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Monday 24 January 2011

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Lundi 24 janvier 2011

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Consultations prébudgétaires

Chair: Pat Hoy
Clerk: Sylwia Przedziecki

Président : Pat Hoy
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Monday 24 January 2011

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES

Lundi 24 janvier 2011

The committee met at 0900 in the Hilton, London.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will now come to order. We're pleased to be in London this morning.

CITY OF LONDON

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Our first presentation is by the city of London. Gentlemen, you have 10 minutes for your presentation. There will be up to five minutes of questioning coming from the official opposition in this round. If you could just identify yourselves for the purposes of our recording Hansard, then you can begin.

Mr. Joe Fontana: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, all provincial members, to the city of London. I'm Joe Fontana, mayor of London, and Grant Hopcroft is our director of intergovernmental affairs.

I want to take this opportunity to thank this committee for making London your first stop and for inviting a number of different delegations from southwestern Ontario. Hopefully by the end of my presentation and this committee asking for recommendations, you may not have to go anywhere else, in terms of hearing our representations or having additional money. So let me thank you again, and let me thank our members, Khalil Ramal, Deb Matthews and Chris Bentley, for their hard work.

As I'm sure all of my other presenters to follow will say, we have an incredible partnership with the province. I think there's a great recognition that the provincial government, municipal governments and federal government have one task, and that is to make sure that each and every tax dollar we receive is well spent on the priorities that move us toward not only fiscal responsibility but, more importantly, how in fact we can move toward economic sustainability.

I don't believe I have to tell you that difficult times continue to place a heavy burden on the city of London and the province as a whole. While the unemployment rates in London and the surrounding area have improved just slightly from the past year, we continue to have 8.7% unemployment and have been hit very, very hard, as you know, especially in the manufacturing sector, where we continue to lose some very well-paid jobs in the city of London and throughout southwestern Ontario. We know

that London isn't alone in these economic difficulties, and we acknowledge that the deficit situation of the province of Ontario affects its ability to provide increased funding.

For the second year, we would like to propose a strategy of co-operation to protect the gains that have already been made with the municipalities, including London, and to minimize the impact of any new costs, and the implementation of no-cost policy changes that will benefit both the province and the municipalities.

We want to thank the Ontario government for the changes it has made in recognition of municipal needs and aspirations and such. We are grateful for the amount of support that the government of Ontario, including the Legislature, has provided to municipalities in terms of economic stimulus money, the recent uploading of certain social assistance and court security costs, and the allocation for capital repairs to our social housing units under our social housing renovation and retrofit program.

I think our submission is pretty extensive and comprehensive, and therefore I will not read the whole presentation. But we do want to emphasize a number of things. One is protecting the gains that we've already made with the partnership with the province. The city of London will continue to benefit from the uploading of costs for provincial social and health programs, which will remove some of the tax burden from London taxpayers. Therefore we would hope that there is absolutely no change, understanding the deficit position of the province, but we are partners and we are serving the same people, so we urge you to maintain what we've already gained in the past.

We do want to cover some issues that, if we're not careful, could add to the municipal burden, and those are phased approaches to some of the regulatory costs that in fact have been put forward by the province.

As you know, some of the costs in long-term care, especially even at our own Dearness Home, have risen, from 18% to 26% of the total costs. On a per day basis, our costs have tripled, while the province's share has not even doubled. Therefore, we would hope that the Long-Term Care Homes Act, which was passed in 2006, will continue to drive local costs. As you know, we all have a collective responsibility to make sure our seniors are in fact looked after.

Water and waste water utilities need appropriate integration and implementation plans during the transition,

and again, some of the regulations that have been contemplated could add substantial costs to our municipal assessment base.

We would like to emphasize that new standards and arbitration-driven settlements for our emergency services are significantly driving up the costs of providing these services. As a specific example, policing standards have been implemented that promote significant changes to the workload.

While we commend the Ontario government for leadership taken in removing certain barriers for people with disabilities through the initiatives related to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, we in the city believe, again, that to achieve those milestones, we need to make sure that integrating some of these regulatory requirements is done in a phased manner.

We would like also to mention a couple of things.

The Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System Act, 2006, could cost as much as an additional \$10 million annually to the London taxpayers, with no additional benefit at all. While the legislation will enrich employee retirement incentives and will provide significant incentives that will promote early retirement, in the short term significant cost increases and early retirements could create an inability on the part of those municipalities to fill the gaps in labour and have an impact on service levels for a broad range of municipal services.

The fourth section that we address is no-cost policy changes.

Again, we highlight safeguarding and sustaining Ontario's water act, waste diversion, and extended producer responsibility with regard to making sure the producer in fact has more of the burden with regard to the environment.

We want to see the recovery of costs from our drug lab cleanups. As you know, even in the city of London we have a number, unfortunately, in the midst of our municipalities where in fact these labs are being created. Therefore, while we and our police services move to extract these from our neighbourhoods, the fact is that it is putting a very onerous pressure on our police services, and we very much would like to be able to recapture some of those costs by virtue of an arrangement that we can make.

Again, safe water and conservation legislation needs to be looked at.

As well, I will cover off that we need amendments to the arbitration section or direction—preferably even legislation, for that matter—as it relates to dealing with our emergency services, those being police, fire, and emergency workers. There's no doubt that some of these costs and some of these awards are unsustainable for every municipality. Therefore, we would like the province to take leadership, if not by legislation then obviously by putting in place in the arbitration system a recognition that parity amongst municipalities, while it might sound very good, is an impossibility to achieve, because every municipality has its own needs. Therefore,

we would want you to seriously consider putting in place directions to the arbitrators that in fact local conditions are taken into account and local affordability is taken into account so that we can deal with these increasing pressures that we have.

0910

Lastly, I think it's important to tell you that in these still very difficult economic times, while we can appreciate that we have to all be very careful with our taxpayers' dollars, the fact is that we're not out of the woods yet. Our unemployment rate continues to be very high, not only here in London and southwestern Ontario but throughout the province. Therefore, in terms of balancing budgets, it's not only making sure that we're spending and investing wisely but, more importantly, that we have a growing economy. Therefore, while we understand the pressures with regards to budget, we also understand that you can't completely eliminate those investments by the province for municipalities or to make sure that our economy is very strong. We are most appreciative of the economic stimulus provisions or programs—

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about 30 seconds left.

Mr. Joe Fontana:—that have been put in place, and therefore, we want to let you know that in the city of London we have a number of initiatives that move us toward economic development and prosperity and jobs. A strong London and a strong southwestern Ontario mean a strong Ontario.

Therefore, we have plans for an advanced manufacturing research park; an international water excellence centre; the London Gateway, which is essential to moving our trade across our borders; a downtown campus; medical device initiatives; high-speed rail we believe is essential to southwestern Ontario. Obviously, we play a part with the Southwest Economic Alliance, where we believe there is a unique opportunity to market ourselves to the world as southwestern Ontario. Therefore SWEA, of which most of the people presenting here are members, believes that we have a lot to offer the world. We are very competitive, we have the infrastructure, we have the talented people, and therefore anything that this committee can do to emphasize to the government that economic stimulus—wise spending is the key to moving forward and making sure that our people can work and that we have a growing economy and that we can all balance our budgets.

Thank you very much to this committee. I'm prepared to answer some questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning goes to the official opposition. Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: Mayor Fontana, thank you for your presentation, and Mr. Hopcroft.

I guess to begin with, you were talking about increased regulatory costs. Specifically, I think you were relating that to long-term care. Can you expand on that a little bit for me, please?

Mr. Joe Fontana: Sure. Perhaps I could have Mr. Hopcroft add some sort of meat to the issue.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you.

Mr. Grant Hopcroft: Thank you very much. The new act and the regulations that have come with this have imposed new nursing care standards and so on. The cost formula has not kept pace with the increasing costs that have resulted both from the increased needs of the residents under the new regulations and meeting those new standards.

Mr. Norm Miller: So the new act has put an increased burden on the long-term-care homes and it's costing more than the funding you're getting to implement the act. Is that correct?

Mr. Grant Hopcroft: They are long-term-care facilities. They're health care facilities now to a much greater extent than they were in the past. There's a recognition of that in those new standards. Our concern is that the cost-sharing and the reimbursement to municipalities and to other service providers has not kept pace with the demands that those regulations and increasing wages have led to.

Mr. Norm Miller: And what's the status of the waitlists to get into your long-term-care homes? Is that increasing, decreasing, stagnant?

Mr. Grant Hopcroft: We have significant turnover. The length of stay for most residents—because we only see the people with the highest needs getting into our homes. They're not there for very long, unfortunately. So we don't have an issue with filling the beds.

I'm sorry, I don't have specifics as to what the waiting list is, but if that's something you'd like me to get back to you with, I can do that.

Mr. Joe Fontana: If I could just add, there's no doubt that we need additional beds, and if we don't get them, obviously what tends to happen is that they stay in our hospitals that much longer, and as you know, it just starts to back up the whole system.

I know I didn't spend an awful lot of time speaking about our health care, but London is a health care leader and a centre, and there's no doubt that from our waiting lists, as you know, some of our hospitals now have had to shut down their emergency facilities or urgent care facilities because we just can't find enough doctors.

Our submission does speak to a whole range of that continuum of health care which is directly related to long-term beds and the cost of long-term beds and how in fact the province could assist in making more beds available for the purpose of making sure that the whole system continues to work.

There's no doubt that the new regulations and new costs have driven up the municipal costs of long-term facilities.

Mr. Norm Miller: Another point you made that you could expand on for me: You were talking about OMERS, and I think you said that there was a \$10-million additional cost with no benefit in it. I didn't quite follow that, so if you don't mind explaining that to me, that would be great.

Mr. Joe Fontana: It's part of page 5 in our submission. Perhaps Grant might want to just cover that off.

Let me just say that during 2010, the OMERS Sponsors Corp. announced a temporary 2.9% three-year contribution increase for employees and employers beginning in 2011, and that temporary rate increase is in response to a report on sudden steep funding shortfalls. In most cases, as a result of the 2008 global credit crisis and the latest stock markets, the temporary rate increases will be implemented over a three-year period. We believe that those should essentially be employee responsibilities and not necessarily the employer. Hence, city of London, as an employer, is directly responsible for those increases, and obviously they impact, as we said, to the tune of about \$10 million per year as our responsibility.

Mr. Norm Miller: The city—you have to take on. You also—

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you.

Mr. Norm Miller: I guess that's the end of my—

Mr. Joe Fontana: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for appearing before the committee.

Mr. Joe Fontana: Thank you very much, and welcome again.

CAMBRIDGE HEALTH COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Cambridge Health Coalition to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning. If you would state your name for our recording Hansard, then you can begin.

Ms. Jade Campbell: Thank you. My name is Jade Campbell. I'm a lifelong resident of Cambridge, and I'm here on behalf of the Cambridge Health Coalition. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to present our case or our document to you.

Cambridge lies between London and Toronto, along the 401 corridor. Cambridge has a population of 120,000—it could be up to 130,000. That was according to the 2006 census. It is an amalgamation of the city of Galt and the towns of Preston, Hespeler and the hamlet of Blair.

I'd like to discuss Ontario health spending and how it relates to Cambridge. In terms of health spending, Ontario spending per person is actually lower than almost all of Canada. Despite the government's crisis rhetoric, per capita public health care spending in Ontario is the second lowest in all of Canada. The lowest is Quebec.

While this government continues to support privatization and rationing of needed care while proclaiming that health care is eating up more of the provincial budget, what it fails to note is that the total budget has been decimated by more than a decade of tax cuts, and those tax cuts are continuing.

There is evidence that the current hospital cuts are a false economy, resulting in new user fees, new transportation costs, new municipal ambulance costs, new

restructuring costs and a burgeoning private consulting industry. The evidence is now overwhelming that budget constraints are resulting in privatization of formerly public and non-profit services and privatization of the payment for former hospital services. Moreover, the evidence shows that current cuts are increasing Ontarians' risk of poor health outcomes and even death. I've provided a table of the costs per person.

0920

Health care budget constraints have fallen on hospitals first. The provincial government has funded hospitals at less than the rate of inflation for three years consecutively, forcing hospitals to restructure. The result is seemingly endless hospital restructuring leading to shortages of in-patient beds, lack of continuity of care, cuts to needed clinics and care, long waits and cancelled surgeries. In the last two years, province-wide, up to 80% of hospitals have faced deficits. Cuts are affecting hospitals of every size—large, medium and small—in every region of the province. The requirement to eliminate deficits in a context of planned underfunding means that hospitals have announced layoffs of thousands of staff. In addition, hospitals have been forced to reduce or cut entirely core services in every region of the province.

I'd like to discuss health care as it relates to Cambridge. Cambridge Memorial Hospital is a medium-sized hospital which provides the following essential health care services: emergency, general surgery, medicine, obstetrical, pediatrics, same-day surgery, chemotherapy, palliative, and in-patient and mental health—but they're in transition right now.

The state of health care in Cambridge has resulted in service reductions and clinic closures. We're under-serviced, there are bed overloads, there is a lack of nursing home beds, and a capital project that has been on hold since 1996.

The impact to the community: The efficiencies sought through health care have meant an erosion of health care. Patients are waiting in emergency departments overnight, or even for days. There is an increased fear that care won't be there when people need it.

I'll give you an example. I was talking to one of our family docs, and I asked him—because there has been an influx of flu—why there are more flu cases, and he said, "This is the busiest year I have ever had." I said, "Why? There are flu shots." I know there's been a reduction in people taking flu shots, and he said that people are not taking their flu shots because there's a disconnect in the electorate with the info that's being provided by the government. People do not trust the government to take their flu shots, which increases the number of patients going to family docs. The evidence shows that if you take a flu shot, it is beneficial for your health.

My personal opinion is that there is a disconnect; for example, the eHealth fiasco and the delisting of services, such as physiotherapy and eye care. There are not enough family docs, if you look in all of the communities. Urgent care clinics are closing. I know for my area that the

urgent care clinic closed. There's a cause and effect: It means that people go to emergency, which increases the wait time in emergencies, and it increases the resources that are scarce in a hospital.

Patients are forced out of the hospital too early and without adequate care. It also means that you have more readmissions because people are not being provided for. Patients are cared for in holding areas or inappropriate settings because of hospital crowding. I know that Cambridge Memorial is in a surge capacity and on any given day is running four to five beds over their limit.

Patients are forced to travel greater distances for care. For example, our alternate level of care patients are having to go to nursing homes distant from their community. Women's services have been reduced or closed, such as breast screening and lactation.

There have been service reductions and clinic closures. For example, our pain clinic: It's in flux. It's undetermined whether we're going to be able to sustain it. I'll give you an example: In our community, one of our pain clinic specialists was approached by a doctor in Kitchener who has a practice of 2,000 patients. He is retiring and he asked if he could take over his clinics or his practice—2,000 patients—when we're downsizing our own pain clinic. It means that 2,000 patients are going to be referred back to their family doctors, and family doctors are already hard-pressed to provide services for the clientele that they already have.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about a minute.

Ms. Jade Campbell: Okay. There has been reduction of outpatient physio; the diabetes clinic has been reduced; occupational therapy has been closed, and the hand clinic.

The history of rehab services for Cambridge: In 1996, the Health Services Restructuring Commission review identified that there was a need for mental health and rehab services. The city of Cambridge has raised \$6.3 million towards its contribution for the hospital capital project.

Specifically, I'd like to point out that our stroke victims do not have outpatient rehab services. Kitchener and Waterloo have the Freeport Health Centre, with a 300,000 population. Guelph has St. Joseph's, at a population of 115,000. Brantford has the BGH rehab centre, at a population of 90,000. Cambridge has none, with a population of 130,000. There are mobility problems for our stroke victims to attend if they're accepted into these other clinics.

I'd like to go to my recommendations:

- approve the much-needed capital project for Cambridge Memorial Hospital. It has been on hold since 1996;

- provide the necessary services for the community;

- restore hospital funding to a minimum to meet hospital inflation and to stop service cuts;

- measure and meet the need for medically necessary services in all settings, including home care, long-term care, and mental health, palliative and restorative care;

—curb excessive administrative and executive costs in health care, specifically the LHINs; and

—cancel competitive bidding for P3s and pay-for-performance hospital funding.

