this is going to mean on the ground to families and seniors who are looking for the help of their pharmacist. I think the pharmacists have put forward proposals to try to save costs for the health care system, but the government is not listening to them and is not working with them, and I think that is unfortunate. I’m sure I will get more perspective on this when I meet with some constituents when I get back to the riding this weekend.

I’d like to go on to schedule 26 of the bill, and that’s the Public Sector Compensation Restraint to Protect Public Services Act, 2010. This is the schedule of the act that is supposed to signal government restraint. But as is so often the case with this government, it’s more smoke and mirrors, more optics than reality.

What are they doing? Well, they’re freezing the wages on what I’d call the easier part; that is, the non-unionized part of the public service. You have a million public sector workers, not including those who work for municipalities. The great majority of that one million public sector workers is unionized, and they aren’t dealing with that part. They’re dealing with the tip of the wage iceberg, as I call it, the non-unionized part immediately.

But when you read the actual bill, there are also a number of loopholes, so even that sector can still get increases in wages. If you get performance recognition, if you take additional training, if there’s extra room in your pay scale, you can still get a raise. So they’re not that serious even about that part, and they put off the biggest part of the challenge of trying to rein in spending.

I might point out that wages are about 50% of the budget. Despite the recession going on, they’ve already negotiated what I would call contracts that are just not responsible—in most cases, 3% increases over a number of years—and they’re aren’t touching those until the contracts come due. Conveniently, most of them happen to come due after the next election.

You know, this government has a very cozy relationship with the unions, and I think this shows they are just not serious about dealing with their spending problem. Unfortunately, all of us are going to be responsible, as time goes on, as they double the debt over their time in office.

I’d like to go to another example of the government’s irresponsible spending and just not doing their due diligence, and that is the issue of severance for the sales tax collectors who were previously collecting the Ontario retail sales tax and will now be collecting the HST. These tax collectors, come July 1 when the McGuinty government’s new HST comes into effect, are not going to lose their jobs. They may not even switch offices. They’ll probably have a different business card. But they’re going to collect some \$45,000 severance from the McGuinty government.

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This government had the time and the power to negotiate reasonable collective agreements. They’ve been the government for a number of years. The BC government is implementing the HST and they aren’t paying severance to people who are not losing their jobs. In fact, these tax collectors are actually getting an increase in pay. This is an affront to hard-working middle class families that are paying their taxes.

I’ve been getting some mail on this issue for sure. Here’s an example.

“I assume”—this is the letter—“that you are familiar with the above issue so I will focus this note on my comments.

“The payment of severance to these provincial tax collectors despite the continuation of their employment is unacceptable and the Liberal government must find a solution to claw back or not pay these amounts. The employees are being unjustifiably enriched and no one would agree with these payments if it weren’t for the provisions in their labour contract. The labour contract does not make it right and the government should stand up and reverse the payments.

“The other acceptable solution would be to ensure that these people are truly being severed. Your government”—meaning the McGuinty government—“should then work with Ottawa to deny these individuals a position with the federal government. However, because of their expertise and Ottawa’s desire to hire more tax collectors, this is obviously the less desirable solution. (I don’t agree with hiring more tax collectors since the PST/GST harmonization should reduce admin costs, meaning fewer combined tax collectors. This is also something that your government should aim to achieve as part of the harmonization.)”

The letter continues: “It is obvious that the Liberal government is ignoring the substance of this severance issue, taking the less contentious route, and not acting in the interests of the taxpayers. This is very costly and unacceptable given the economic and fiscal conditions in Ontario that we live in today.

“I urge the Liberal government to deal with this issue and ensure that none of these employees receive this severance payment and continue their employment as tax collectors.”

I think that is reflective of the way the vast majority of Ontarians feel, especially those people who are just trying to earn a living. They recognize that if you don’t

lose your job—the reason you get severance is, it's a transition between jobs. If you're not losing your job, then you shouldn't be getting severance, just like the BC tax collectors won't be getting it. Unfortunately, the McGuinty government wasn't paying attention when they made agreements to do with the HST. As a result, there's an additional \$25-million cost.

The official opposition will be proposing a budget bill amendment on this issue. We've been working on it. It's going to affect section 50.1. This is the new amendment we're going to put in: "The transfer of any public servants, as defined by the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006, pursuant to" the "comprehensive integrated tax coordination agreement referred to in section 50, and annexes and agreements thereto, shall in no way be deemed a dismissal under s. 39 of the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006."

The purpose of this amendment that we're going to put forward is to support the principle that if you do not lose your job, you do not get the severance, and rectify the McGuinty Liberals' decision to pay six-month severance packages, worth as much as \$45,000 each, to more than 1,250 HST tax collectors who will transfer to the federal government without losing a day of work.

Tim Hudak and the official opposition will be putting that amendment forward. I think most Ontarians would recognize that that's a reasonable amendment. It would save the Ontario taxpayers some \$25 million in costs.

I'd like to get to some other parts of the bill. In the bill there are energy rebates for the north. Certainly, the issue of rising energy costs is of real concern. I got an email from a constituent of mine that illustrates what it's like for many people out there who are struggling to pay increasing energy costs.

The energy policy of the government is scary, is the way I'd look at it. They've got the Green Energy Act, which we know for sure is going to drive energy costs up—absolutely no question about it. There has been an application to increase energy costs by basically 10% this year. Starting July 1, there will be another 8% on your energy bill. I'm hearing from all kinds of constituents—smart meters have been put into effect. They aren't even operating yet, and yet I'm hearing from many constituents—and I've heard from other MPPs—that people's energy bills are going up significantly for some reason, despite just the change in the meters. I don't know what that's all about, but I've heard from many people.