I thank you for this opportunity. I'll answer any questions if there are any. I'll get back to you if I can't answer them.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the NDP and Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Jade, thank you very much for coming in this morning and making this presentation.

There are two questions I have. The first is about the stroke rehabilitation clinic. You noted that hospital cut-backs of outpatient rehab services were justified because there were alternative services in the community, and those have now all disappeared?

0930

Ms. Jade Campbell: The service was referred to the YMCA fitness for function program. At one point, I did talk to our YMCA director, and he said that in the beginning, Cambridge did provide some physio services, but that has dwindled down to nothing.

I did talk to somebody who transitioned from strenuous stroke rehab who went to the YMCA, and he told me that it wasn't the best because he was competing with normal people for the bicycle. It diminished his self-worth—stroke creates those kinds of things: depression and all of those other things. He felt he was basically competing for machinery with yuppies. He didn't think it was an appropriate setting for that kind of program.

If you look at stroke recovery, it's supposed to be physiotherapy. The best practices will tell you: physiotherapy every day.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Has there been any move on the part of the Ministry of Health or the hospital to reopen this rehab clinic in the hospital because, in fact, the services don't exist out in the wider community?

Ms. Jade Campbell: The mayor actually had a meeting with Sandra Hanmer from the LHIN to discuss it. That was back in June, and they were studying it. I don't understand how you study something when best practices across the country have been established, standards have been established, and we're just talking.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. If I have time, Mr. Chair—the recommendations around P3s: Can you speak just briefly about the impact of P3 financing on provisional hospital services?

Ms. Jade Campbell: I don't have the figures before me, but there is a great deal of information on P3s and how they are to the detriment of health care and how they cost Ontarians more in the end. I can provide that documentation, if you would like.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: If you could provide it to this committee, I would appreciate it. It could be circulated.

I don't have further questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you, and thank you for your presentation.

Ms. Jade Campbell: Thank you.

CHRISTIAN FARMERS FEDERATION OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning, coming from the government side in this round. If you'd just identify yourself for our recording Hansard, you can begin.

Mr. Henry Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm Henry Stevens and I'm president of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. I happen to be a poultry producer from the Palmerston area. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you this morning.

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario thanks Minister Duncan for inviting us to share our thoughts on where the provincial government should be focusing its finances in the year ahead. While we recognize that this is not a year where new spending initiatives should be undertaken lightly, there is at least one program that farmers in this province need today, and several areas where it's critical that your government support be maintained. I'm sure this is nothing new for most of you.

The most critical need for agriculture at this time is provincial funding of a permanent business risk management program, based on the cost of production. As you know, some of our sectors have been in dire straits the last number of years, particularly the pork and beef sectors. They've met a number of challenges that are beyond our control, and that's why they are in such dire straits.

Primary agriculture is the foundation of arguably the largest and the most important private sector industry in this province. Many facets of that foundation are on the verge of collapse after years of loss and a suite of current business risk management programs that cannot help with a sustained downturn. It's critical for our government to recognize just how many other industries benefit from a healthy primary agriculture sector and the sheer number of jobs that could be impacted.

First, there's the supporting infrastructure that enables farmers to do their business. A few examples of this are the feed mills, the equipment dealerships, the fertilizer suppliers, a substantial portion of the trucking industry, the banking institutions that supply capital to farmers, and all the jobs tied to those industries. Then there are the businesses that are further up the chain. The processing and further processing sectors in this province provide a substantial number of urban jobs that help keep our cities prosperous. Ontario has built one of the largest and best further processing clusters in North America. That sector is threatened when the farmers that supply it are losing their farms due to costs that simply cannot be recovered from the marketplace at this time. While some of the raw materials for those processing facilities may be sourced from further afield, eventually it will make more sense to move the facilities closer to where the remaining farmers are located.

Failing to maintain the underpinning primary production that is the basis of the food processing sector could lead to the long-term loss of thousands of jobs, not just for rural residents but for urban ones as well. We ask that our provincial government step forward and provide the leadership and support that our agriculture industries need to thrive in the coming year and for years to come. We believe that a healthy primary agriculture system will result in a healthy rural Ontario, as history has shown it always does.

The CFFO is very appreciative of the government funding from both the provincial and federal coffers that has allowed some of Ontario's processing plants to make improvements to their facilities. The cost-shared investment approach is vital to keeping our processing sector on the cutting edge and viable in the long term. CFFO wants to encourage our government to maintain this level of support moving forward.

CFFO also believes that our provincial government can play a crucial role in supporting research into import replacement, targeting the specific dietary preferences of our diverse and growing ethnic community. Investing in this emerging opportunity and building capacity to access this market would greatly help many farmers and consumers connect in a meaningful way.

CFFO recognizes that in a time of high government deficits, cost cutting will come into play somewhere down the line, but we hope that the provincial government does not turn its eyes towards cutting back on the support for or the number of rural schools and hospitals that currently exist. These institutions are the heartbeat of their communities, and must remain so. And it's very important to understand that rules made in Toronto do not work in rural Ontario.

Our rural roads must also be maintained at an acceptable level. Rural commerce depends on good roads, as do the ever-increasing numbers of people who commute from the rural areas to their jobs in the city. We're all aware of the pressure that our municipalities have been under in trying to raise enough assessment dollars to continue covering their roads and responsibilities.

Access to modern communication systems is as important to the rural communities as it is to the urban communities. We must bring high-speed broadband access to all our rural communities as soon as possible, not only for the business community but also for our students especially. This will allow our rural students to be competitive with their urban counterparts.

CFFO has been a strong proponent of the concept of environmental goods and services programs for many years. Farmers and other landowners are increasingly being asked to provide environmental benefits for the rest of society. These public benefits often cost the farmers in terms of time and money, with no means to recover the costs from the marketplace. The development and expansion of alternative land use services pilot projects, such as the one under way in Norfolk county, is sought by the CFFO as the next step in developing a system that rewards farmers for providing broad public benefit for all

Ontarians. CFFO would like a financial commitment from our government to develop a series of these projects in various regions of the province, featuring various ecologies as the next step in establishing a province-wide program. CFFO would be pleased to work with OMAFRA and the Ministry of Finance to develop such programs.

I'll answer some questions, if I can.

0940

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning goes to the government side. Ms. Pendergast.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you for being here with us this morning. I find your presentation is really quite interesting and thoughtful. I have a couple of questions, if you don't mind just elaborating on some of your comments.

Your opening comment that the province needs to maintain support is a great opening comment. I have a rural riding myself: Kitchener-Conestoga. I have all three townships in the rural riding, so a lot of what you're saying here really hits home.

You talk about a permanent business risk management program. Can you elaborate on how that would affect farmers and the whole idea of the business of farming?

Mr. Henry Stevens: As in any business, farmers need the assurance, going forward, that the government will be there to support them. They need to know that the government supports agriculture and is willing to stand behind them and do what it takes to support primary agriculture in Ontario.

It's very easy to import everything we need; we can do that. But we believe, and the message that we're getting is that Ontarians want a local agricultural community in this province to maintain a strong, healthy sector. That's what we can accomplish through a business risk management program that farmers can count on in times of need.

There are many times when it will cost the government absolutely nothing, but there are times like when the pork industry was hit by H1N1, incorrectly called swine flu—that devastated the pork industry, through no fault of their own. The rising exchange rate devastated the pork industry because they export approximately 50% of their production. In those cases, we need some kind of help.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: That actually leads into my next question. Just at the bottom of the page, the last three lines are excellent: "We ask that our provincial government step forward, and provide the leadership and support that our agriculture industries need to thrive in the coming year and for years to come." Would you say that there are priorities? I see that you've listed several things here, but are there immediate things you'd like the government to look at in terms of support for the next year and then down the road?

Mr. Henry Stevens: From the agricultural perspective, it's simply a risk management program. That's what we need, number one.

From the rural perspective, I think the high-speed and the broadband access for all our people is very important.

It not only hurts our businesses in our rural communities, it hurts our students. It hurts everybody.

Ms. Leanna Pendergast: You talk about the processing sector, and thank you for that. In my riding, Conestoga College received support for that. I think sometimes we don't really understand the implications of how important that is to other jobs and business in the community—and of course, a local meat plant in my riding as well.

Your next comment was about research into import replacement. Are you aware of any research that's going on currently or any areas of the province where this is a stronghold in research? Or would this be something that is—

Mr. Henry Stevens: I've heard some talk that the University of Guelph is looking into doing some research in this area.

As we are all aware, the ethnic community is really growing by leaps and bounds, and their food preferences are different than our traditional Caucasian food preferences. There are a lot of things that they would like to be able to source locally and which we could grow locally, but we're not equipped for it. We don't have the technology to know how to do it.

Ms. Leanna Pendergast: It's a whole new world there. Fascinating.

How am I doing on time, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): One minute.

Ms. Leanna Pendergast: This man means business up here.

I wanted to talk about the tax cuts and the tax package and how that has affected farmers. A lot of people don't think of farming as a business, but it is—and the idea that tax cuts actually help farmers to run their business and getting their business inputs back.

You talk about farmers providing broad public benefits for all Ontarians and the series of projects that you could work on in partnership. Has the CFFO done any work on that yet? You're looking forward to OMAFRA and the Ministry of Finance to develop—

Mr. Henry Stevens: When we first started talking about this whole idea of environmental business services approximately 10 to 12 years ago, we drafted a list of activities that could fall into a list and you could somehow prioritize those and attach—we had it work almost like a point system, where this particular activity may be worth five points and that worth 10 points, that kind of thing. Funding would be determined according to that point system.

Nothing has come out of that. We've presented the options to the government ever since we started talking about it, and so far we haven't seen any response on the part of the government. But we think it's something that—in fact, I would almost go so far as to say that it would have been money better spent than some of the other things that are happening under our green energy policy right now.

Ms. Leanna Pendergast: You say this is over the last 12 years that you have developed this?

Mr. Henry Stevens: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you.

Ms. Leanna Pendergast: So all governments. Is it possible you could forward that?

Mr. Henry Stevens: I can do that, yes. I'll do that.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Henry Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

MS. TERESA ARMSTRONG

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on Teresa Armstrong to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning, which will come from the official opposition in this round. I just ask you to identify yourself for our recording Hansard. You can begin.

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: Thank you very much for allowing me to speak this morning. My name is Teresa Armstrong, and I am here to speak as an ordinary citizen who wants my community of east London to get its fair share in the next provincial budget. I am a mother of two, a registered insurance broker by profession, and a long-time resident in east London. I care deeply about the current welfare of my community. I care even more strongly about the world my children, and one day my grandchildren, will inherit.

I love my community. On most scales of economic measurement, such as average family income and employment rates, east London is one of the poorest regions in the province, yet it is a proud, resilient community. There are good, hard-working people here, proud Canadians, caring parents, the sort of ordinary people who are the core of our society, the sort of people who should feel secure that their government will return their hard-earned tax dollars to support and nurture their community. Unfortunately, they are increasingly feeling they are being overlooked and ignored by the government they elect.

I am not here to talk about economics or political theories. I am here to talk about specifically what we in east London and in the rest of Ontario need to see reflected in the upcoming budget.

Let me focus on one crucial area: the affordability of life for ordinary Ontarians.

Let's start with the HST. I am not against taxes. I am against the wrong sort of taxes, the taxes that put more burdens on the poorest people in our society. It may not be a burden for wealthier people in more prosperous areas of London to pay an additional tax on basic life essentials like heating our homes, or personal care products. It sure affects the people of east London. Progressive taxation geared to income is the fairest way to fund the essential programs that governments must provide to support vibrant, strong communities. The HST is not geared to income. It has a punitive effect on the most vulnerable in our society. Quite frankly, it is a disgrace in a democratic society to increasingly add to

the tax burden on the poorest while finding more and more ways to relieve the most wealthy of paying their fair share. If the HST is here to stay, at least do not apply it to areas like home heating and other life essentials that our most vulnerable citizens are already struggling to afford.

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Electricity has become a basic life necessity, yet projected future costs for home electricity show immense increases. I'm not here to get into the debate about nuclear power or why a seemingly energy-rich province like Ontario has energy problems. I am not an expert on alternative forms of energy. I want to see the clear beginnings of concerted and effective government plans to ensure affordable energy for now and the future. It is simply not good enough to make future power costs so high that ordinary citizens such as retired people on fixed incomes, the working poor and families struggling to raise their children have to pay the costs for bad or lacking government planning. Bad energy policy will hurt our economy and our ability to finance government services.

I am very concerned about affordable housing. Individuals and families need stable and affordable housing as a basic foundation to build their lives. Investments in affordable housing create jobs, support strong communities and give families a secure foundation to become positive and productive members of their community. Yet successive Conservative and Liberal governments have virtually stopped or severely reduced investments in co-ops and other forms of affordable housing. Government-supported affordable housing is a basic reality in many jurisdictions, including an earlier Ontario. East London needs this sort of sensible, affordable and basic government support.

We need affordable, regulated and universal government-supported child care. It is a basic reality in many other countries and in the province of Quebec. Most families need two incomes to survive, and they need to know that their children are safe, secure and supported in a quality daycare while they are earning the income their families need. Single parents are particularly vulnerable. How can a single mother go back to school or hold a steady job if her children are not in affordable daycare? Why do so many women face the reality that their jobs earn little more than their daycare costs? Investments in affordable government-supported child care create jobs, free women to make their fullest contribution to their communities and help build strong communities. If there is a political will, affordable, government-supported and regulated child care can and must be a reality.

We are very concerned about health care. Since our public health care system was created some 50 years ago, we have taken it for granted. Does it need fixing? Yes. Are there answers? I will rely on organizations like the Ontario health care coalition to provide the specifics. But one example: Hospitalization is very expensive; supported home care much less so. I hear governments

talking about smarter spending, but let's see the specific programs. Let's see real support for expanded home care, especially for the elderly. Let's see support for community health centres with allied health professionals supporting the work of doctors. Let's see the programs to provide more doctors, especially family physicians.

I have mentioned job creation more than once. There are those who would have us believe that corporate tax cuts create jobs. Really? Corporate tax cuts create more wealth for corporations. Corporate tax cuts rob governments of their revenues—a strange thing to do when we are running a deficit. I want to see an increase in well-paying and secure jobs in east London, jobs in building affordable housing, jobs in child care and home care for the elderly, and manufacturing jobs supported by an effective government job-creation strategy.

It is a challenge for students to finance their post-secondary education in east London. The financial burdens connected with post-secondary education are virtually insurmountable for many working families. OSAP provides some support, but at best our children start off their working lives deeply in debt. At worst, they face setbacks in pursuing their educational goals, and are left only with high personal debt. Again, the examples in other jurisdictions are clear: Investments in education are investments in strong, vibrant communities. In many countries, post-secondary education is at least much more affordable.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have less than a minute for your presentation.

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: Thank you.

A fraction of the projected corporate tax cuts would do miracles in supporting post-secondary education opportunities. In the next budget, let's see specific measures to start doing better for our children.

Let me mention one other key topic not tied so directly to affordability, but certainly key to maintaining strong communities. At least one east London school is threatened with closure. Yes, I realize that education is controlled by the local school boards, but after the Harris government's crippling of local school boards, they have virtually no ability to raise funds for local education needs and priorities. The education funding formula is deeply deficient, and the current government has done little to fix it.

Economically challenged communities like east London need their schools. They are an anchor for the students, for the families and for community programs. In the next provincial budget, let's see improvements in the education funding formula so that local boards have enhanced abilities to respond to local realities and are better able to protect local community schools.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. I'm going to stop you there and move to the questioning now. We are about a minute over. Mr. Miller?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'll start, and I know that Ms. Witmer has questions as well.

Thank you very much for your presentation and taking the time to come in today to make your presentation.

I guess the first thing I wanted to ask you a bit about—you had highlighted energy costs and were talking about families in east London and about affordability issues to do with energy costs. Can you tell me a bit about what has happened to people's energy bills in the last couple of years and what sorts of increases you've seen?

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: I have first-hand knowledge, one example being that a representative that I know gets phone calls, on a higher increase now than they ever had before, from people who can't afford to pay their bills, specifically on hydro, as an example. Hydro isn't being very flexible in extending the pay period that they offer. A lot of them are getting their hydro cut off. HST is a big factor, and also the rising bill, the actual costs of energy now that have increased so substantially.

Mr. Norm Miller: So their bills have gone up substantially. You're saying that they are faced with the situation of their hydro being cut off.

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: Hydro being cut off, the dynamics of the fact that people are losing their jobs—all that stuff is contributing to people having a harder time to afford to be paying extra taxes on their hydro.

Mr. Norm Miller: So in terms of relief for these families that you were talking about in east London—and you talked about the HST—have you got suggestions? Would you like to see an exemption on hydro or heating costs, or would you prefer a reduction of the HST rate across the board? Any suggestions or anything else that I may not have thought of?

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: I think the government needs to review what the HST impacts are on working families because, as we all know, we're in a very hard time right now and struggle to pay all our bills. Costs for everything are increasing. So reviewing that tax on necessities of life: That would be my suggestion. Whether it can be abolished or removed, I don't have the answer, but it certainly needs to be reviewed, and the rate of hydro as well that we're paying.

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Mr. Norm Miller: That's a very good suggestion.

I know Ms. Witmer would like to ask a question.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much, Teresa. I had an aunt and uncle who lived in east London, and if they were still alive today, they would agree with every word that you've just said. They were decent, hard-working immigrants who certainly worked hard, but still sometimes you don't have enough to meet the basic needs.

When people have their hydro cut off—I just want to go back to that—what do they do? I think of a day like today. Driving in from Waterloo, it was minus 20. What do people do? They've seen the costs accelerate and increase the way they have. What do they do?

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: They contact their local politicians, generally, for help. They go to their local riding associations as well to try to get somebody to be the intermediate between hydro and themselves.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: I have a question about school funding. The education funding formula was to

have been reviewed in order that it could better respond to local board needs and also school needs. Would you like to see—I think I hear you saying this—boards have more local autonomy for money? Or would you like to see principals have more local autonomy and more money to spend?

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: The outcome that needs to happen, I think, is that schools need more money. How it gets there, through either the principal or the local school boards, the semantics of it—I don't know what would work better, but they need more funding.

Specifically, one school that I have mentioned is under threat in our area. That doesn't just provide schooling for children. There's the breakfast program in the morning; some kids don't even go to school, but they'll go to school for breakfast. If that school is closed down, are the other schools going to be prepared to provide that need to that specific neighbourhood? The other part of that is if the kids miss the school bus, they're not going to get to school. There's a lot of social problems, unfortunately, tied to the neighbourhood that depends on that school for a lot of resources. How the money gets there—I don't know the best way to get it because I haven't studied it, but the system needs improvement for sure.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: So it's a community hub, then. I hear you say that there are specific local needs.

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: In this particular example, absolutely.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

Ms. Teresa Armstrong: Thank you very much.

LONDON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the London Chamber of Commerce to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes for your presentation; there could be up to five minutes of questioning, this time coming from the NDP and Mr. Tabuns. I ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of our recording Hansard, and you can begin.

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name's Gerry Macartney. I'm the CEO of the London Chamber of Commerce. Joining me today are the president of the board of directors of the London Chamber of Commerce, Don Bryant, and our vice president of policy for the chamber of commerce, Mr. Dave Craven. Also accompanying us are Doug Marshman, who's the chair of our federal and provincial affairs committee, and Kristen Duever, our policy co-ordinator at the chamber.

You have the presentation, I believe, before you; it was distributed. We appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today. I'm just going to cover a few highlights. We're not going to read the entire document.

Suffice it to say that the title suggests a lot of what we want to talk about today: 2011, in our view, should be a year of fiscal discipline. We've seen lots of spending, some of it necessary, some perhaps not, but we need to tighten our belts and get back to a balanced budget as

quickly as possible. There are ways to do that, we believe, without necessarily giving up the ghost in some areas.

One area that we do not want the government to retreat on is the area of tax reform. We think it's done a great job thus far and want to continue to stay the course on those tax reforms because we believe that, in the long run, Ontario will be a much more competitive jurisdiction than it is now.

On that note, I'll just run quickly through. You might note that our presentation is designed somewhat to follow or align with the presentation that was given by the finance minister in the fall on the overview. That's why it's aligned that way.

On electricity, we've heard a lot about electricity costs and going greener. We think it's a noble and wise move; however, we think it ought to be tempered. If we're going to allow Ontario's manufacturers to actually get back on their feet again, we need to do it in a slower fashion and perhaps find more ways to reward those industries, those manufacturers that are coming onside with green initiatives.

Insofar as the investments to infrastructure are concerned, the chamber has long held the view that infrastructure is the highway on which commerce travels. So while you're deliberating over the budgets, we would encourage you not to cut infrastructure spending, because it's essential to the growth of our province.

Anecdotally, we would encourage the government as well to focus on all of Ontario and not just Toronto. We believe that Toronto gets more than its fair share of infrastructure spending, and we think London is also an important jurisdiction. Khalil, you're laughing, but you know I'm right.

Apprenticeship training is one thing we've advocated for for a number of years, and we think that there needs to be more emphasis placed on that. We know there's a skill shortage in this province, and we think that the one way to get at it is to increase the profile of apprenticeship training in this province. I think we've done a good job thus far. I think we can go a lot further.

Retirement income: I'm not going to read this part of the presentation. We actually gave this to the government back in 2007. We repeat that same recommendation through the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and others, and we know they're doing a reasonable job on pension reform as we speak.

I also want to talk about the single securities regulator. With credit to the finance minister, he, among others, has tried, and so has the London Chamber of Commerce, to encourage the federal government to find or develop a way to come up with a single securities regulator. We have not been successful to date, but we would encourage the government to keep trying, in spite of what Alberta and Quebec are doing. We think it's the right move, and we continue to support the finance minister in that regard.

We'd also like to emphasize a bit again on the energy side. We heard some comments here about people

suffering and not being able to pay their hydro bills. We understand those issues, but we also understand that Ontario needs a platform on which it can build its future. It has to have sustainable, affordable energy, and the only way to do that, of course, is to continue to build. But let's do it wisely and pace ourselves so that we're not taking our manufacturers backwards in terms of the recovery. We have to go a little slower, in our view.

One thing we thought of—and I credit the government for their transparency—is the need for more transparency and accountability. We presented a paper last fall that speaks to adopting the municipal auditor general role in municipalities that have 100,000 people or more. This is the same model that Quebec has used. We think it's the right move for Ontario, and we would encourage the government to continue trying to find ways to get more municipal auditors general in the province of Ontario.

On drug reforms: We have the health minister, of course, right here in London, and went through quite a battle on drug reforms, particularly to the Ontario public drug plan. Those recommendations are before you; these are ones that we've submitted before. There's still a tough fight ahead, but credit to the government for a lot of effort thus far in sort of getting that whole industry balanced and on its feet again.

The one that you're probably going to shudder at when I recommend it—doubtless not a single health administrator in the province of Ontario will be sending me Christmas cards any time soon. The radical recommendation that we're making is to freeze health care budgets across the board for three years. I understand the demographics, and I understand the need for health care in this province better than anyone—I was on a health care hospital board for a number of years—but it can't always be about money. I don't care which expert you're listening to. Some argue that somewhere between 60% and 70% of the entire provincial budget will be eaten up by health care costs in the next 20 years. We just can't sustain that; it's impossible. Somebody has to do something. If a radical recommendation like this gets the game in play, or gets the yardsticks further downfield, if you like that metaphor, then that's what needs to be done.

We would also encourage, I think as others have—the LHINs, whose main motivation in forming in the first place was to integrate hospitals, have done anything but. It was a noble gesture and probably a good move to establish the LHINs, but they have not integrated anything. Therefore, our recommendation would be to eliminate the LHINs from that process.

Another recommendation we've made in the past is to increase the percentage of private sector health care providers. It's about 26% now. We think there's room for a lot more, so if you could encourage that, that would be helpful.

Reducing the size of the public sector: I think the opposition party argues that we've added some 300,000 to the wider public sector in the last seven years while at the same time we've lost some 300,000 manufacturing jobs in the province. Something seems askew to me. So if

we could continue to work on reducing the size of the public sector, I think that would be good for the economy.

Two final things: One is, and you can read it under “Additional Considerations,” that some of the savings investment vehicles have been double-taxed. We’d encourage the government to look at that and make sure that’s not happening. If we have to back off a bit on that piece particularly, I think that would help the investment community considerably.

We also heard just recently that there were new discussions started in the province with regard to high-speed rapid transit. We’ve been a strong advocate for that for some years, but I would emphasize that that advocacy calls for a high-speed rapid system from Windsor to Montreal, not Toronto to Montreal, as some are arguing.

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In case some of you don’t know, London, Ontario, is the fourth-busiest passenger rail terminal in all of Canada. To not include it on a high-speed rail system would be folly. I think that we’d be missing a great opportunity by not having it there. I appreciate that not every city can be on a high-speed rail line, because it would certainly not make it very high-speed if that was the case. Nevertheless, London absolutely critically needs to be on that list. So for the folks in Toronto who are arguing that that’s where it starts and stops, we would respectfully disagree.

That’s all the presentation we have for this morning. We’d be happy to answer any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation, and we’ll move to Mr. Tabuns of the NDP.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much for taking the time to come here this morning. There are two questions that—

Interjection.

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Your friend?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Sometimes.

The commentary you have about making it easier and more attractive for companies to engage in energy efficiency: Can you tell us if there are particular programs you’ve seen in other jurisdictions that are very effective and that you would like to see here? Are there elements that you particularly think would make an energy conservation program attractive to businesses and to industry in the London area?

Mr. Gerry Macartney: The answer to your first question is no, I have not seen any other models. The answer to your second question is, I think we need to find them. The Ontario manufacturing sector has been the hardest hit of any in the country. We have to find ways to incent them to engage in this new green economy. It’s the right thing to do, no question about it. How you get there and how you do it in an affordable fashion is the real difficulty.

If we want to recover, if we want to get those manufacturers back to where they were, or at least reengaged in some other industries, then I think more incentives on that front, through tax reforms and through regular

incentives, could be achieved, but we’ve got to find creative ways to do that. Right now I have no models to offer to you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. Do you have any sense of the percentage of total operating costs for London businesses that goes to purchasing either electricity or other forms of energy?

Mr. Gerry Macartney: On a percentage basis, I can’t tell you that. I will tell you it’s the third-largest expense on anyone’s P&L. So after the cost of rent and labour, energy costs are the highest, and they are creeping higher and higher each year.

I said earlier that we need a sustainable, affordable system, and I believe that. I think there’s a way of getting to that in an affordable, incremental fashion. I think if you do too much too soon, you’ll stall the recovery and then we’ll end up with a worse situation than we’re in right now.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The other question I have is about infrastructure. Can you give us a sense of what are the critical infrastructure investments needed in London and area, and the scale of cost that you’ve identified?

Mr. Gerry Macartney: It’s a cliché, but roads, bridges and sewers, I think, are the critical elements. Those are the main elements that communities survive and grow on. Everything else, while it’s nice to have, isn’t necessarily critical to have, and I think until we get those critical elements—some have argued that our national infrastructure deficit hovers between \$153 billion and \$200 billion. London’s fair share of that is no different. I think we, as the 10th-largest city in Canada, can probably claim about a tenth of that deficit.

We’re trying desperately to get caught up, but it continues to creep and eat more and more of our local municipal budgets because we’re behind. I think everyone in this room understands that municipalities don’t necessarily see infrastructure spending as the sexy spending that gets the voters out, but it’s absolutely critical that we continue to spend on infrastructure.

My emphasis was that we ought to rebalance the ledger somehow so that London, Ottawa, Hamilton and other cities get their fair share of that infrastructure dollar, not the disproportionate amount that my good friends in Toronto are receiving.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Are there particular bottlenecks in the transportation infrastructure in this area?

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Road repairs and life cycle maintenance, I think, would be the two areas that come to mind. We’ve had some of our city experts here today. Most of them will tell you that in order to get caught up on road resurfacing and potholes—at the present scale that we’re going at today, we’re about 53 years behind. It’ll take us that long to get caught up with current spending. That’s potholes. Well, today’s pothole is tomorrow’s sinkhole, and I think you’ve read some headlines about what sinkholes can do to your community. Another black eye like that, we don’t need.

So I think it's back to roads, bridges and sewers. Fix the basics, spend the money wisely and redistribute some of that money to cities across Ontario.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Fair enough. I have no further questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you, and thank you for the presentation.

Mr. Gerry Macartney: Thank you.

LIONS MCINNES HOUSE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Lions McInnes House, the Group Home for Deafblind Persons (Brantford) Inc., to come forward, please. Good morning.

Ms. Joan Brintnell: Good morning.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): There are 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning, which is coming from the government side in this round. If you would state your name for our Hansard, you can begin.

Ms. Joan Brintnell: My name is Joan Brintnell. I'm from Lions McInnes House in Brantford. I would like to thank the standing committee in advance for providing this opportunity for Lions McInnes House to present the serious issues facing current and future intervenor services across Ontario.

First and foremost, Lions McInnes understands the fiscal constraints the government of Ontario is faced with in these economic times but feels it is imperative that the government of Ontario reconsider the new proposed funding model for intervenor services. We are asking for additional resources to adequately serve all Ontarians who are deaf-blind. We are asking this standing committee to take our plea forward as the new budget is formulated.

I will speak in specifics of the current situation of Lions McInnes House and more generally of intervenor services, as we share a similar plight.

Lions McInnes House has been providing intervenor services in the community of Brantford since 1985. Currently, we provide services for 13 adults who are congenitally deaf-blind.

What does it mean to be deaf-blind? A person who is deaf-blind has a loss of both senses. This is a dual sensory loss wherein one sense cannot be compensated for by the other sense. Neither sense can be used as a primary sense.

Intervenor services provide individualized programming that meets each individual's communication mode to allow them to gain life skills, nurture relationships and prevent isolation. Intervenor services requires high levels of one-to-one. The philosophy of intervenor services is, "Do with, not for." Intervenor services do not act as caregivers, but assist people who are deaf-blind with communication and information.

The persons living at Lions McInnes House live in a shared apartment setting that is designed specifically to meet their needs. The home is staffed 24/7. The Lions and Lioness of Ontario provided the capital funding for

this building, with the purpose in mind that adults who are deaf-blind would receive a continuity of services as they meet further physical and aging challenges.

There are other intervenor service models in Ontario, and the model and living arrangements are varied. Intervenor service providers currently provide services to two very distinct groups of adults with deaf-blindness: those who are congenitally deaf-blind—those born with the condition or who develop it before age two—or acquired deaf-blind, who would have developed it after age two.

Over the past six years, Lions McInnes House and other intervenor services have been working collaboratively with the Ministry of Community and Social Services in the review and transformation of our sector. There are five core intervenor service providers in Ontario. They are funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. They provide special services to adults in the community who are deaf-blind.

This is a low-incidence disability. Persons who are deaf-blind require the unique services of intervention. Intervention is costly, as one-to-one staffing is often a required component.

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As a service provider, Lions McInnes House believes that all adults in Ontario who are deaf-blind should be eligible for intervenor services and have equitable access.

The guiding principles of the review and the transformation are:

- common eligibility rules;
- fair, equitable access;
- sustainability; and
- within available resources, which at this time are finite.

In October of this year, the new proposed funding model was outlined to the service providers of intervenor services. With the proposed funding model, the consumers at Lions McInnes House could lose up to 40% of their current funding and service. Currently, intervenor services of Ontario have a budget of \$25 million. The new funding model will remain at \$25 million. There will be significant reductions in funding and service for current consumers of between 40% to 65%. There appears to be no base budget to cover building occupancy or program administrative costs.

We understand that the government is not taking money away from the sector. The government has said many times over the past six years that intervention services are vital. A quote: "The ministry is committed to providing funding for services for deaf-blind individuals to assist them to live as independently as possible. Intervenor services is a vital support that helps deaf-blind individuals perform activities of daily living and engage in their communities." This is from Rick Beauchamp, regional director at Hamilton-Niagara, November 29, 2005.

We know that additional funding is required to avoid wait-lists and address the pressures of new people coming into the sector. Approximately 10 million is what

has been going around the table as we sit in meetings with the ministry. Service providers, if there is no funding, would lose the ability to maintain current levels of service or provide new service, agencies would not be viable within this new model, and the impact to services would be devastating and not sustainable.