I'd just like to refer to this email that I think demonstrates the situation for a lot of people. It's an email I received on the weekend. Some of it is kind of a short form, so it may not come out quite as clearly as I might like:

"I'm in need of a little help. I've been having this ongoing problem with Hydro One since last winter in 2009 until now, April 9, 2010. I have had extremely high hydro bills—I mean like \$1,000 to \$2,000 in one month. I have made arrangements and followed through with them. I have made a one-lump-sum [payment] of \$1,500 and now I have been paying them \$400 a month because

that's all I could afford to pay. I'm not working. My husband is the only one working at this time. I had to quit my job because [of] my daughter's illness and they are telling me it's not good enough, and no matter how much I pay, they are going to shut off my hydro. I was told to get an electrician to come in and see if anything was wrong, so I did; \$150 an hour I had to pay for that, and he told me nothing was wrong. He tried to contact Hydro; they wanted nothing to do with him! I have shut my electric furnace off because I thought that's what the problem was, but it doesn't make a difference either. This has started since winter last year 2009 until now, April 9, 2010. I've been paying, and then on top of trying to pay it they added another \$875 to the bill for a security deposit because of failure to keep up a good payment history! I'm trying; that's all I can say, and I can't afford to have my hydro shut off. I've explained to Hydro that I'm trying to pay what I can in a month. They just don't want to hear it from me anymore. So [I] would like or need your help on this matter, please."

I think that demonstrates the situation of many people. I know that in the district of Muskoka the applications for emergency help have gone up significantly. This is before we get the 10% increase, then the 8% for GST and then, in years to come, the significant increases that are going to happen with the Green Energy Act. I would like to briefly just talk about those because—and this is not just me. You look at an article on the weekend from Shawn McCarthy, global energy reporter, and he talks about what's going on with the province's green energy plans. The title of it: "Ontario's Clean Energy Plan Called Threat to Industry's Edge."

"Critics such as former provincial power executive Jan Carr say the government is recklessly pursuing politically popular, environmentally friendly policies that will undermine the power system's reliability and affordability.

"The recent rush to "green" Ontario's electricity system has produced a largely ad hoc approach to the selection and investment in power generation technologies that will unnecessarily increase the cost of electricity with far-reaching economic and social effects," Dr. Carr wrote in this month's edition of the *Journal of Policy Engagement*.

"Bruce Sharp, an analyst with Aegent Energy Advisors in Toronto, calculates the average residential power bill will climb by \$330 a year—about 25%—within a few years, including the addition of the harmonized sales tax."

On the same weekend, Margaret Wentz wrote an article, "The Wacky World of Green Power." Starting in the middle of the article, it reads:

"Don't bet your solar panel on it. Renewables simply can't produce the large volumes of reliable energy that our economy needs. 'These energy sources are so intermittent and unreliable that you have to have backup power at all times,' says Professor Trebilcock. For every wind farm we build, we'll have to have a coal or gas-fired power station waiting in the wings to take over

when it's 20 below. 'I think we'll get next to nothing on carbon dioxide abatement,' he says.

1710

"Mr. Monbiot agrees. Germany, he says, has spent €1.2 billion on solar roofs. Their total contribution to the country's electricity supply was 0.4%. Their total contribution to carbon savings is zero.

"But what about green jobs? The McGuinty government confidently predicts that its green scheme will create 50,000 of them. Don't believe it. Some will be temporary construction jobs. Some other jobs will disappear because higher electricity costs will make Ontario less competitive. And many of the new jobs will be extremely costly to create....

"So who are the winners? The companies that harvest the subsidies. They're flocking to Ontario like fruit flies to a bowl of overripe peaches. The government is trying to create a feel-good story by showcasing the little guys—such as schools that want to install solar roofs, and native-run wind companies with names such as Mother Earth (despite the fact that little guys are the most inefficient operators of all). But it's the big guys who are the biggest winners—multinational corporations such as the Korean giant Samsung....

"The world is littered with cautionary tales about subsidized renewables and overblown promises. Spain went wild on solar, and set off a speculative boom. Inefficient, poorly designed plants popped up everywhere. The lavish subsidies inflated costs. When Spain plunged into recession, the subsidies were ratcheted back, and the industry collapsed."

Those are just some cautionary tales about what this government is getting into.

In the budget bill, they have an industrial rebate for northern Ontario. Well, that coalition I met with this afternoon that's concerned about the Xstrata smelter said it's too little, too late. It's a 25% reduction. Well, the cost saving in Quebec, where the ore is going to be shipped to be smelted, is 50%, and the smelter is going to close. And just about every mill is already closed.

I would say, as with so many things that this government does, that the way they execute it is so full of holes and problems. They're always trying to pick winners and losers. I say to the members opposite, what about those people in the forestry sector? It's great for the forestry businesses that happen to be above the arbitrary boundary in the north, but what about Kimberly-Clark in Huntsville that's in the same business, that's producing toilet tissue and is a big consumer of electricity? What about Tembec in Huntsville? What about Panolam in Huntsville, which is in fibreboard? Now, all of a sudden, their competitors have a 25% advantage.

What about smaller companies? I received an email from Little John Enterprises in Timmins:

"LJE has been an entrepreneur in northeastern Ontario since 1983 and as such have been consuming hydro like all other businesses. At this time I am questioning why we are not entitled to receive the 25% rebate offered to larger companies. Why are we being discriminated against because we are a smaller company?

"I would appreciate a response ASAP."

This is another email from Little John Enterprises:

"Apparently to qualify for the 25% rebate, you must consume five megawatts of electricity. Our mill consumes one megawatt.

"There are hardly any large companies left in the wood industry in this northern district. What a time to give a rebate!

"We at Little John Enterprises pay taxes and royalties same as the larger companies. We've employed workers for 20 years-plus. Our mill produces up to 100 different added-value products and has been doing this for over 20 years. Manufacturing value-added products are encouraged by the government aren't they?

"The government loaned us \$1 million to modernize and keep our industry working. Why are we being discriminated against by not allowing us to benefit from the 25% rebate?

"Hydro is one of our largest expenses and is going to become even more costly in the near future. It is little wonder that the forest industry as well as mining is packing up and leaving our province and country with little encouragement.

"As far as the provincial government is concerned, the north does not exist!!!"

That's from John Kapel of Little John Enterprises.

I've had inquiries—I won't name the business—from a company in my riding concerned about whether they will be able to participate in this industrial energy policy. After making several inquiries, they were told that the eligibility criteria for this program has not been established. Once again, this government seems to be making announcements, but they haven't necessarily figured it all out yet.

I was up in Parry Sound last week and I stopped in at Orr's Meats to buy some fine-quality sausages from Murray Orr, and other things, but what did he want to talk about? He wanted to talk about smart meters and the time-of-use metering. He's really concerned. He said to me, "I can't shut my fridges off. I can't have them run just in the middle of the night. They've got to run all day." He had estimated, this small butcher shop, fine-quality Orr's Meats in Parry Sound—I highly recommend you stop in there if you're going through; very good items. The porkettes they have are delicious. Getting back to the issue, though, seriously, his concern was that he estimates the cost for his energy bill could go up by as much as \$800 a month, and he's quite concerned about what that will mean for his business. So there's real concern out there.

Schedule 6 is the Electronic Land Registration Services Act. That makes provision for entering into agreements with service providers. It also creates a commissioner of electronic land registration services. It gives the commissioner the power to investigate disputes. No doubt this is in part to deal with all the omissions which have resulted from the electronic registration process, such as the failure to convey road allowances and rights of way, which has had the effect of landlocking property

owners. I know the member from Durham has raised this issue in the past. He will probably want to speak about it. Currently, these property owners have had to pay out of their own pockets to have their problems corrected, despite the fact that it was the government that created them.

There are various other schedules to amend the Law Society Act, the Health Care Consent Act, the City of Ottawa Act, the Mental Health Act.

But criticism about the budget is not confined to the PC caucus. Adam Radwanski of the *Globe and Mail*, on March 25, 2010, said, "With this budget, Ontario is banking on the near-impossible." The Cross-Border Biotech Blog of March 25 said, "Ontario's 2010 budget contains no new innovation-related initiatives, leaving the province to fall further behind competitive jurisdictions." Toronto Board of Trade president Carol Wilding says, "This is not a good day for regional transit," as the budget slashes billions of dollars in new transit construction.

Tourism: I know the member for Wellington-Halton Hills, I think it is—I'm getting his riding mixed up—Mr. Arnott, is the tourism critic, and he noted that there was no mention of tourism in the budget. Now, there is a tourism tax. Interestingly, despite the HST being created, the retail sales tax does stay around, so we're still going to need tax collectors and the bureaucracy because there's going to be a 3% retail sales tax on transient accommodations. There's also going to be, and most people probably don't realize this, a new 13% retail sales tax on used cars. I bet most people are not aware of that. So the bureaucracy will still be around to collect this new 13% retail sales tax on used cars. That means there's still going to be this bureaucracy; there's still going to be a need for tax collectors in the province of Ontario.

Jeffrey Simpson of the *Globe and Mail*, on March 24, said, "Ontario's budget will just delay the pain: The province is in an immense fiscal hole with absolutely no idea how to climb out of it." I would agree with that, Mr. Speaker. They have this never, never plan to go some eight years before they might balance the budget. Hopefully, there will be a new government in place before then that will actually get serious about restraining spending, because I think this government could be elected for 100 years—

Interjections.

Mr. Norm Miller: They could be elected for 100 years, and they'll never balance another budget. Never. I just don't believe it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm starting to run out of time.

Schedule 23 is an interesting one because it finances new borrowing. Because of all the money they're spending, schedule 23 allows up to \$31.7 billion in new borrowing—new borrowing—apart from debt maturity. So that's what we've got to look forward to. As has been pointed out, the government is spending some \$2.8 million an hour more than they're creating.

1720

There's a schedule 28—sorry. I think it's schedule 31 or 28; I've got my schedules mixed up there. One has to

do with the tobacco tax; the other has to do with cigarettos. However, the government is not dealing with the 50% of illegal cigarettes that are sold in the province in any sort of convincing way. We're almost at the fourth anniversary of Caledonia. I received a letter from a constituent this week who had been charged with buying illegal cigarettes at Caledonia. They bought illegal cigarettes, and the email to me, with a series of questions which I forwarded on to the government, asked, "How come it's okay for me to buy these cigarettes? Why is the government not going after the people who are selling them? When they know where they are selling them and they can see they are selling them, why doesn't the government deal with them?" The constituent is writing me, saying, "I didn't know it was illegal to buy these cigarettes." So that is certainly a valid concern.

Tim Hudak and the opposition have put forward some significant ideas to try to get the economy going again, to try to create those very important private sector jobs that we need in the economy. So I'd ask listeners to go to 10for2010.ca to have a look at some of the ideas, like the plan to restore balance to WSIB. As I mentioned, the unfunded liability has gone up 50%. We're out of whack with the other provinces. We have the highest premiums and costs on business. That's hurting jobs.