Consumers would experience the following:

- increase in mental health;
- increased isolation—most people would not be able to leave their front doors;
- homes would become mini-institutions within the community, and this is what we've just taken away;
- being forced to move from their current homes;
- not being able to access the community, jobs, education, recreation and leisure;
- not being able to be participating members of society;
- the inability to access information, which is a basic right for everyone;
- not being able to communicate, which is also a basic right;
- there would be a breakdown in family relationships—parents, spouses, children; and
- their environments would no longer be safe and secure, because we wouldn't be able to afford to do that.

Staff would experience:

- safety within the workplace;
- career choice—there would be high turnover;
- philosophy change to the intervenor's role—they would become caregivers; and
- there would be high burnout.

Current budget allocations for Lions McInnes House—this is just very basic. Our salaries: Our intervenor hours are 75% of our budget; program administrative, which includes our training dollars, is 17%; allocated central admin is 8%; and program costs such as travel, which is very important, is 12%.

We are requesting that the standing committee take our request to the budget meetings to find a solution to this potentially devastating situation. The proposed funding model for intervenor services would not be sustainable. This alone would cause agencies to close their doors.

As I've listened to people speak in front of us, we've talked about the government and infrastructure as well. That would be a moot point for our individuals who are deaf-blind because they wouldn't have the ability—they wouldn't have the intervenors to take part in those things.

The other situation is that without cost of living and without thought of HST and climbing hydro bills and all of those items, which they also have to pay from their ODSP, and their rent and what they do, it would become very, very difficult for them to survive in the community.

Smart meters: Our program is 24/7. I can't tell a deaf-blind person that they can't have a bath at 9 in the morning because they need to get up at 6 o'clock to do that. There's no relief there. I have asked the hydro company, "Are we going to have smart meters? How am I going to manage that?" They don't have an answer.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): The questioning goes to the government. Ms. Pendergast.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you for being here with us this morning and for sharing this information with us. We really appreciate it and all that you've done for Brantford since 1985—is that right?

Ms. Joan Brintnell: Yes.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: That's remarkable.

I had a deaf-blind student, a young lady, when I was a vice-principal in a high school, and I don't think people really understand the amount of attention and work and partnerships that go into it until you actually deal one on one with them, and the dependence they have on the intervenor. So I thank you for your comments today.

That takes me to your comment on your second page where you're talking about the high level of one-to-one and that the hours may vary by agency. I'm going to jump to the end and come back to the one-to-one, because I want to talk about the salary and your overall budget and how you broke that down at the end.

Before I do that, I want to commend you on your partnership with the Lions and Lioness of Ontario and the capital funds that you acquired from them. My question would be, do you have other partnerships like this that you've acquired or that you're working on or looking into?

Ms. Joan Brintnell: We don't at this time. As you're probably aware, there are many agencies and many people out there who are looking to have partnerships. We have 13 individuals, and it makes it much more difficult to fundraise when you're talking about a very small number of people—and people don't understand deaf-blind. It's easier to be a big association or an agency, but we are very small. We're very well known in the community, but we do not have continued funding from the Lions or Lioness.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: So it's one-time funding.

Ms. Joan Brintnell: It's a one-time capital funding project.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: You were talking about the continuity of services. In Kitchener-Waterloo, we have several one-stop-shop ideas, where that continuity of services is all available under one roof. Is that something you've considered, or is that a possibility?

Ms. Joan Brintnell: The continuity of services—we're really talking about aging in place. We have individuals who have been with us since 1985, and they've continued to have losses, they've continued to have balance issues. Some of them are now in wheelchairs—not all the time, but for any kind of long-distance walking. We have physiotherapists and dietitians come in and work with us, so we use community accesses. They appear to be aging faster than the normal population. Their first building was all stairs, but in the one we have right now there are no stairs, so they can get around much easier. If we needed Hoyer lifts or things in the future, the building is accessible to do that.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: You mentioned that over the last six years you've worked with the Ministry of

Community and Social Services in the review and transformation.

Ms. Joan Brintnell: Yes. I've sat on an advisory committee with the other five core agencies, and we have been working with an assessment tool and with dollars to come up with a plan to have fair, accessible plans for bringing in new deaf-blind clients.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: To expand your services, then—

Ms. Joan Brintnell: Not to expand ours on a whole, but to make sure that the deaf-blind people in Ontario have access to the services. It could be any of the five core agencies at this point, or other people, not just us. So I'm speaking, really, for myself and intervenor services.

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Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: So back to the one-to-one, and this will be my last question. When I look at how you break it down at the end that 75% of the budget would be intervenor hours or staffing, when you say that one-to-one staffing is often a required component, how often would you say? What percentage are we talking about?

Ms. Joan Brintnell: In our particular building, we have three individuals. We have six apartments; we have two one-bedroom and four three-bedroom apartments. So they share. In most cases, within the building they have two-to-three coverage, so two staff to three individuals, but when they're out in the community for anything at all, they need one-to-one.

I don't know if you know much about the deaf-blind, but you're talking to them all the time and you're saying hello and you're telling them about how there are 15 people sitting around this table to your right and to your left, and what they're doing. While you're doing this, if you have two or three other deaf-blind people beside you, they have no idea what you're talking about or what you're doing, and the chances that they'll even stand there with you are slim. You can't tuck them in beside you because you're using your hands. When you are out in the community, it's your job to let the individual you're working with know everything about the environment and everything that is happening so that they can make choices and they can know what's going on in their world.

Some of them have no vision and no hearing at all, so you're talking in their hands. Some of them have a little vision and a little hearing. Out of the 13 people we have, none of them are the same and none of them have the same communication mode. With some of them, you're talking in their hand; with some, you're talking in a little window here; with some, you're moving back so they can see you. Most of our staff do not have training, because there are very few training programs for intervenor services, like George Brown in Toronto. So they come in and we have to provide that training, and it's ongoing training, because the individuals change over a period of time.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

Ms. Joan Brintnell: You're welcome.

ONTARIO GEOTHERMAL ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I call on the Ontario Geothermal Association to come forward, please. While they're coming up, I'll inform the committee that check-out time is at noon. You can bring your items in this room if you care to, but I wouldn't leave anything overly valuable. The room will be watched. Noon checkout.

Gentlemen, you have 10 minutes for your presentation, which I'm sure you know by now; you've been sitting there most of the morning. There will be 10 minutes of questioning coming from the official opposition this time. If you'd just state your name, you can begin.

Mr. Brian Beatty: My name is Brian Beatty. I'm a professional engineer. I've had 30 years' experience in the geothermal industry. My colleague to my left is Earl Morwood; he's the executive director of our association. I am the president.

This morning I'd like to speak to you on behalf of the Ontario Geothermal Association. We represent the geothermal industry throughout the province of Ontario and we wish to partner with the Ontario government to promote the development of the largely overlooked geothermal resources in the province.

I'd like to start by asking the question: What is geothermal energy? Unlike wind and solar energy, which tap intermittent sources above the earth, geothermal energy is literally heat from the earth. The core of the earth is molten rock which radiates heat outward to the earth's surface and on to outer space. You may be surprised to know that 99% of the earth's mass is hotter than 1,000 degrees Celsius, and only the outer few kilometres are cool enough for human survival.

In Ontario's climate, the top 200 metres of the earth—that's about 600 feet—are a constant nine to 11 degrees Celsius, and this is where we recover our geothermal energy. Water is circulated through pipes in the earth and can be upgraded in heat pumps to heat our buildings or used directly for cooling. This form of clean energy eliminates fossil fuels for winter heating and reduces peak electrical usage for summer air conditioning.

The vast repository of heat within the earth is renewable and will become the world's primary source of heating and cooling energy after the last remaining oil, gas and coal reserves are used up. Some people speculate that could be within 100 years.

The supply of geothermal energy within 10 kilometres of the earth's crust is 50,000 times more than exists in all the oil and gas reserves in the world. Among the various forms of renewable energy, geothermal power is uniquely reliable.

I'd like to speak a little bit about Ontario's transition to renewable energy. The introduction of the Green Energy and Green Economy Act in 2009 put Ontario in a leadership role in the global march to greener energy. Energy policies such as the FIT—feed-in tariff—program were created to spur growth of renewable electricity generation. Solar and wind created the most hype. In

terms of megawatts, they accounted for about 96% of the FIT applications in 2010.

However, several challenges with the solar and wind energy initiatives have emerged over the past year, and I've listed a few of them. One, the need for more transmission lines to distribute the intermittent pulses of electricity: As you can imagine, you generate electricity from wind only when the wind blows and from the sun only when the sun shines, so that creates the pulses. Next, the need for back-up fossil fuel plants or electrical storage facilities during those periods when there's no sun and no wind; hikes in electricity rates to subsidize solar and wind power; new transmission towers and gas peaker plants have become an issue; the domestic content of some of these solar and wind equipment manufacturers is a concern; there are public concerns about the aesthetics of the wind turbines in the countryside; and finally, there's a loss of prime farmland with some of the large solar farms.

Geothermal energy faces none of those challenges. It is hidden below the ground, does not affect the use of the land, is generated at the place of use, 24 hours a day, and is the lowest cost. Neither the Green Energy and Green Economy Act nor OPA's recent long-term energy plan have considered geothermal energy. Nevertheless, our industry has grown exponentially in Ontario over the past few years. There is now a major network of residential geothermal suppliers and installers across the province. Commercial geothermal installations have also accelerated over the last five years. Most new schools, social housing apartments and government buildings are currently being equipped with geothermal energy systems. In fact, Ontario has now become the leading Canadian province in the installation of residential and commercial geothermal systems. It was only three years ago that BC was the leader. Ontario has far surpassed BC.

If geothermal energy is now added to Ontario's renewable energy portfolio, it would help to offset the intermittency issues that affect the cost and sustainability of solar and wind.

How is geothermal energy different from the other renewables? The key difference is that no electricity is produced. Geothermal energy is used primarily to heat and cool our homes, schools and workplaces. Supplementary uses include some supplies you may be surprised to know about. One is hot water in our homes: Geothermal can produce all of that. You can warm floors. You are probably aware of radiant floors, but farmers raising young chicks, piglets, lambs and so on love the warm floors. Snow melting is now commonly used, where you can melt the snow around your home under the sidewalks or around the shopping centres. Swimming pool heating and ice-making are just a few examples of other uses.

A vast supply of geothermal energy is available in the earth beneath every building lot in Ontario. Our rich geothermal endowment has scarcely been tapped and is destined to become a major factor in solving Ontario's complex energy equation. Geothermal energy has the ad-

vantage over other renewables in that it provides heating and air conditioning 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It also has the ability to use electricity in off-peak hours, with none of the power transmission problems of solar and wind. Thermal energy storage is another unique feature, where excess summer heat can be stored in the earth for later use in the winter.

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When the total life cycle costs for heating and cooling buildings are considered, the best choice is always geothermal energy. Also, the inherent reliability of a free energy source immediately beneath each building site, at any time of day, will make geothermal energy a major renewable supplier for Ontarians in the future.

The use of geothermal energy to heat and air condition a home or workplace is like driving a hybrid car. Electrical power from the grid is still required, but the need for fossil fuel heating is completely eliminated, and the electricity required for cooling is significantly reduced.

In the future, opportunities to power geothermal heat pumps with combinations of solar, wind and hydro-electricity will be developed. When that day comes, you'll be able to take your home completely off the grid.

A few considerations for the Ontario budget coming up—I've listed three or four of them here. Geothermal energy in Ontario stands on the brink of greatness. It is clearly the best and least expensive choice for heating and air conditioning the homes and workplaces of Ontario. The main barriers to broader acceptance of geothermal energy are two: lack of knowledge, and awareness of this unique resource. It is time to add geothermal energy to Ontario's green energy portfolio.

Government funding is required to develop knowledge, cultivate public awareness and advance the implementation of geothermal energy throughout the province.

In closing, I would like to thank the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure for the role it has played in the current incentive programs for retrofitting residential homes with geothermal energy and also for their role in facilitating geothermal energy installations in most new schools and social housing projects.

We look forward to working closely with the political parties in Ontario to develop a stronger united voice for geothermal energy. It is sustainable and available around the clock beneath every property in the province.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. Your timing is impeccable. You must have practised that, perhaps. Mr. Barrett will be asking the questions from the official opposition.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Mr. Beatty. We met with Mr. Morwood just a few days ago on this issue.

I just wanted to clarify. Much of the focus is on what I refer to as heat pumps. We're not so much talking about the deep geothermal approach, going down half a mile or whatever.

Mr. Brian Beatty: No, deep geothermal is available primarily in British Columbia in the mountain ranges where, if you drill a few thousand feet, you'll get really

hot water. In Ontario, we can't do that. You could if you drilled 5,000 feet deep, but nobody's going to do that.

This is what we call low-energy geothermal heat. We need the heat pump that you mentioned, sir, to boost that heat. It comes out of the ground at about 10 degrees and goes through the heat pump, the heat pump boosts that up to room temperature, and that's how your home is heated.

Mr. Toby Barrett: As you say here—I think this would be in Ontario—most new schools and government buildings are being equipped with geothermal, but you're not part of the FIT program. I don't know whether there's a flaw there in the sense that it's not so much oriented towards energy; it's more oriented towards electricity. Why would that be? Is it because it's easier to measure just electricity rather than energy?

Mr. Brian Beatty: That has been a puzzling issue for us. We're not quite sure how geothermal energy got missed in that program. In spite of that, there's a huge acceleration of geothermal in those public buildings that you mentioned, both at the federal and the provincial levels. The P3 buildings almost all have geothermal in them. All new schools that I'm aware of have geothermal.

One other aspect that I think stimulates geothermal in those buildings is that many of them are LEED—you may know what that means; it's Leadership in Energy and in Environmental Design, and there's a standard there of gold LEED, silver LEED, platinum LEED and so on. To qualify for the highest standard of building, geothermal gets you there. That may be why they're promoted. But up until this point, it has not been part of the FIT program, and we hope to see it change.

Mr. Toby Barrett: There's obviously been some big changes as far as government assistance, making reference to FIT. For decades now, people who are interested in solar, people who are interested in wind power have been exploring this, building systems, and their goal was to get off the grid. Government is now a player—for example, 80.2 cents a kilowatt hour for rooftop solar—and in the last year or two, elected representatives like myself no longer hear these people talking about independence and getting off the grid; they want to get on the grid to get the money. These people are businessmen; they're not necessarily environmentalists. They come up here from Texas, from Korea and other jurisdictions because of these subsidies. How is your approach different? And obviously, you're not putting this stuff out on the wires. You don't have to build new towers for what you're proposing.

Mr. Brian Beatty: No. Geothermal provides precisely the opposite aspect of producing electricity: It conserves electricity and conserves fossil fuels. But on the other side of the equation, when I go to Europe—of course, Europeans, as you might imagine, are five or 10 years ahead of North America on the issue of energy. They advertise the home of the future—in the Netherlands, some of them are here now—where you can take a house right off the grid. You need three things: geothermal,

solar and wind. If you can get those three connected together, you could take your homes off the grid.

Mr. Toby Barrett: My colleague Mr. Miller has installed—heat pump systems? I don't really have a—

Mr. Norm Miller: I did. In my business 22 years ago, I had a heat pump, but it had a loop in the lake. I happened to live on a lake at that time. I had a couple of them at that point.

Mr. Brian Beatty: Lakes work.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm just wondering: You said in your presentation, I think, that the use of heat pumps has grown exponentially. Can you talk a bit about how much it has increased and also, maybe, the economics of it, the payback if a business or a home was installing it?

Mr. Brian Beatty: Yes, I can speak to that just briefly. Like you, we put our heat pump in our house about 25 years ago. It's worked without spending any money in all those years. About five years ago, I designed what has become the second-largest geothermal system in the world. Very few Canadians know about it, but it's located in Oshawa. It's at the University of Ontario. When I go to Europe and talk about that system, they all know about it. When I speak in Canada, nobody knows about it, but that's Canada.

That big project spurred activity at the commercial scale. Up until that point, many, many residential systems just like yours went in across the province in the 1990s and into the 2000s. We needed some leadership, and that big project in Oshawa kind of did that for us. Then the province and the federal government saw the benefits of geothermal. They started implementing it in government buildings first. The private sector has been the last to pick up on it because they won't take risks. But now that they see the schools working and the hospitals working and the big buildings—we just finished a 40-storey building in downtown Toronto for Toronto Community Housing. The private sector sees that, then they'll do it, and we're seeing that take off.