We have a plan to eliminate job-killing red tape, to suspend the tax on new jobs, to make home ownership more affordable, and to expand job opportunities for young people through apprenticeship. Because of this government's cozy relationship with unions, they won't do the simple thing and bring in a one-to-one apprenticeship ratio, which they could, at the snap of a finger, very easily do. They have not done that. When you talk to some of the local electricians, that's something they'd really like to see.

We'd like to see them create jobs in northern Ontario. They've got their Bill 191, the Far North Act, which is going to shut down all development in northern Ontario.

We'd like to see them cut wasteful government spending. They're good at spending money. We'd like to see a mandatory sunset review of all the ministry agencies, boards and commissions.

We'd like to see them stop picking winners and losers and end corporate welfare.

I can't get through all 10 points because I'm at the end of my opportunity to speak, but it's been my pleasure to make some comments on the budget bill, Bill 16, today.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: It is always a pleasure to listen to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka when he waxes so eloquently on all economic matters.

He spoke about so many issues, but time only permits me to talk about one of them. He talked about the failure of this government in terms of its HST policy and the amounts of money that it gave to the auditors. He very correctly points out that it was the government's decision to give that money. The government, in turn, of course, correctly points out that it was the Conservatives who

signed that initial contract all those many years ago. And so here we are caught in this conundrum about who is to blame.

But I do have to agree with my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka: Although the Conservatives did negotiate this contract in the first place, it has been renewed many times, most recently by this government on two or three occasions in the last six years. The government knew full well, when it decided to go along the HST path, of the cost of its actions. The government knew when it signed the accord in secret with the government in Ottawa, the Harper government in Ottawa, that the auditors were going to be transferred. They knew that it was going to cost them money to get out of the contractual agreement, and they knew that that cost was going to be \$25 million. But they went ahead with the HST anyway.

I think that's the point that needs to be underlined: They went ahead with the HST. It was simply a cost of doing business, and the cost for the government was to pay the auditors, whether they thought it was a good thing or a bad thing. They were transferring those jobs from Ontario to the federal government, and they had no choice but to pay. They hid that fact from everyone until the time of the budget. When it broke at the time of the budget, of course, many people were upset, not only those who don't believe the HST is good financial or fiscal policy, but also those who felt that this was a form of double-dipping.

I commend my friend for bringing it up, but I think the full facts need to be revealed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Mr. Rick Johnson: It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the comments that were made by the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka and the member from Beaches–East York.

Our Open Ontario plan will create new opportunities for jobs and economic growth. The 2010 budget moves that plan forward and protects the progress Ontarians have made in our schools and hospitals as we eliminate the deficit caused by global recession.

The deficit which the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka spoke about is very easy to explain. We made a commitment to invest in infrastructure of \$16 billion. The tax revenue in this province is down. We also invested in the auto sector to keep it here.

He talked about spending being up. It costs a lot of money to repair the damage that was done from 1995 to 2003 in this province. We had hospital cuts—huge cuts in hospitals. I remember going to visit my wife in the hospital at the Oshawa General Hospital. I pressed the wrong button and ended up, I think, on the fifth or sixth floor. The doors opened. All the beds were in the hallways and all the mattresses were rolled up, and that was the efficiencies that that hospital was able to find.

We had education cuts. It was identified through the Rozanski commission at the time—cuts of over \$1 bil-

lion. They cut inspectors. They talk about efficiencies: "We're going to cut red tape." What we got through inspector cuts was Walkerton.

I think we got a very clear message from the member who spoke about tearing up contracts. He said the government should just walk in, tear them up, throw them out.

Our budget proposal is talking about hope, giving people hope in this province. We're going to create more college spaces. We're going to invest in Second Career spaces as well. There's a lot of things that we're talking about—giving people in this province hope.

But what the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka gave us was a reminder that the PC Party hopes that Ontario has forgotten the damage they did.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I certainly listened intensely to our critic, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. Mr. Miller gave a very thorough review of this budget, and he has every reason to have needed more time. In fact, I think he should have sought more time to make the points.

He commented primarily on two sections that are most troubling in the general sense. One is the stealthful way that they've eliminated the review of the LHINs, the local health integration networks, this health bureaucracy that's taking hundreds of millions of dollars away from patient care, away from the bedside and into the boardroom. It's just unacceptable the way it was done, and I think it undermines the whole process of why we're here today. Our leader, Tim Hudak, has brought this up in question period, only to be shuffled off.

The other part that's the most troubling, I think, looking forward, is section 22. That's another stealthful way within the budget to be dealing with the pharmacists of Ontario. I read with much disdain—and Mr. Miller's point was very well taken, reading some of the commentaries that all members are receiving. The letter and the tone of the letter from the minister to the OPA was quite unacceptable, criticizing a highly regarded profession in each of our ridings. I think he's done a very admirable job of bringing that up.

I just want to put this on the record. This is from one of my constituents. He said, "First of all, I would like to say that pension income splitting is a great benefit." He thanks the federal government and gives them much credit. He says, "However, the Ontario Liberal government's budget appears to be slightly less generous...." He goes on to explain that if you file with income splitting, you end up paying more tax provincially through the health tax. The health premium tax is applied to both persons, so you actually increase the amount you spend provincially. Also—

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

Mr. John O'Toole: The tax credit is also not—

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

Hon. John Gerretsen: I'm very pleased to join the debate. I always enjoy listening to the member from Parry Sound.

I've been here for 15 budgets, both put forward by the Harris government and by our own government. Quite frankly, this is one budget on which I've had less response from the general public than any other budget, and I think the reason for that is that people basically believe the direction that we're going in. They basically think it's right in tough economic times to do something with respect to salary levels, that we freeze salary levels once contracts are over and done with in a couple of years etc. They basically agree with the approach that we're taking.

1730

Now, let me just very quickly deal with the whole drug situation. The reality is this: We in the province of Ontario—whether the government buys generic drugs or the average person—pay, in some cases, three, four or five times more than the same generic drug sells for in other jurisdictions. One of the reasons for that is the fact of the so-called “professional allowances” that are then being paid back by the generic drug companies to the drug stores. That's what this is all about. Is it going to hurt the bottom line of the drug stores? You're darned right. Once we've got those professional allowances out, they can no longer count on it. But it simply isn't right. You and I know that these so-called “professional allowances” in some other professions are called something totally different. The reality is that we want to utilize that \$500 million that in effect is being paid back—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order.

Hon. John Gerretsen: —that in effect is being paid back to the drug stores for other purposes, when it comes to health care. The reality is that we should not be paying any more for generic drugs here in the province of Ontario than any of the other jurisdictions in North America, and this bill does that job.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Now, are we all ready to hear the response?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond, and I thank the members from Beaches–East York, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, Durham, and Kingston and the Islands for their comments.

The member from Beaches–East York talked about the fact that the HST collectors will still receive severance. I think he correctly pointed out that the contract has been renewed many times. The government knew they were going to be making this HST agreement, although I don't recall much being said about the HST in the past election campaign. But they did know about this, and yet they didn't change the structure of that agreement; BC did, so they aren't paying out the \$45,000 per tax collector who is not losing their job. As I've pointed out, we do have an amendment ready to go, and we will be putting that amendment forward at committee when this bill has done second reading and goes to committee. We

have an amendment that those tax collectors are not deemed to have lost their jobs, so they shouldn't receive severance, because they haven't lost their jobs.

The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock talks about the Open Ontario plan. We've seen a lot of plans from this government. There's the five-point plan that was talked about. We have a five-year plan. He talked about the past government, the PC government. Well, one of the things I think was a pretty good accomplishment of that government was the over one million jobs that were created from 1995 to 2003.

This government is digging a bigger hole, a deeper hole, than Bob Rae did. Some of the spending restraints that Mike Harris had to bring into effect were because of that deep hole that Bob Rae dug. The McGuinty government is digging an even bigger hole, which is going to require some spending restraint, which this government so far has been very much unwilling to do.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: The first thing I would like to do is hold down the lead. Our critic is not available. I'm seeking unanimous consent to do so.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Prue has asked that the leadoff speech of the third party be stepped down. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Michael Prue: So now you have to hear me for only 20 minutes. In the 20 minutes, there are three areas of this budget that I want to talk about, three areas in which I think it is absolutely essential that the people of Ontario understand what is going to happen to them as a result of the budget, if and when this budget is passed.

The first area that I want to talk about is hospitals and the hospital base funding, because this is going to have a huge implication upon all of those hospitals across Ontario, all of those people who rely on medical services, and will literally force many of the hospitals across this province to provide different kinds of care. Whether you are in Wawa, Toronto, Thunder Bay or Kingston, things are going to change, because the hospital base funding has been set at 1.5%. We know from the hospital administrators—we know from all of them—that hospital costs in the next year are going to go up somewhere between 3% and 4%. They cannot help it. It is based in part on some of the negotiations and the contracts, some of the medical supplies, some of the costs of energy and other things. The rate of inflation for hospitals tends to be higher than the normal rate of inflation, which is anticipated at being around 2%. So there is going to have to be a change to those hospitals. We know it. They know it. The government knows it. The government, which is setting it at 1.5%, knows that things are going to change in the hospitals. And what is going to change?

I've spoken about this before. Things are going to change, such as in my own local hospital, Toronto East General. I have spoken at length several times with Mr. Rob Devitt, who in my view is an excellent CEO. He tries his very best to run that hospital to the community standard that we have come to expect, but he has told me

quite bluntly, and told the community quite bluntly, that he cannot operate the hospital and the same programs that he has done in the past. The first thing the hospital administrators did, and they were forced to do, and I think they did so with some great reluctance, was shut down the physiotherapy unit. They have shut it down because it is not within the total mandate of the hospital. They considered that it was something that could be taken out and could be provided privately in other locations, although the majority of patients who use the physiotherapy unit have no such coverage to purchase that independently and privately themselves. They're doing so with considerable community angst. The community is not happy about this. They know that the loss of this vital service to our hospital is going to hurt.

The second thing is another community hospital just north of me that a lot of people in the East York area use, and that veterans use, Sunnybrook hospital, and we have had letters from people at Sunnybrook hospital outlining that there aren't the number of beds and services available that there were before and that they've had to make cutbacks to the point that they've had to close some of the rooms. But they still have sick people, and those sick people are being put out in the halls and being forced to sleep in the halls. The nurses do not like the fact that people sleep there all night for days on end. They have to be toileted there. There is very little privacy. It is not the kind of care that nurses and doctors in that hospital are accustomed to giving. They want to give so much more, but there isn't the budget to do it anymore.