The payback for a home depends on the kind of power you're on now, whether it's natural gas or electricity. If it's electricity, it's probably a year or less, maybe a few months. If it's natural gas, it's probably two, three or four years, but not too long. All commercial buildings won't put them in unless the payback is less than seven years, and that just means that once you've paid for the system—the capital cost of that system, and you've paid that off—you're away to the races. We all know that, in the long term, natural gas prices and electricity will just continue to go up.

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The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Brian Beatty: My pleasure.

Mr. Earl Morwood: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION
OF SOCIAL WORKERS,
HAMILTON AND DISTRICT BRANCH

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I call on the social action committee of the Ontario Association of Social Workers, Hamilton branch, to come forward, please.

Mr. Mel Basbaum: That's what happens when you rely on technology. I will start, because of the time constraints, and we are starting late, I realize.

First of all, good morning, and thank you for allowing us the time to do this presentation. The presentation will be done by myself, Mel Basbaum; Sally Palmer, who's on my immediate left; and Amy MacPherson, who is an ODSP recipient. Anne Newbigging is back there, but was involved in the presentation.

Are we working?

Interjection.

Mr. Mel Basbaum: Okay. Fortunately, you have the presentation. Apparently, he can't make it work, so I'm going to have to work from the paper slides.

Why do we have the child benefit to begin with? Well, we know that families living at or below the poverty line need financial support to meet the needs of their children and that children's social and educational development is closely linked to adequate nutrition and social recreational opportunities. It has also been well demonstrated that poverty is a major contributor to health outcomes in both children and adults.

The Ontario child benefit, introduced by the Ontario government in 2008, provides much-needed support to children in low-income families. For children whose families are employed, the OCB provides an extra \$92 per month.

However, much less benefit has been received by children in families which receive social assistance from either Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support program. This is the result of clawbacks to children's grants and to their parents' social assistance cheques. When the OCB was introduced, the government made significant deductions to the parents' social assistance. This included withdrawal of the back-to-school and winter clothing allowances for children. When the OCB was increased in 2009, the government again deducted money from the parents' social assistance. The deductions from social assistance are complicated, and families with different compositions receive different amounts of the OCB.

Great differences exist between the children who have benefited the least and those who have benefited the most. At the back of this section is the chart, in a larger form. You'll notice, if you look under single parents with one child over 13, their net increase was \$13 per month, whereas for couples with one child under 13, that net increase was \$125. A child aged 13-plus in a single-parent family gained only \$13 per month from the changes between March 2007 and March 2010. A child under 13 in a couples family gained \$125, and that includes the national child benefit, not just the OCB.

We're left with the impression of a two-tiered system where some low-income families are considered deserving and others undeserving. With a few exceptions, children of the working poor are being treated as more deserving than those on social assistance. Among social assistance recipients, children with two parents are being treated as more deserving than those in single-parent families. We've tried hard to get changes to this.

Sally will now talk about what has happened there.

Ms. Sally Palmer: We've communicated our concern about the OCB to your government in many ways, and in all their responses the ministers and MPPs have really sidestepped the issue of inequality and simply described other anti-poverty measures your government has taken.

First, we've made appeals to Hamilton's Liberal MPPs. The Honourable Sophia Aggelonitis asked us for briefing notes and promised to raise the issue with the relevant ministers but gave us no feedback.

Meeting with ministry staff—this was in December 2009. After several requests, we were allowed to meet with MCSS and MCYS staff. There were several last-minute dropouts, including the only senior policy analyst, and those present did not seem knowledgeable about our concerns. They did acknowledge the unequal distribution of OCB, comparing people who were on social assistance to those who were employed, and explained this as a policy decision to lower the welfare wall. In effect, the clawbacks were intended to widen the income gap between employed families and those on social assistance, including disabled parents.

A rally at Queen's Park last April: A group of 70 citizens from Hamilton and Toronto gathered at Queen's Park to demonstrate and attend question period, hoping to increase awareness about the OCB clawbacks. MPPs asked questions in the Legislature about the unequal distribution of the OCB, and the ministers responsible responded to the questions without acknowledging any inequality.

Correspondence with ministers: We sent letters of concern about the OCB to Ministers Meilleur and Broten, signed by five Hamilton organizations which were concerned about the health and development of children living in extreme poverty. Again, their responses ignored the issue and cited their other programs aimed at reducing child poverty. Minister Meilleur's November 2 response was copied to Finance Minister Dwight Duncan.

Generally, we feel that our expressions of concern have been ignored by your government.

We hope that this committee can take action to bring our most disadvantaged children out of deep poverty by equalizing the Ontario child benefit.

Ms. Amy MacPherson: I am Amy MacPherson. I am hoping to have everyone's attention. I know you've all been very busy multi-tasking, texting off and on. I have driven five hours to be here, and the reality is that my son and I will go without groceries to be able to deliver you this message today. It is of a personal nature, so I'd like to have that back and forth with you, please.

Good morning, honourable committee, and thank you for having me.

Thanks to my associates for providing the data. I'm here to bring those numbers to life. I represent hundreds of thousands in those statistics, as the single parent of a teenage boy who got the worst end of this deal.

I'm hoping to gain your support with a few endeavours that would restore my faith in the current situation. This begins with an equalization of payments between family types, as already mentioned; restoration of children's basic needs in front-line funding, such as Ontario Works and ODSP; and the establishment of a healthy food benefit. I know my partners focused on the disparity issues, but I must elaborate further.

Despite the string of feel-good headlines, my family is further behind than ever before. For every dollar you've given us under the Ontario child benefit, it has been taken away with the other hand by public assistance on virtually the same day. But instead of playing a new round of deductions, we were all hit with clawbacks across the board—and no longer does any form of welfare provide basic needs to our children.

The definition of basic needs is food. Clothing and school supplies were also removed through the restructuring process. These funds were previously accessible in the community in emergency situations, but now they've been shifted to federal management through the Canada Revenue Agency, where help is out of reach for months of red tape and children go hungry in waiting.

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Now, I seriously doubt our government would seek to inflate the number of kids in foster care, because then the costs become astronomical as you take full responsibility from the parent. But have you considered the real consequence of making children's food this inaccessible? Where can they be fed if mom and dad hit a snag filling out income tax? The food bank only offers three days' grace and Revenue Canada takes a lot longer than that. The only other emergency service available is the children's aid society, and that's a drastic measure against the poor, if you don't mind me saying.

I appreciate the OCB initiative to make funds available to all, but through this brilliant move of switcheroo, the working poor gained what the sick and frail lost. As a disabled person, I received \$92 to help feed my child, but \$91 was rescinded for my son under the ODSP umbrella. The exact amount of my withdrawal was then deposited into a coffee barista or housemaid's account. With all due respect, this isn't new money, sirs and madams. We're painfully aware that it's just the same pile being redistributed to twice the people now.

I had only received a \$1 increase once all the rhetoric died down. If your accountant told you something different, he's fibbing, I promise. Through a combination of policies, we were brilliantly shortchanged, and even the United Nations recently took notice. In a published assessment, they said that our children are worse off than ones from Portugal or the Czech Republic. I'm not

throwing out red herrings here; the world is honestly looking at us sideways now.

Our chief medical officer and the World Health Organization are crying crisis and epidemic over poor children's diabetes level. By making it so difficult for Ontario's kids to eat, you're not only quadrupling their rate of sickness, but also the health care funding to medicate daily. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, you know.

If I was your mother, you'd be grounded for hoarding food from the poor kids. It sounds funny on the surface, but I hope you'll let it resonate afterward. The worst thing is, I fear the government is out of touch with what it's really doing. The highest rate of homelessness is now single parents and whole families. The middle class is the new face of poverty, especially since the recession. Factories are still closing and job creation only comes from Tim Hortons or 7-Eleven. This was a fine time to steal the safety net and name it a miracle for our benefit.

I'm not a degenerate; I can read and also decipher my bank statement. As a matter of fact, I'm on ODSP because I'm educated and thoroughly enjoy working whenever it's possible. I refuse to give up or write myself off and once upon a time I'd likely have been a lawyer. But that path was interrupted by a drunk driver with no insurance, who left me in a coma. I had to relearn how to live and an awful lot was stolen. But up until then, I was an A-plus student and about to change the world somehow. If you think it can't happen to you, think again. Just ask the federal industry minister about his trip down Highway 11 this weekend.

To complicate matters, the schedule you use to calculate housing and hydro is based on 1995 and an era when Mike Harris decimated our social infrastructure. I am humbly asking you to step up and provide true leadership through this crisis we're now facing. At the very least, share your food with the children.

There is no dollars and sense in maintaining poverty. Please recommit to the poverty reduction strategy and don't let it become an expensive decoration. We need to see the human side of our government before the next election and a sign of your courage to take action. I invite you to check out putfoodinthebudget.ca to see what all your voters are saying. It's a wealth of insight, but there's one last thought before I finish: Children who don't eat aren't healthy. Children who aren't healthy don't learn. Those who don't learn will not find jobs. And without a job, no one pays taxes. Worse yet, children who don't work or pay taxes can't grow up to teach their children any better. But it all started with the wee tyke whose milk and honey were stolen.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you, and we'll move to questioning: Mr. Tabuns of the NDP.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thanks to all three of you for coming in this morning. It's a very effective, powerful presentation.

Like you, I'm puzzled. I don't think it's a good argument, but I can see where a government might say that we want a difference between the incomes of those who

are working at low-end jobs and those on welfare, because otherwise, what's the incentive? I don't like that argument, but it's made. But I don't know why there's a difference within the categorization of those who are on social assistance. If you could comment a bit on this, I would appreciate it, because it is utterly mysterious to me.

Ms. Amy MacPherson: Is it okay for me to take this one? I would just like to say that, being on ODS, educated and able to work off and on—my condition permits it now and again—not only am I receiving a different amount of Ontario child benefit than any of the working poor, but further than that, 50% of my wages are taken by the government. So I work, I pay my taxes, and after my taxes are paid, 50% of that is taken by the Ontario disability support program, and then I am further held liable for the Ontario child benefit. I do not know why the government has chosen to do that; I do not believe it's fair or reasonable or that there's any excuse possible. To me, that's slave labour.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I leave it to the three of you to select who will speak.

Ms. Sally Palmer: I would like to offer my explanation, which still leaves me puzzled. One of the things we all know is that when Mike Harris was in, he bought a very expensive social assistance computer system. It's still mainly in operation, the way they spew out the cheques and letters to people telling them they're being cut off. The Liberal government did increase social assistance by 3%, 2% etc., and when they tried to do it, that system wasn't flexible; it cost them about \$18 million to make the change. This allowance is also using that expensive computer system, and it doesn't work very well. So I think that's part of it.

Another part of it is that when they took away the children's back-to-school and winter clothing allowance, they took away more from people like Amy, and then they put in a transitional benefit to those people to try to make up for it. But the next year—I don't know why—they removed that transitional benefit, so that's one of the reasons that she's receiving less than others. But overall, her group is really disadvantaged, as you can see from the numbers.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: But it has got to be more than just a software problem.

Ms. Sally Palmer: They don't want to look at it, and we're just not getting answers. I hope you will ask about it.

Mr. Mel Basbaum: The other thing, I think, is that—I don't pretend to understand the formulae that are being used to determine this; they are very complicated. I don't know if the accountants actually understand it, as Amy made reference to. But when you try and look at the formula, you can't make sense out of it, so I can't directly answer that question.

Ms. Amy MacPherson: Also, I would like to say that I believe part of the problem is that this is an unpopular topic. People like myself are generally stereotyped against as rubbish, lazy, undeserving and just taking

money from the province. But as I explained, when I work, what I contribute is twice as much as anybody else in the province for how you're ding me left, right and centre.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Can you speak briefly about any studies on the impact of this? You've talked in your presentations, but clearly if there hasn't been an advance, if almost everything is clawed back, then I assume this is reflected in nutritional outcomes and school performance. Can you speak to that?

Ms. Sally Palmer: Do you want to?

Mr. Mel Basbaum: I don't know how many of you might be familiar with Code Red, which was done in Hamilton and looked at the differences in different areas of the city where poverty versus—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay.

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Mr. Mel Basbaum: They found, number one, differences—the big one was in terms of both adults and kids, a life expectancy, between the highest and lowest, of 21 years' difference. This was replicated as well—I can't remember—by a professor at York University, so it has been done. Similarly, there are studies, which I can't think of to quote right now, that show that kids who go to school hungry don't learn. Amy made reference to this; it's well documented. They are the people who, as Amy pointed out, are going to be poorly educated and later on have more trouble finding work, that kind of thing. The studies are there.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

HAMILTON HEALTH COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Hamilton Health Coalition to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning coming from the government side in this round. Just state your names for our recording Hansard, and then you can begin.

Mr. Kenneth Jackson: Yes. My name is Kenneth Jackson. With me is Betty-Ann Bushell. I am the co-chair of the Hamilton Health Coalition. Betty is a member, and a wonderful driver to get me here safely this morning.

We are here to speak to the committee, and we thank you for the opportunity to make some general statements about health care in Ontario. There are two bundles of materials: a thick one which contains most of my presentation, and a thin one which contains the last page of my presentation plus two copies of articles that appeared in the New York Times, one regarding health care, comparing health care in Canada with health care in the US; and the second article talking about attitudes towards deficit. This is a very general presentation.

The first point that we want to make is to note that we expect our government plainly to demonstrate care of all Ontario citizens. We call upon the government of Ontario

to preserve and strengthen public health care for all its citizens. A wise man whose name was Richard Sennett, in a book called *The Corrosion of Character*, has written that “a regime which provides human beings no deep reasons to care about one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy.” We call upon our government to demonstrate its legitimacy by setting a standard of care worthy of emulation by all citizens of Ontario.

We expect our government to withstand ill-informed propagandistic campaigns. Public health care is sustainable. This is contrary to the statements of the Fraser Institute and the report submitted to the government by TD Economics. It is unfortunate that the government hired TD Economics to examine the provision of health care in Ontario. TD Economics offered a number of privatization options as “solutions.” This was entirely self-serving because TD Economics is part of the TD Bank, which itself sells health insurance and will benefit from moves towards privatization.

We expect our government to be truthful about spending on programs and services. As a percentage of GDP, Ontario spends less on all programs and services than all other provinces and territories except Alberta and Saskatchewan. Computed on a per person basis, however, Ontario is dead last in spending on programs and services. Budgetary economies ought not to be sought here. Public health care expenditures are the lowest of all the provinces except Quebec. The government must plainly demonstrate its care for those it purports to govern and increase the health care budget.

Public health care is more efficient than private health care. In comparison studies made between health care in the US with health care in Canada, it was shown that out of 10 studies comparing the care given to a broad range of patients suffering from a diverse range of ailments, five favoured Canada but only two favoured the US. The other three studies yielded mixed results. The article is as an addendum in the second handout.

In 2006, Canada spent a little over half of what the US spent on health care per person. The claim that public health care is too expensive is factually indefensible.

False economies: Experience has shown that the health of patients is threatened by privatization of services. The almost regular outbreaks of *C. difficile* in two hospitals in the Hamilton area can be attributed to the fact that the hospitals in question let out their house-keeping services to private companies whose aim is to make money for their owners. To make money, the work must be done more quickly and therefore less carefully. The result is more resistant diseases, needless deaths and greater costs. Privatization of services is false economy.

Refusal to gain by others' experience: Experience in the UK has clearly demonstrated that P3 projects are not cost-effective for the government. It was wasteful and therefore foolish for the government to proceed with the building of new hospitals with private partners. The government was warned about the costliness and failure of such projects but it proceeded anyway. The University Health Network in Toronto financed its renovation by

issuing bonds and other fundraising measures, a much more cost-effective approach.

Administrators' salaries: About one quarter of the budget of Hamilton Health Sciences is given to people in administrative positions. It has been said that such people need to be paid high salaries to attract the best people to the positions. Past history reveals that such a philosophy has not worked in Hamilton. Additionally, the implementation of the LHINs has added an exorbitantly expensive and needless escalation of health care costs. In our region, one member of the LHIN board publicly and proudly stated to a Hamilton Spectator reporter that he does his required public consultation on the golf course.