Another symptom in a letter that was sent to me just this past week—it was sent by a woman who has asked that I not use her name, so I won't, but she outlines that Toronto East General Hospital has made some further cuts that are going to be very detrimental to public health and to the community. Toronto East General Hospital has been a teaching hospital for a long time. When I was the mayor of East York, and before that when I was a councillor, I served on the board of health with Sheela Basrur, who we all remember with some great fondness. We had Toronto East General Hospital in our community designated as a teaching hospital. People came from all over the world, and particularly all over Canada, to study at that hospital. It was a model. But more than that, the hospital allowed the community to have access. There are lecture theatres. There are community rooms. There are rooms and classrooms. There are places where community groups can get together and talk about medicine and health and health promotion. I have attended on behalf of some of those groups, some of the meetings of the schizophrenia society of east Toronto. I have talked to diabetes groups who hold their meetings there, lots of groups like that.

They have all been given notice. They have all been given notice that they can no longer use those facilities free of charge to promote public health in the Beaches–East York area, that from this point on they're either going to have to find another location or pay the hospital hundreds of dollars to hold their meetings to promote

public health and public health awareness issues. This is what the hospital's having to do. They're having to shut down a community. I can't believe that this government wants this to happen. But it is happening. It's happening right before your very eyes. You're doing that by limiting the hospitals to 1.5% of base funding and forcing them to make decision that I know and you know they don't want to make, and that I know and you know the community is upset about.

1740

But here it is; it's part of the budget. This is what you're going to ask me to vote for, and if I don't vote for it, you're going to taunt me forever with, "You didn't vote for this provision of the budget to give the hospitals money." Well, I don't think it's enough. I think that when the community starts to suffer on something they expect very strongly from this government, from this institution—they rely upon the government of Ontario for many things, but primarily and fundamentally, one of the things they rely upon is the provision of adequate funds for hospital services.

The second thing I want to talk about is the whole provision of poverty, because this was much in the last budget, but not so much in this one. In 2003, the Premier stood in his place and ran a good and successful campaign for the Liberal Party, talking about poverty issues and that he wanted to do something about the horrendous level of poverty in Ontario. In 2007, he ran another campaign in which he said he wanted to be known as the poverty Premier. He promised in the 2007 budget process and the throne speech that he was going to do a lot of things to help the poor.

But what do we see in this budget? We see some of the cruelest, meanest, most horrible things being perpetrated by any government in the history of this province. I say that, remembering full well the meanness of Mike Harris around this issue. I say that, full well knowing that they cut back welfare payments by 21%. I know that. But what this government is doing is almost identical and even more hurtful than what the Conservatives did.

The first thing this government has done in this budget is that they've stood up and proudly announced that everybody's going to get a 1% increase—1%. But if you look at the small print, they're not going to get the money now. They're not going to get that huge 1%, which amounts to \$6 if you're a single person, or \$10 if you're a family, or \$10 if you're on ODSP. You're not going to get that now. It is in November, if you're on ODSP, that you're going to get the 1%, and only in November. If you had the unmitigated gall to be on Ontario Works, because you're not quite as good, you have to wait until December to get the 1%.

Mr. Paul Miller: A month later?

Mr. Michael Prue: A month later. So for six months, there's no increase, although they talk about that. And we know, and you know, and everybody out there knows that inflation is going to eat all of that before they get it—every cent.

Over the years, this government stands in their place, and every time I ask the minister questions, she always trots out the same thing: “This government, since 2003, has given an 11% increase.” Inflation has been 14%. The people who are on welfare and ODSP are worse off today than they were in the deepest, darkest days of Mike Harris, and this government pretends to be proud of it. I think that is a disgrace.

But not to be outdone, you’ve got the special diet allowance. This government really wants to stick it to the poor. They really want to stick it to the poor.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: No, no. Just wait until I start reading what your government is doing, because you have no idea what’s going on down there at the Human Rights Commission.

They have done away with the special diet, and they are replacing it with a nutritional supplement program. They didn’t wait for the end of the month for their expert panel, for Gail Nyberg et al to come forward and say what needs to be done. When Gail Nyberg wrote to the government—and she’s a very nice Liberal woman; she lives in my riding; I’ve known her for years; capable, competent—she begged you not to do this. But you didn’t wait for her report; you went ahead and did it anyway. You didn’t do anything about asset stripping, which they’ve talked about. You haven’t done anything about the social assistance rules.

What you did do is you went to the Human Rights Commission. The Human Rights Commission ordered, on February 17, that this government pay people the special diet allowance that they deserved.

This government has gone way out of its way to try to reverse that decision. They will not obey the Human Rights Commission of Ontario. In fact, yesterday they filed a report. They filed an application before the Human Rights Commission in which they are asking that nothing be done to pay people the money that they are owed until the government can, in fact, change the law and make sure that they become ineligible.

I’d like to quote what the assistant deputy minister had to say, because they rely on his affidavit—the assistant deputy minister, and I’m looking for his name. I have it on the second document; if I can’t locate the first one, it is on the second one. Anyway, I’ll get the assistant deputy’s name in a—oh, there it is: It’s David Carter-Whitney, assistant deputy minister of the social policy development division of the Ministry of Community and Social Services, a position he has held since September 2007.

He makes the following statement in support of the government’s action. I quote it starting on paragraph 7: “Unlike the SDA, which provides assistance”—that’s the special diet allowance—“to social assistance recipients with a variety of medical conditions, the new program that was announced by the government would be medically based and would help individuals with severe medical needs that are on social assistance. Therefore, not all current SDA recipients will be eligible for the new program. As a result, the government indicated its

intention to provide a transition period between the elimination of the SDA and the implementation of a NSP.”

He’s being very forthright, very honest about what you’re doing. You are cutting off all of those people who have a special diet allowance in favour of some people who have severe medical needs who are going to get a new program.