Staff salaries: However, if it is so that salaries must be high to attract the best people, let this be so in the remuneration of nurses. We respectfully petition the government of Ontario to hire more nurses and to raise the salaries of nurses so that we may not only have the highly dedicated nurses we presently have but pay them closer to the value of the careful work they do to ensure our well-being. In this time of economic downturn, it is in the best interests of the government of Ontario to do all it possibly can to ensure the healthiest possible population as an essential element in economic recovery.

Since 1975, the costs of health care have remained relatively stable at between 4% and 5% of GDP. Tax cuts have eaten away at public budgets. It's all too easy to claim that health care costs have risen as a percentage of income when that income has been intentionally lowered by tax cuts. There are reputable economists who assert that governments, or those who influence government policies, are needlessly concerned with quickly eliminating deficits.

The third page is found in the thinner bundle that was given to you.

Contrary to what we regularly hear, the government's deficit is not the result of a runaway growth in spending, especially not a growth in spending on health care. A large portion of the deficit was caused by the ongoing economic crisis, which has led to a downturn in tax receipts and to necessary bailouts.

Running a deficit is currently the best thing to do. To counter the deficit, the government should be doing more than it is to create jobs. Deficit fearmongering is a political stance, not an economic stance. The article regarding deficits is added to the second, thinner pass-out.

The present government must raise taxes. It once had the courage to tax all Ontarians specifically for health care. I was sitting at Tammy's restaurant in downtown Dundas with Ted McMeekin a couple of days after the tax was announced, and my coffee was kept continuously hot by the comments that were fired at Ted.

The government survived. The government had the courage to harmonize the provincial sales tax and the GST. So far, so good.

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It is suspected that there are companies in Ontario that pay no tax. That needs to be investigated and the required taxes imposed and paid.

The government must be more vigilant in its administration of governance. In 2009, the Auditor General reported on the attempt to create electronic health records. That report was damning in its criticism of the way government allowed eHealth and its predecessor, Smart Systems for Health, to let spending go out of control with few safeguards to protect tax dollars; eHealth paid \$16 million in untendered contracts to consultants. It is not public health care that caused the fiasco. Let not the sins of the fathers—that is, the government—be visited upon the children; that is, the citizens of Ontario.

On a recent Oprah show, the lovely host was speaking with a man from Sweden. She commented that Swedes have “socialized medicine.” With a large smile, her guest responded that in Sweden, they like their young people and their old people. They like to ensure that everyone is properly cared for. Let it be so in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. Your time has expired.

We will move to the government. Mr. Ramal.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you very much for your presentation. We listened to a similar presentation done by the Cambridge people earlier in the morning.

You mentioned our investment in health care. I’m not sure why you’ve been talking about privatization of health care. As you know, we believe strongly in publicly funded, accessible-for-all health care. We’re going to continue our trend in the future.

You’re talking about less funding for health care. I’m not sure how you get your statistics. If you go to our budgets from 2003 until now, you see our budget for health care being doubled. Even though you talk about hospital budgets here, on the last page of your first presentation, talking about less than 2008—because as we transform health care, we split it between community health care and hospital health care in order to lower the pressure on emergency rooms. How are you getting your—

Mr. Kenneth Jackson: That’s good news. Thank you for that. I appreciate it very much.

What I’m looking at is the way the local scene in Hamilton presents itself publicly. If it is so that the government is raising the money it spends on health care, why does it seem that there are fewer services and there is greater strain on the health care system in Hamilton? I can’t explain it. That’s where I get my information from.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: I just wanted to jump in. Thank you specifically for page 3 and for the attachments.

I appreciate your comment about the large portion of the deficit caused by the ongoing economic crisis. I think it’s really significant to point out that it is a global crisis. It’s not just in Ontario. Thank you, because sometimes people forget that. They don’t have that perspective.

I also want to thank you for your next paragraph, which says that deficit fearmongering is a political stance, not an economic stance. I think that’s a brilliant statement. Do you want to elaborate on that at all?

Mr. Kenneth Jackson: I don’t know if I can. My problem with speaking is that I want to say something quickly.

I think it’s too easy for governments to use scare tactics. I’m reminded of an article that appeared in Saturday’s Globe and Mail about Brian Mulroney telling the Prime Minister to do something big and perhaps look at health care. The Honourable Mr. Mulroney said that health care costs are going to rise to account for 75% of our government budgets. That is simply to, again, try to use scare tactics to scare people into doing what other people want them to do.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: The government believes in transparency, telling people how difficult it is and working with them, and I really appreciate that.

The article in the New York Times saying that they report it as if they were facts, yet they’re not—thank you for that.

Also, thank you for your statement about the HST. The government had the courage to harmonize the sales tax, because it was the right thing to do. Oftentimes, it’s difficult to convey that message. It’s easier just to sort of, as you said in the article, make up things that aren’t necessarily the case. So I thank you for the courage to sit here today and say that.

Thank you both. Thank you for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Mr. Ramal. We have a minute left.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: You talk about the P3—it wasn’t P3—third partners to participate in building hospitals. I’m not sure if you know or not, and I’m telling you for the record, the majority of the unions that were building those hospitals participated in financing that stuff. So I think the money is going to go back to the workers who are doing it.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

Mr. Kenneth Jackson: Thank you all for your attention and for your very kind comments. This will encourage the people back home.

LITERACY LINK SOUTH CENTRAL

ONTARIO LITERACY COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I call on Literacy Link South Central to come forward, please. Good morning. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. The questioning will come from the official opposition this time. I would ask you to identify yourselves before you begin.

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: I’m Tamara Kaattari from Literacy Link South Central.

Ms. Lesley Brown: I’m Lesley Brown. I’m the executive director of the Ontario Literacy Coalition.

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: We are here today to talk about the importance of increased funding for adult literacy programs in Ontario. The Ontario Literacy Coalition and Literacy Link South Central, on behalf of our members and the 60,000 adult learners in Ontario, appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. Lesley is going to kick off our presentation.

Ms. Lesley Brown: I also want to acknowledge the importance of the two-year funding provided to literacy and essential skills in the 2009 Ontario budget.

Ontario is on the road to recovery, and that's really welcome news for all of us. For Ontario to thrive, every Ontarian needs to contribute to our province's prosperity. That means we have to equip the 42% or, said another way, two out of five adults who do not have the adequate skills to read, write or handle technology in order to contribute to our economy and to function effectively in day-to-day life.

To better understand the need for adult literacy in Ontario, let me first clarify it. Only 3% of the population could really be defined as functionally illiterate, but over 40% of the population in Ontario have literacy skills below the level considered sufficient to function reasonably well in all aspects of a person's life.

To be literate today means far more than being able to read and write. It means being able to deal with numbers and use technology effectively. All jobs, including lower-skilled and entry-level jobs, are increasingly requiring knowledge and expertise with technology.

In 2009, the Ontario government increased its investment in literacy and skills programs for Ontarians. This was for the first time in over a decade. The impact of the additional investment of \$45 million a year is now beginning to show real results. We need to keep it going, sustaining the investment in the full spectrum of literacy programs for Ontarians.

We acknowledge that Ontario's increase in support to literacy was made possible through an increase in training funding from the federal government through the economic action plan. With respect, we submit that providing Ontarians with the skills and training they need is really the responsibility of both levels of government. Failure of the federal government to sustain funding for provincial training programs does not, in our view or the view of learners in Ontario, absolve the province from its responsibility to Ontarians.

The low literacy attainment of adults really directly affects our economy. TD Bank Financial Group, in its own analysis, shows how investing in literacy can make a difference, citing that an increase of 1% in literacy can boost the national income by \$32 billion.

A human resources and skills development study found that the capacity of labour markets, firms and individuals to adjust to change, improve productivity and capitalize on technological innovation depends in large measure on the skills of the adult population.

Workplaces are also recognizing the critical role a skilled workforce plays. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, in their 2010 survey of economic leaders,

recognized the importance of developing and retaining a highly competitive workforce in Ontario.

Ontario has been impacted by the global upheaval of the past few years. Economic shifts, loss of certain sectors such as manufacturing, and technological enhancements in the workplace have highlighted the change for many Ontarians who found themselves without adequate skills to either maintain their current jobs or to move into new jobs when they became unemployed.

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Ms. Tamara Kaattari: Information that Literacy Link South Central gathered through interviews with hundreds of displaced workers identified that although these workers had years of experience and strong work ethics, many did not have the literacy and essential skills they needed in order to compete for jobs.

The Rick Miner report, *People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People*, forecasts that our province simply won't have the workforce—the quantity or the quality—to fill the complex jobs that are becoming the reality of the workplace. While much attention has focused on higher education in colleges and universities and on the K-to-12 system, not enough has been paid to the adult literacy system, a system which many Ontarians need to access in order to get to post-secondary or to support their own children in K to 12. We won't be successful as a province until all Ontarians find a place for themselves in the new economy. Literacy and essential skills programs provided through schools, colleges, the community and workplaces assist adult Ontarians in transitioning on to further education and training or to different forms of employment.

The increased investment in literacy and essential skills training over the past two years has begun to show results. Last year, in London and Waterloo region alone, over 7,000 adults exited adult learning programs. Of those, almost 5,000, or 70%, moved on to further education and training or to employment.

Literacy and essential skills programs have supported Second Career, the province's employment support program. Second Career applicants who took the time to review or build their foundational literacy and numeracy skills were more prepared for post-secondary success.

Not only did adult literacy programs across Ontario serve an additional 13,000 people as a result of the stimulus funding; they also increased their ability to integrate social media and distance learning into adult literacy programming, which provided even greater access to Ontarians. For example, one of our local programs had a student who was deployed to Afghanistan. He continued his upgrading studies while he was on duty, uploading his lessons on a weekly basis so that when he was able to come back to Canada he could further his opportunities.

Literacy and online learning are being combined to meet the skills needs of local employers. Goodwill Industries retail locations throughout southwestern Ontario, with 200 employees, now have access to a dozen

online training opportunities in areas like WHMIS, health and safety, customer service, family literacy and how to participate in online learning.

Although the time frame for stimulus funding is coming to an end, the demand for adult literacy programming is not. Even though the economy is beginning to improve, it will be several more years before the demand upon literacy programs abates.

If we have to return to funding levels from 1997, it will mean we cannot serve Ontarians who face serious impediments to gaining employment opportunities, including training for the jobs of the future. In London and Waterloo region, for example, we project that over 3,000 adults will not have access to services or they will have access to reduced services because there will be 300,000 hours of instruction that will be cut. If you multiply these numbers across Ontario, you will begin to see the impact if adult literacy programs revert to 1997 funding levels.

Ms. Lesley Brown: The additional investment in adult literacy programs opened opportunities for over 13,000 Ontarians to access programs to upgrade their skills. Economically, socially and from a community perspective, these are good results. We deliver value for money. Investment in literacy and essential skills improves the lives and economic self-sufficiency of Ontarians in every community in the province.

We salute the Ontario government for its 2009 additional investment in literacy. It's a good start; we need to continue.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the official opposition. Ms. Witmer.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much for your presentation. I'm a big supporter of the work that you undertake. I know that in my own community of Kitchener-Waterloo it has made a significant difference in the lives of many, many people. We've had people displaced from what they thought was a lifetime job in the manufacturing sector, and obviously it wasn't, and now they need the skills to move forward. At the same time, we have many jobs in the high-tech sector where we can't find employees to fill them. So thank you very much.

I guess the problem that we have today is that, despite the fact that we saw a significant increase in funding in 2009, and the provincial government did step up to the plate, there was also two-year funding, I believe, from the federal government. Just reaffirm with me: Everybody knew that was two-year funding?

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: Yes, they did. They knew that it was economic stimulus funding. The other thing that we're never quite clear on in the field is where the labour market agreement additional funds for literacy were coming from. Again, we're never sure if it's economic stimulus or if it's the labour market agreement that was six years in duration that earmarked \$34 million for literacy and essential skills. Technically speaking, there are three more years under that agreement that have yet to play out, so we are waiting to see how and if those

funds will flow. But that original two-year economic stimulus funding was for two years.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: So if you were to get the additional funds that you don't know about, would that respond to your need?

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: Yes, it would greatly respond to the need. Even of the \$45 million that was flowed per year, \$25 million a year was flowed directly for delivery in agencies. The \$34 million, if it were to come through the labour market agreement, would certainly fill that need and allow us to continue to provide increased service.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Why do you think it's not going to come?

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: Because we have been told to do our business planning for the next fiscal year based on the funding levels that we had in 1997.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: So the province has communicated that information to you?

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: Yes.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: And have they told you why they're not going to provide that funding, as they should?

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: No, I wouldn't say they've said that in so many words. I think we are all still speculating, wondering if that money is going to be released through the labour market agreement. Those of us who operate at the ground level are not privy to those kinds of conversations between levels of government. We simply plan based on the funding levels that we're told to plan for, and then we try to examine the fallout that will come from that.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Basically, you're telling me that so far, you've been given no reason for any optimism that the money will flow.

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: Yes, that's exactly what we're telling you.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: And you've been asked to go back to?

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: The level of funding that we had prior to the two-year stimulus package. As Leslie mentioned, we hadn't seen an increase in the previous 10 years before that, so essentially, we are moving back to 1997 levels.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: It's unbelievable, in this day and age, given the economic upheaval we've seen in the province of Ontario, that we'd even be thinking of going back to the 1997 levels, because I think, as you've indicated, there are going to be thousands of people who obviously are going to continue to have to access welfare and aren't going to be able to provide the support to their families and have the dignity of having a job.

Your ask today, then, if you wanted to get a message across to those of us: What is it that you want us to hear?

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: I would say that some way, somehow, whether it's through continued economic stimulus funding or whether it's through the honouring of the agreement that has already been put in place between the provincial and federal government, additional dollars continue to flow to adult literacy programs so that we can

meet the needs of the people in our communities. Otherwise, we are going to have to shut down some programs, restrict others and possibly have to ask people within programs to leave. I'm not sure how they're going to be able to get a job and keep a job if they don't have the foundational skills that are required by employers.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: What happens to people when you tell them you can't accommodate them?

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: We've had a number of situations where people have contacted us out of frustration because they know that they have to improve their skills; they don't have a level of education that is grade 12 or a GED. Many of them have to do academic upgrading before they can even entertain the idea of doing credit courses. They just feel completely powerless. They don't have the options. They have the desire to work. They have strong histories of working in many cases because they were at a company for 20 or 30 years, so it's incredibly frustrating. They feel like there's nobody out there listening or respecting the fact that they have been a contributing member of society for a very long time, and now they cannot access services that they feel very much they should be able to access.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

Ms. Tamara Kaattari: Thank you.

ONTARIO GRAINS AND OILSEEDS SAFETY NET COMMITTEE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now we'll hear from Ontario Grains and Oilseeds. Good morning, gentlemen. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning, coming from Mr. Tabuns of the NDP. Just state your names before you begin for our recording Hansard, and you can begin.

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Mr. Leo Guilbeault: Good morning, honourable members. My name is Leo Guilbeault. I'm the chair of the Ontario Grains and Oilseeds Safety Net Committee. I'm joined today by Jeff Davis, who's an executive member of the safety net committee. The safety net committee represents over 28,000 farm families in Ontario who grow soybeans, wheat, corn, canola and edible beans.

As I said, my name is Leo and I've been farming for over 30 years in the Windsor-Essex county area.

Mr. Jeff Davis: I've been farming for 20 years in the St Thomas area.

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: The labour and innovation of Ontario's grains and oilseeds farmers bring in over \$2 billion in receipts a year for food and biofuel products. The industry as a whole has an economic impact of over \$10 billion per year, providing direct employment to over 40,000 Ontarians.

Until the economic turndown, the manufacturing industry was the number one economic power in Ontario, but since the turndown, if you look at the numbers, agriculture has now become the leading economic provider

in Ontario. So we're a substantial force as far as an economic engine of this province.

Our farmers feed the cities of Ontario and the cities of the world. I'm sure you've seen our campaign over the years, Farmers Feed Cities.

We're here today to ask the government to make a permanent contribution to the risk management program for the grains and oilseeds industry in Ontario. This program is also known as RMP.

Mr. Jeff Davis: What is the RMP? RMP is similar to an insurance program that the grain farmers pay a premium to protect against such uncontrollable factors as the volatility and collapse of commodity prices, unexpected increases in the cost of inputs such as fertilizer and oil, and the high Canadian dollar and currency fluctuations.