He goes on in paragraph 10: “Notification to recipients

“The government wishes to provide the over 162,000 current SDA recipients with written notification of the date on which their payments will cease in order to help them prepare for an adjustment in their monthly social assistance.”

Think about that: 162,000 people are going to get a letter saying that they’re being cut off so that they can prepare themselves to get \$10, \$20, \$50 or \$200 less a month on which to live. That’s what this government is doing. That’s what you’re doing in courts. That’s what you’re doing before the Human Rights Commission.

In paragraph 11, he writes, “In order to eliminate the SDA, amendments are required to both a minister’s regulation and a Lieutenant Governor in Council regulation. Amendments to the latter are subject to the government approval process,” which means that the cabinet is going to have approve it.

Of course, all the members of the Liberal caucus who are not in cabinet are going to cheer madly and clap when the minister stands up and makes this announcement.

He goes on to write in paragraph 12, “The LRC”—the Lieutenant Governor—“is scheduled to meet for business twice a month until the end of June 2010; and

“Committee and cabinet approval and signature by the Lieutenant Governor in Council” will be given by that time.

In paragraph 14, he writes, “I have been informed by the director, social assistance and municipal operations branch and believe that it will take 6 to 8 months to implement all the changes to the SDMT that are required to discontinue recipients’ SDA payments, including:

“—4 months to implement the program data fix that will stop all current SDA payments;

“—6 to 8 months to program and implement the required changes that will prevent the system from creating future SDA payments.... This activity will include the planning, designing, and implementation of required coding changes” etc.

Then he goes on over many pages to describe how exactly the government intends to do this.

So if the backbenchers over there think you’re not doing it, you’re doing it. If you think that there’s some kind of program and that you’re going to help these poor people, you’re not. It is the intention of the minister and the intention of the cabinet to cut them all off and to allow a certain limited few with severe medical problems back on. That means people are going to lose up to and including 20% of their payments that they get on ODSP. These are the poorest and sickest people we have in our province, and you are sticking it to them in this budget. They are being stuck to in a way that I find reprehensible and immoral. I even remember that back in those days—

and I am no fan of Mike Harris, as you obviously know—he didn't even cut off that special allowance, but you're doing it.

1750

The next thing I'd like to talk about in the few minutes that are left is the deficit. It's not common that New Democrats talk about that kind of thing, but I think it's important. The deficit is continuing at a record pace. The government admits that it's going to be \$21.3 billion of deficit in this fiscal year, and in spite of all of that there is going to be a continued lack of tax dollars. That's because this government in this budget and in all of the announcements leading up to the budget has agreed to continue \$2.4 billion in corporate tax cuts, money they could use to pay down the deficit or fund social programs, or give money to poor people who rely on social assistance and those who rely on diet supplements so they don't get sick. But they are also losing, according to the government's own figures, some \$4.5 billion as the result of the institution of the HST.

I know that a lot of people out there would find that very hard to believe. I have heard many times in here that the HST is a tax grab, which it is, but it is not a tax grab that is going to make the government any money, and that's something that is not often talked about here. It is not making this government money. It is simply—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Prue: I agree with the minister over there. You will actually lose money as a result because you're giving away the money to a lot of places, including the corporations that don't need it. And in the end, it's going to cost the government money. The \$4.5 billion that they lose on that, the \$2.4 billion they're giving away to corporations, amounts to nearly \$7 billion, which I don't think this government can afford to give away, but they're giving it away anyway.

They've talked about the seven years of elimination until the time of the elimination of this debt. This is laughable. This is totally laughable because when you look at the long-term plan, how they're going to do that, it counts on a 3.4% growth plan for each and every one of the next seven years.

Mr. Paul Miller: Unheard of.

Mr. Michael Prue: Three point four per cent is unheard of, and it's also nearly impossible. This does not happen in Canada all the time; 3.4% is an excellent growth year. It is a rare growth year. It is one that is not often met. But this government, in order to eliminate the deficit, is looking at seven consecutive years of growth rates of 3.4% or more.

They are also stating at the same time that they are going to increase expenses by only 2.3% a year, but this includes all of the interest that they are paying on past debts. It is literally impossible to limit growth like that, unless you're going to start affecting programs.

Then, of course, you come down to the end, and that is that they're going to cut those programs. But this is a smart government. They're not going to do it in this budget cycle and they're not going to do it next year, either. The cuts to the programs come in the years 2012

and 2013, which is coincidentally a few months after the next election. Oh, wow. That's when the cuts are going to come. That's when everybody's going to come back here, and if the Liberals find themselves still on that side, that's when the cuts are going to come. That's the big plan. This is a budget that is so full of holes that some people would call it a Swiss cheese budget. With that, I'll sit down.

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

Mr. Glen R. Murray: We first heard the member's honourable party carp about how cruel we were because we were going to lose 8,000 daycare spaces. The sanctimony was dripping. Now, we've reversed the Harper cuts and we're introducing day-long education. I would love the member to come down to Regent Park, where I was just elected with a majority of the votes there, and talk to people there about the child tax credit, about the \$1-billion housing rebuild, about Pathways to Education, which has reversed the dropout rate from 66%. The real cruelty under the Harris Tories: They removed the bus fares, they took the bus money from kids and the dropout rate went from 10% to 66%. It's back down to 10%.

We are not cutting back. This is the big difference between the Liberals and the NDP. While we share some values, we understand you have to create wealth before you can redistribute it, which is why the NDP have been one-term wonders in most provinces, unless they become Liberals, like they have in Manitoba and Nova Scotia, where they like the HST.