RMP claims are only triggered if the market price for a commodity falls below the provincial average cost of production. By design, RMP compensates farmers when factors such as unfair international subsidies, a volatile Canadian dollar and collapses in commodity prices come into play.

We have provided the committee with a chart of commodity prices over the last four years. You will see the vast fluctuation and volatility of prices that our industry has been subject to: oil at a high of \$147 a barrel and a low of \$69 a barrel in one year's variance; corn at a high of \$6.84 a bushel to a low of \$3.39 a bushel, and there again, one year's variance; soybeans, a high of \$16.12 a bushel and a low of \$9.49 a bushel; and wheat, \$8.18 a bushel to a low of \$4.54 a bushel.

This summer, many corn producers sold some of their corn when they thought \$4.50 a bushel was a high price. Today, corn is at \$5.70 cash price and \$6.60 on the Chicago futures market. Fuelled by high demand, poor growing conditions elsewhere and excellent growing conditions in Ontario, the price of corn continues to rise. Those who sold early are missing out on higher prices. But just six months ago, some producers were selling at \$3.60 a bushel. This is the volatile market that we operate in.

For family farm operations, the volatility of agricultural markets puts considerable stress on finances. RMP gives us the ability to plan for the future by providing a sense of long-term stability. We have heard from many government officials that this is how government programs should be designed: shared risks and shared funding. RMP is a true partnership.

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of our members to thank the government—the Premier, Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, and the agriculture minister, Carol Mitchell—for showing leadership in implementing the risk management program. Thank you.

RMP is a program developed by farmers for farmers. It started off as a three-year pilot project. Last July, it received a one-year extension. Now we're here to ask you to make RMP permanent.

Honourable members, we understand that the government is facing some tough decisions in setting its financial priorities in the coming year. As farmers, believe me, we understand what that's like. We know what it's like to run deficits and operate for many years with negative margins. In fact, this is exactly the situation that we were facing in 2007 when the RMP was developed by farmers for farmers.

In the three years of the pilot project, the grain farmers have paid \$48 million in RMP premiums to the province of Ontario, and the province of Ontario paid out \$66 million in benefits back to the farmers. The total cost to the province was only about \$18 million over that three-year stretch.

RMP is very popular among the farmers, and their commitment to the program was evident again this year. Farmers have signed up and paid their premiums to the program in spite of the fact that commodity prices are high and we know there's no assurance that the program will be here next year. Our producers like RMP and are committed to making it work.

Without RMP, we could go back to the system of ad hoc emergency funding for commodities and sectors in need. History has shown us that that does not always work. Ad hoc programs show up too little and too late, and often show up in the wrong hands. Ad hoc funding is also far more expensive and less predictable for the government than a shared-cost, shared-risk program like RMP.

We do not know what the future of the program is. We have been told by the province that the federal government needs to come on board as funding partners. However, the federal government has stated that they will not revisit business risk management programming until 2013, when the Growing Forward agreement expires. Actually, in the current Growing Forward, there's not a business risk management component to it. For us, this is too little, too late. We're still pressuring the federal government to reconsider this decision, but we are not optimistic that anything will happen in the immediate future.

As farmers, we are stuck in the jurisdictional Ping-Pong between the province and the federal government. Most of our programs are jointly administered and funded by two levels of government, leaving the industry vulnerable to intergovernmental squabbles that commonly occur in Canada, ultimately to the detriment of farmers. We are of the strong opinion that someone needs to go first, and we are thankful that the Ontario government has stepped up and taken on a leadership role.

Make RMP permanent: We are requesting that the risk management program be made permanent in the 2011 budget. The program is set to expire, and farmers will lose the long-term stability that the program provides. RMP is a critical pillar in supporting the multi-billion-dollar industry that feeds Ontario cities and keeps our rural communities thriving. It's time to make RMP permanent.

There are two of you around this table who are directly involved with RMP because you're farmers. The rest of you all have a vested interest in agriculture because you do eat breakfast, lunch and dinner every day, and we are proud to provide that for you guys. All we're asking for is the continued support that the province has shown. We thank you for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much for coming in and making this presentation today.

When the program was set up, what sort of commitments were made to assessing it once the pilot period was over?

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: The pilot was set to be three years, and then the province conducted a study after it was done to see the successes or the failure of the program. The province deemed it to be a success hugely because of the wide support of the farmers and the support that it got throughout the government ranks, so they extended the program for this past crop year, 2010. That's where we sit today. By their own study, they deemed it as a successful program.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Are there other jurisdictions in North America or western Europe that run similar programs, and do they have a similar experience to what we've had in Ontario?

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: If you look at other governments around the globe, that's who we compete with: other government funding of agriculture programs. Our neighbour to the south, the US, has the US farm bill, which is a great funding source and protection source for their farmers, and I think you see that across Europe and across some smaller Asian countries also.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's interesting to me. Farmers put in, clearly, a lot of money, counterbalanced by payments that came out. Do you envision a program that would be largely self-financing, or one that would consistently require government money put in to make sure that it happened and worked well?

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Mr. Leo Guilbeault: It's an insurance-based program, so we're not much different than our crop insurance program, which is funded federally and provincially—actually, one third, one third by the farmers, the province and the feds. We're envisioning this program to be a similar style, so it would require some funding.

On the other hand, it doesn't mean that there's going to be a payout every year. If we look at this coming year, where commodity prices are high, we're still going to pay our premiums as far as farmers go, but it doesn't mean that the province is going to have a payout.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Right.

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: But we want a permanent program that will take those highs and lows and dips and valleys, because it's not fair to either the government or us to come to the government only in times of crisis. It should be a permanent program that would cover the

crisis in the years when it's needed, and in the years when it's not needed, at least we know it's there.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes, I can understand that.

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: It's like buying house insurance. You buy house insurance every year, you pay the premium, but you don't hope that your house is going to burn down, right?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Absolutely true.

If this program had not been in place over the last few years, can you give us some sense of the scale of farm bankruptcies or farms going out of business that we would have seen?

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: It's a hard number to come up with; certainly, if we did some deep digging, we could, through the financial institutions. But what it does is it provides farmers with a bankable program so they can go to their financial institutions when they're doing their cash flows—we're all businessmen now, and when we put our cash flow together every year, we can go to our lending institutions and say, "This is what our cash flow will look like. If it doesn't work out, this is what kicks in: crop insurance kicks in; RMP kicks in; AgriStability kicks in, blah, blah." It makes it a lot more bankable and predictable cash flow unit for the financial institution to look at.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Prior to this program coming into place, were there substantial problems with bankruptcies and farmers being driven out of business?

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: Absolutely. If you look at the years from 2003 through to 2007, when we faced way below the cost of production, a lot of us were cashing in our life savings to keep the farm up and running because we didn't have an effective program running. Bankruptcies were very common at that time.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Right.

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: We already lost two generations of sons and daughters who aren't coming back to the farm in those years, and we're trying to prevent that again, to make agriculture a stable economy and a stable industry so that our kids will see a future in it. Let's face it: We all still need to produce food to survive—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No question; I'm a fan of food, believe me.

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: —but if we keep losing our sons and daughters because they don't see a future in the industry, who will be around to do it in the future?

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for the presentation.

Mr. Leo Guilbeault: Thank you. Nice to see you again, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Good to see you.

GREATER KITCHENER WATERLOO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now, the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. Good morning. I'm sure you know how this goes.

Mr. Art Sinclair: I have an idea.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have 10 minutes, and five minutes of questioning. If you'd just state your name for our recording.

Mr. Art Sinclair: Sure. My name is Art Sinclair. I'm vice-president of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. I believe our brief has been circulated. I will try and be brief in my points to follow up on my colleagues here from the agricultural industry. I don't want to prohibit anyone from supporting them because I know that lunch is next on the agenda, so I will try and be as brief as possible so everyone has an opportunity to support the great agricultural industry here in the province of Ontario.

To start with, there are a few things. Before we get into our priorities for 2011, I'd like to acknowledge some significant achievements that we received as a chamber of commerce in terms of our requests and recommendations for last year and the government delivering on them over the last 12 months.

For the last two years, one of our priorities has been the reform of the underserved area program for physician recruitment. Our position in Kitchener-Waterloo—we've always been non-underserved-designated, so we've been at a significant disadvantage against a lot of other municipalities in terms of recruiting physicians. After some significant lobbying and some significant assistance from Ms. Pendergast, Mrs. Witmer and Minister Milloy, we received some significant changes to the program last March when Minister Matthews announced that some reforms were being made to the program for the recruitment of family physicians. We are now significantly better off than we were a year ago in terms of our ability to recruit physicians. We're now in a position where we can recruit doctors with return-of-service agreements, and we can recruit them to the community. That was a significant accomplishment, and I'd like to thank all the government members for assisting us on this.

We received two significant funding announcements this past year with respect to transportation: One was the \$300 million that Minister Wynne delivered last June for a region of Waterloo rapid transit system. That is something that we have included in past presentations to this committee and that was also a very significant funding announcement that we're quite pleased with in the community. Obviously, infrastructure development is critical to managing the growth that we are expected to incur in Waterloo region over the next 20 years, so again, we're quite grateful for this funding assistance.

As well as the funding commitment on rapid transit, we also received word this past November that GO Transit will be running train service from Waterloo region to Toronto starting this fall, in November or December. Again, that's a significant achievement and a significant contribution to the community, because obviously, we're interested in developing a lot of economic linkages with communities to the east of us in Waterloo region. We're very grateful for that announcement as well, and this is also something that we have

been recommending for the past number of years in our submissions. Again, we're quite pleased with what we've received in the community over the past year from the provincial government.

In terms of our recommendations for this year, on the fiscal side, obviously we're seeing some improvement. I believe I pointed out a report from RBC which indicates that the adjustments in the provincial finances, where Minister Duncan has dropped the deficit projections by \$1 billion, a lot of that is due to an increase in corporate taxes. Obviously, that's good news from a business perspective, that corporations are paying more revenue to the government because they're making more money. That's certainly a positive sign. However, I guess our big concern is with respect to any possible move towards more corporate taxes. We feel that that wouldn't be appropriate at this point in time, as we're still in a recovery mode from the recession. Certainly, we wouldn't recommend any new corporate taxes or increases in corporate taxes at this point in time.

Secondly, on the program spending side, I think it's quite clear that in fact, the key to achieving deficit and debt elimination targets, both on the federal and provincial side—program spending restraint is going to be key to meeting those targets. We're recommending probably a 2% to 2.5% increase in the annual program spending as being reasonable to achieve the deficit reduction targets that both the federal and provincial governments have come up with. Those are our recommendations on the economic side.

A year ago, we made a recommendation, and this was included in the report that the committee did at the end of their hearings. We provided a recommendation for the province to set up a ministry of manufacturing. At that point in time, one of the things we pointed out was that the Ministry of Agriculture supports farmers, the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry supports the respective economic sectors of northern Ontario, and the Ministry of Tourism supports that economic sector. We certainly heard from a lot of manufacturers in Waterloo region, where manufacturing still is a very important part of the local economy, that a similar ministry should be developed to support the local manufacturing sector. We're back making that same recommendation again this year.

Obviously, we've seen some improvement in the auto sector. Sales are up in the United States, which is obviously good news for the local manufacturing sector here across Ontario. But locally, we received somewhat of a shock this past week with the announcement that Colonial Cookies, which is a cookie and snack manufacturer in south Kitchener, is in receivership and 400 jobs have been temporarily lost while the trustee in bankruptcy is looking for a possible buyer. Again, there's still some uncertainty in the manufacturing sector, and I think probably having that ministry of manufacturing would be critical for addressing a lot of these issues for the sector going forward.

Thirdly, we were quite active at the chamber this past year, putting together a submission to the Ministry of Finance on pension reform. Obviously the financial services sector is a big component of our membership and the local economy; we have Sun Life Assurance and Manulife with significant operations in Waterloo region. From the perspective of our membership, both as providers of pension and benefit services and small employers, we see the pension portfolio as being quite critical. Again, based on our discussions with the membership, one of the things that we constantly heard was that what they want to see was more small and medium-sized employers participating in group benefits and pension programs. The employers want it. Both the employers and the employees feel that this is a priority, and they want to see improvements in the legislative and regulatory regimes to make that possible.

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We've been quite fortunate. Our chamber of commerce, for the last 25 years, has partnered with the Cowan insurance company, originally based in Princeton, just east of here, between here and Woodstock. We've been partnering with Cowan Insurance now for about 25 years on a group benefits program for chamber members, and it's a very valuable service that we can offer to our membership. That's the type of framework and the type of program that we would like to see expanded on so that more and more employees amongst small and medium-sized employers will be covered. Again, I think we made that quite clear in our submission to the Ministry of Finance last November.

Another issue that we've identified as a priority is funding for post-secondary education. You heard in an earlier presentation, 15 minutes ago, about the importance of literacy development. We agree with that, but we also feel that there's an imperative requirement to continue investments in post-secondary infrastructure. The knowledge infrastructure program that Minister Flaherty announced two years ago has been, we think, a significant benefit to our community. All three institutions—Conestoga College, the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier—have benefited from this.

I often use the analogy, with respect to the importance of post-secondary education—we're in a situation in Waterloo region where the high-tech employers, such as Research in Motion, OpenText and other smaller organizations, at this time require about 2,000 employees. So, certainly, a lot of the growth in Waterloo region over the next 25 years is going to come from the technology sector. If we have people coming to work in the technology sector, obviously there's going to be a significant demand for housing. Of course, one of the things that Conestoga College has been developing in the last number of years has been their capacity for construction and construction technology programs. If we're going to have people coming to work in the tech sector, we're going to have a significant increase in residential housing demands.

Really, the demand for education and educational services is going to be pretty significant across all portfolios, so we've recommended that the province and the federal government continue with some type of initiative to ensure that we have the funding available for infrastructure development on campuses.

The final recommendation we have revolves around a relatively new concept in public policy. It relates to something called social finance. Our community particularly, and I think a lot of other communities across Canada, has recognized that there are many not-for-profit organizations and charities that need a significant source of committed, long-term and sustainable funding to make their operations viable. There is an organization that was established recently called the Canadian Task Force on Social Finance. It includes a number of people in private finance, in government. Former Prime Minister Paul Martin is a member of this committee. In our community, an individual, Tim Jackson, who's been involved with a number of technology start-ups over the years, is also a member of this committee, and he spoke at a chamber event last November. Subsequent to him speaking, the task force on social finance released a report that includes a number of recommendations on how governments can assist charitables and not-for-profits in securing the funding that they need to be viable.

We have included one recommendation. There is a series of recommendations in the report, and I would encourage everyone to review this report. It is quite interesting. But one specific recommendation they've made is that charities and not-for-profits should be eligible for a lot of the business support programs that private sector businesses are eligible for. If that were applicable, then a lot of these organizations would be able to secure the funding they need to be viable.

Again, those are my recommendations. I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear this morning.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. You did indeed cover a lot of ground. The questioning goes to the government. Ms. Pendergast.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Good morning, Mr. Sinclair. Thanks for being here. On behalf of Elizabeth Witmer and myself, I welcome you—a good Waterloo county welcome this morning. I guess it's the region of Waterloo.

Mr. Art Sinclair: There's something in the water in Waterloo, yes.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Right, what's in the water? So we welcome you this morning and thank you for being here.

Thank you for this thorough submission. As always, the leadership that the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce has shown in the past and continues to show is greatly appreciated. As a government, we enjoy working with you. We appreciate your comments and insights.

The priorities that you've put forward on page 2—I wanted to go to the first two but do that last. Of course, your “no new or increased corporate taxes” comment:

We understand that. The almost \$2 billion that will be saved by businesses with the capital tax elimination for all business: Of course, we understand that.

As I move through your recommendations, there are some excellent comments about the Ontario deficit being lowered to \$18.7 billion, almost 25% lower.

You're talking about how business investments increase when taxes on them decrease, and of course coming from Waterloo region with many business start-ups, we appreciate that. Of course, by 2014, with the reduction of the business education tax, we'll continue to support businesses.

The manufacturing comments that you make are quite interesting. I was very fascinated by the recommendation of the establishment of a provincial ministry of advanced manufacturing—highly exciting; quite brilliant, actually. Then I went to your second comment: restraints on provincial program spending. I don't know how much it costs to start up a ministry, and I'm not familiar with what the dollars would be on that, but it would be a substantial commitment. Looking at those first two things: establish a ministry, which is a brilliant comment; followed by your second comment to restrain provincial spending—how do you rationalize that?