You should read Cy Gonick's analysis of the NDP's record on the equivalent of ODSP, because you talk a great story in opposition but you never deliver when you're in government—like we do, quite frankly.

GDP growth is better in Ontario than in any other state or province on the continent. And if you don't think that is a result of this government's policies, then you don't get it.

Fifty thousand jobs: People in my community who voted for me two months ago don't want more social assistance, they want a job. They like Samsung. They voted against your party because of Samsung. They want 16,000 jobs. They don't want left-wing rhetoric. They don't want more subsidies—

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

Mr. John O'Toole: The previous speaker thinks that loud makes it right.

But anyway, I think the member from Beaches–East York brought some very caring commentary to the budget, which is a very conflicting issue.

I would say that the part that really troubles me most is the portion to do with the pharmaceutical changes, I think in schedule 22. There are really two sections that are troublesome. In fairness, in his rebuttal, I'd like to hear what he says, because this discussion here in schedule 22 is quite troublesome.

I would only say—I've got a couple of examples that were brought to my attention by one of my local

pharmacists today. This is what's happening as a result of this budget bill.

A generic drug today, a heart drug, is in very high demand and is also a very important drug, treating heart disease. Digoxin, a generic drug, is currently 38 cents. That's what it costs today. But it's being discontinued as a result of this change for the patent drug, which is a drug called toloxin, and that will be dispensed at \$60 a tablet. This change is going to be shifting the cost to our constituents, our seniors, people like myself, who are seniors. That's one example. I have a list here as well.

The real issue here is that they're not dealing with the patent drugs. There's a list that was just released today of the patent drugs; they're all going up in price. This is a schedule. All of the patent drugs are going up in price. They're dealing with the smallest part of it and blaming the pharmacists.

I would think that some of the people—

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

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde: This Bill 16 is a budget bill. Listening to the member from the opposite side from the NDP, from Beaches–East York, I'm telling you, he keeps saying that government is spending too much, and at the end, he ends up saying that we're not spending enough.

When he referred to the hospitals here in Toronto and the 1.5% increase in their funding, that 1.5%—I hope it's not going to go to the CEO, because right now we know how much those people are making.

I've got to tell you that the McGuinty government saw what was coming, way back in 2008. When we spoke about the infrastructure program that we decided to implement in 2009, we said that we would spend \$32.5 billion on the infrastructure program.

I was in Montreal way back in October 2008. There was a seminar of all economists from all over the world. They were saying at that point, "We have to be ready to face this crisis coming, the recession." We were the only ones present at that meeting who had forecast the future of Ontario or the rest of the provinces.

Today, they're criticizing us for the HST. The HST right now has had 13 info sessions in my area, and I can tell you that people keep telling me, "Now we've finally got the truth." We've been hearing the opposition criticizing, but if they would tell the right story—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Thank you. The member for York–Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: In the few moments that I have, I'd like to just put on the record a couple of comments with regard to this debate on the budget.

One of the things that one should always consider in the creation of a budget is, what's the impression that people are going to have in the short term and in the long term? When I look at this budget, I see the fact that there are some very serious implications for both the short and long term.

Ontarians across the province are quickly coming to realize the kind of imposition of higher taxes that this government is in the process of introducing. Certainly, in

my riding I have had hundreds of people talk to me about the HST come July 1 and the kinds of implications it will have, particularly on small businesses and seniors who have not got the opportunity to expect to have a further 8% in their own pockets.

The other thing that has come quickly to their attention is the question of the so-called smart meters. The question of a meter that deprives them of the ability to make best use—because they're not going to do it in the middle of the night, because they are going to have higher costs during the peak times, which is going to impact their daily lives.

Most of all, there's the long term. In 2003, this government had a debt of \$147 billion. Today it's \$289 billion. That's the legacy the Premier is going to have to carry as time passes. That's the legacy for all Ontarians.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently to what my colleagues from Toronto Centre, Durham, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and York–Simcoe had to say. Given that I've got one minute and 50 seconds, I'm going to concentrate mostly on the member from Toronto Centre, because he intrigues me with what he has to say. His knowledge of the history of politics in this country is legendarily bad. That is because, as he should know, NDP governments have been re-elected again and again and again, time after time, in Saskatchewan and in—

Mr. Paul Miller: Manitoba.

Mr. Michael Prue: Manitoba and in British Columbia and, I dare say, will be in Nova Scotia come the next—

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Prue: When he wants to attack what I have to say, he doesn't attack what I have to say or the facts of what his government is doing; he tries to make other things up. He's very good at making things up. I've known him for years. I've known him for years when he made things up in Winnipeg, and I've known him for years now that he's making them up in Toronto Centre.

I'm a boy from Regent Park. If anyone knows what Regent Park needs, it's me, not you. In spite of the fact that you may claim to represent them, you're a bit of an interloper. That's the reality: You showed up, you got elected, and you pretend to know them. Those are poor people who rely on so many things. Those who can work want to work. Those who can't work and are on ODSP for health reasons need decent money to live. They need a good, decent place to live. They need an opportunity not to get sick. You cannot, as a government, cut them off special diet without expecting that your citizens, those people you represent, are going to end up in the hospital. That is what your government is doing, and that is what you should be ashamed of.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): My trusty pocket watch tells me it's after 6 of the clock. This House is adjourned until 9 of the clock Thursday morning, April 15.

The House adjourned at 1805.

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Hoy, Pat (LIB)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
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Leal, Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (LIB)	Brant	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
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Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
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Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
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