Mr. Art Sinclair: We haven't done an awful lot of analysis in terms of what the costs might be, but we were thinking it may be a situation of moving people out of existing ministries, such as economic development and trade primarily, and moving them into a new stand-alone ministry.

Again, I think the key thing is, when discussions come up with respect to manufacturing issues or industrial development issues at the cabinet table—you have a Minister of Agriculture for the food industry. You have a Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry for those key sectors of the northern economy. Certainly, what we've heard from other manufacturers in our community is, “Where's our advocate at the cabinet table?” I think that is a key thing: having those persons with a presence at Queen's Park, because to a large extent the manufacturing sector is southwestern Ontario-based. It's very much a regional industry. Yes, there is some manufacturing in northern and eastern Ontario, but it's very much focused here in southwestern Ontario. Again, when you add that Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry, which has been an advocate for sectors of the north—and speaking with our chamber colleagues in the north, they very much like the role that MNDMF supplies for them. We think, in fact, a similar organization for southwestern Ontario and the key driver in the economic sector here in southwestern Ontario would be an effective vehicle for making sure that a lot of the issues are addressed.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Your recommendation about pension reform—we thank you for your submissions that you submitted last November. As you're aware, Bill 120 moves toward the pension reform and addresses many of the recommendations in the Arthurs

report. Again, we thank you for your input on behalf of the chamber.

Social finance, fascinating again: As the chair of the financial literacy task force working group that went around the province, working with the federal task force on financial literacy, I see that all working together with social finance as well. I can see a link there that I hadn't seen until this presentation.

Thank you, of course, for highlighting what's going on in Waterloo region with Capacity Waterloo and Tim Jackson, and the idea that the government is just beginning to move into this area of government business development expanding to include charity and not-for-profit—and continue to encourage you to give your support, vision and ideas, and to thank you for your ongoing leadership.

At the end, you talk about business requiring a strong government partner. We have that partner in the chamber of greater Kitchener-Waterloo, and we thank you for that.

Thank you for your time today.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation this morning.

For the committee, as I mentioned, checkout time is at noon. You can leave your items in this room; someone will be here throughout. Lunch is in suite 300. It's on the third floor. Apparently, there are signs all over the place to tell you how to get there.

We are recessed until 1 o'clock. I would ask you to be prompt in that.

The committee recessed from 1209 to 1300.

SARNIA LAMBTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs will now come to order.

Our first presentation this afternoon is the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce, if you'd come forward, please. Sit anywhere you like. They control the microphones from beside me.

You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning, coming from the official opposition this time. Before you start, just state your names for our recording Hansard and then you can begin.

Ms. Katherine Walker: Katherine Walker, Sarnia Lambton chamber.

Mr. Garry McDonald: Garry McDonald from the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Katherine Walker: Good day, and thank you for the opportunity to provide input from our 1,040 chamber businesses in Sarnia and Lambton county. Our primary concern is that you have a clear plan in place to control the size of the deficit and reduce provincial debt, returning to a balanced budget within a time frame that continues to stimulate the economy and does not hurt jobs.

We are hearing from many of our member businesses, large and small, that one of the biggest issues facing them is red tape, primarily provincial red tape. Compliance regulations and standards, along with duplication of paperwork to meet audit requirements of both the federal and provincial levels, creates a disadvantage and severely limits business's ability to be competitive. The cost to do business in Ontario eats up ever-shrinking margins, discourages investment, eliminates growth and pressures sustainability.

We do note that you have the Open for Business strategy that the government needs really badly to implement, and we certainly hope that it is a success.

It is also our hope that Ontario works co-operatively with the federal Red Tape Reduction Commission in areas where federal and provincial requirements can be merged into one reporting body and solutions are found and implemented quickly.

Mr. Garry McDonald: We polled our members, and a number of them told us a few things that we thought we'd bring to you here today. They're listed next on our presentation letter.

In our particular community we're noting that the movement towards higher air emission standards in Ontario will make us much stricter than the federal standards and those in the rest of Canada. They threaten the viability of the petrochemical industry in Ontario, and this will have a significant impact on tax revenues for Ontario for this whole sector, and a huge impact on direct and indirect employment.

Something that we've been advocating for in the last year that we're looking for your support on: the HST-GST threshold level has been set at \$30,000 since the GST was introduced in the early 1990s. In the past year, we've gained the support of the Canadian chamber and have requested that the federal government increase the threshold amount. Doing so would reduce red tape and administration time for governments, balancing off taxation losses. We would ask your support of our recommendation to the federal government to increase the GST-HST threshold to a globally competitive amount of \$75,000.

The employer health tax threshold has been set at \$400,000 for the last decade. Also, the HT is a 1.95% taxation rate that applies to all employers, whether a small business or a large national corporation. The threshold exemption should be raised to \$500,000 to reduce the red tape for small business and government and be more in line with inflationary increases. More businesses would be under the threshold and not have to spend time capturing information and filing the HT reports. Further, the rate should be reduced, recognizing small employers with payroll under \$1 million, to 1.65%.

Ontario colleges are emerging as innovation catalysts and accelerators, helping Ontario businesses overcome barriers to research and innovation. Through applied research and collaboration, Ontario colleges stimulate new research and innovation activities that would otherwise not occur. Ontario colleges' applied research ser-

vices contribute to product, process and service improvements, reducing time to market increased research and development (R&D) spending and activity. Strategies and resources to better support and expand college-applied research are needed. Funding for applied research leader positions should be provided to Ontario colleges, as in universities.

Continue to support the development of new programs designed to attract new industry to the province on the same level as a very popular system, the advanced manufacturing strategy.

Work with the federal government on programs to improve the pool of available financial capital through such instruments as flow-through shares for large capital projects like the construction of bio-based plants.

I'd like to note that Sarnia-Lambton is a willing host for additional electricity generation, and what has held back our huge involvement in the green energy area in particular is that the transmission grid west of London needs to be improved and increased in size.

The temporary recapture of input tax credits applying to large corporations—above \$10 million in sales—puts business at a competitive disadvantage compared to companies under \$10 million. A company with \$10 million in sales may only have a net income of \$100,000 a year, but they quite often employ many, many people in communities, which is exactly what our economy needs. The harmonized sales tax was supposed to simplify things for business and help reduce costs by allowing businesses to get back input tax credits on all of their purchases. This was the government's argument for why prices might even go lower after the change. While the government is planning to phase out the restrictions starting in 2015, we recommend immediately raising the threshold from the current \$10 million to \$50 million. This would relieve the burden on many small to medium-sized businesses and increase the employment that we badly need.

Thank you very much for allowing us to make these brief points for you today.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the official opposition. Mr. Bailey?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Mr. McDonald and Ms. Walker, for your presentation today.

I'd like to ask you for a couple of examples. You talk about red tape, both provincially and probably federally as well. Could you give some examples, locally and probably across the province, of duplication etc. that red tape has caused to small businesses and many of your members' issues?

Mr. Garry McDonald: One of our contributing members, when he was talking to us about red tape—he's a home builder, and he represents the Sarnia-Lambton Home Builders' Association. He was talking about the Ministry of Labour, and I was a little shocked. He said that one of his contractors was telling him the other day that there actually is a requirement that he write up a piece of paper that informs his employees, and have it on file, on how to carry a two-by-four. To me, the time spent

to do a lot of these obviously logical modes in a business is just a waste of productivity in our Ontario businesses.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The other example in one of your number one issues here: the air emission standards, where the proposed emission standards would be greater than the federal standards. Can you speak specifically to how that would impact local business, both in Sarnia-Lambton and across the province, that are in heavy industry?

Ms. Katherine Walker: Everyone in Ontario wants to be greener. It isn't an issue of being a good corporate citizen. What it boils down to is the ability to stay competitive against a provincial counterpart. So if you have a petrochemical industry—and it's especially in that sector where we feel the impact, because there are many in Sarnia—if the standards are 10 times higher than what they are in Alberta, what it takes to become compliant in the period that's being required is unattainable, so these businesses will close their doors. That is not what Ontario needs right now.

Mr. Robert Bailey: One more?

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Yes.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to get another example. Could you give a little more depth about expanding the grid west of London, between London and Sarnia-Lambton, to get that green energy and other energy out of there?

Mr. Garry McDonald: We've been speaking with the energy ministry over the last decade, through the different governments, and what was noticeable was the great potential in our community to generate electricity for Ontario. We're a willing host for lots of types of electricity generation. Even with the pending closure of the Lambton generating station, there's not enough room on the grid to move a lot of the new green energies or the existing biomass energies which we can produce in our community. We're short, and this was recognized by the OPA in their report of fall 2009. I believe they've been studying it through this past winter, and we're hoping for a positive comment from them to go forward with the expansion of the west-of-London transmission.

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The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Norm, do you have something?

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for bringing that up to me. On the red tape and regulations, you stated that it's one of the biggest issues from your businesses, both small and large. Have you got suggestions on what you think government should be doing to make it easier for business to be able to go about making money and creating jobs?

Ms. Katherine Walker: One thing for sure: Wherever there is a federal regulation and a provincial regulation and there are two separate requirements and auditors to process those and file those reports and so on—wherever that exists, it creates duplication, reduces productivity and puts the extra burden especially on small business, where it's often a one-man show running the administration of that company. Wherever there are those two

reporting bodies, if it could be merged into one, it would be optimal.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

SOUTH WEST SPINAL CORD INJURY SOLUTIONS ALLIANCE

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the South West Spinal Cord Injury Solutions Alliance to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning. This round will come from the NDP, Mr. Tabuns.

Please state your name before you begin.

Mr. Blair Watson: My name is Blair Watson and I represent the South West Spinal Cord Injury Solutions Alliance, which is a part of the Ontario Solutions Alliance. The alliance is a collaborative provincial network of individuals with spinal cord injury, service providers and researchers who are addressing systemic barriers and ensuring the implementation of best practices and customized solutions to minimize disability and maximize the quality of life.

I would like to first thank the members of the committee for your time and the opportunity to make this presentation for a respiratory support strategy. We are here to present you with a solution that will reduce the Ontario deficit and create a higher quality of service for people who require assistance with breathing.

Many people in Ontario with spinal cord injuries and neuromuscular diseases need to use ventilators in order to breathe. A substantial number of these people are living in hospital rather than in the community because adequate community services are not in place. Using bed costs, referenced in a provincial 2008 long-term ventilation report on 27 individual cases, the government is spending over \$5 million more a year unnecessarily to house these 27 people in chronic assisted ventilator care beds as opposed to living in the community.

We are proposing the development of a community-based respiratory outreach program. One such program in British Columbia offers a very cost-effective program which we could use as a model system to improve the services in Ontario.

Steven, as an example, lived a full and rewarding life as a quadriplegic for almost 26 years after a diving accident at the age of 19. Steven could not breathe on his own and used a ventilator for almost a year after his accident before he became only the second person in Canada to have a phrenic nerve pacer implanted in his chest. The pacer allowed him to speak freely again and become much more mobile.

Steven lived in a neurological intensive care unit of the hospital for almost two years before being accepted at West Park rehab hospitals. While more suitable than the ICU, West Park was still an institution and not a real home. After almost five years of living in West Park, Steven found an apartment at Humberview co-op on

Weston Road in Toronto, where he lived for 17 years. Steven's desire to live in the community was not answered for seven years. If you take the cost for that one individual, that is approximately \$7 million for seven years—\$1 million a year.

Our recommendation is to develop a community-based, province-wide respiratory outreach program. We are requesting resources to work with experts in Ontario already in place to develop and implement a province-wide, community-based respiratory outreach program that is evidence-based and provides a higher quality of life for people who require assistance with breathing and that would be at a significantly lower cost.

According to Ministry of Health statistics, we can save the government millions—\$5 million, at minimum—a year by developing the service and providing the ability for Ontarians to live at home in their community of choice. I would like to add, although I do say a five-year minimum, we are taking into account that there are also patients with a high level of respiratory need kept in ICU because of inadequate community-based programs. So we're talking about \$1 million a year for those individuals in the ICU. We ask the opportunity for these people to live a full, healthy life, go to school, get gainful employment and no longer be forced to be dependent, but to be independent.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Blair, thanks very much for coming today and for making this presentation. I have a few questions, but the first is, if the savings are that apparent—five million bucks, that's a fair amount of money—why hasn't there been action on this? Do you have a theory?

Mr. Blair Watson: Everyone has a theory, I would say. I can't answer that question as I'm not a political expert. I don't know what budgets are involved. I know that programs have been introduced similarly and have not gone to fruition.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. So you're giving this fairly substantial dollar savings. That's already been identified in a report not by your organization but by others. What are the elements and the difference between hospital and community care that allow for such a substantial financial savings?

Mr. Blair Watson: I will fall to the fact that I am not an expert in this field. I will tell you that we have many experts in place, as I said, who are perfectly willing to meet with you at a future time and explain all this. We have people from West Park health sciences, we have Toronto East General—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Oh, yes.

Mr. Blair Watson: —which are both recognized centres of excellence. We also have Dr. Doug McKim—I apologize for not pronouncing that properly—who is a lead respirologist in Ontario and he is currently working on best practices for the entire country. We have many more people who are very much interested in seeing this community-based program get off the ground.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: You identify 27 people here and as I skim through the report, that number reflects an incomplete survey of all the hospitals in Ontario—just not everyone responded. What is the total size of this population that is currently using services that are more expensive than they would be if they were community-based?

Mr. Blair Watson: You mean a finite member?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes. Are we talking 1,000 people, are we talking 500, are we talking in the tens of thousands?

Mr. Blair Watson: I can't give you a figure. Like I said before, I'm not an expert in health statistics. There are substantial numbers out there, but I think the important thing to note is that one person who is stuck in ICU is \$1 million a year; seven people, \$7 million a year.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That's a very easy to grasp number.

Mr. Blair Watson: Yes, which is not necessary.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. And what previous lobbying efforts have you engaged in to try and bring about these changes?

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Mr. Blair Watson: The Ontario Solutions Alliance is a new organization funded by the Rick Hansen Institute. It has been in effect for about two years. This is one of our first initiatives to get going. As for history, I'm afraid that cannot be relied upon. I will say that these are issues that have been brought to us by many people.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

LONDON HEALTH COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the London Health Coalition to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation; there could be up to five minutes of questioning following that. I'd just ask you to identify yourselves for our recording Hansard; then you can begin.

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am Peter Bergmanis. I'm a co-chair of the London Health Coalition. To my left is Shirley Schuurman, another co-chair of the coalition. To my right is Mr. Jeff Hanks. We will all be co-presenting.

Ontario health spending is the second lowest in Canada. That is our primary message here. Tax cuts, not health care, are eating up the provincial budget. Public health care in Ontario and in Canada is founded upon principles of equity and compassion. Its goal—to remove financial barriers from care when people are in need—has led to greater equality and improved quality of life for millions of people. Despite endless restructuring and cutbacks to the scope of services covered, and in spite of a masterful propaganda campaign determined to topple confidence in public health care, support for the public medicare system remains strong amongst Ontarians and Canadians.

In Ontario, the provincial government commissioned a report in recent months from TD Economics on the sustainability of public health care. TD Economics is part of TD Bank Financial Group, linked to TD Bank and TD Securities Inc., investors in the Niagara privatized P3 hospital. TD Insurance sells private health insurance. It does not come as a surprise, then, that TD Economics chose to use the most extreme numbers in its forecast and promoted a range of health privatization options as so-called solutions.

TD's support of private health care is not a solution. It is not an add-on to the public health system. It is fundamentally incompatible with the principles of equity and universality in the Canada Health Act. It would drive up costs and undermine or dismantle efforts to create a health system that is organized to meet human need for care. Yet the TD framing for this has been built into the throne speech, last year's budget and factoids on government press releases. The government should not have enabled the release of the TD report. In the future, organizations that are tied to industries that benefit from privatization ought not to be given such a strategic opportunity to press for self-serving policy changes.

The language of "unsustainability" that the McGuinty government has been using regarding health care is dangerous and untrue. It does not befit a government that has run in two consecutive elections with support for public health care as a cornerstone of their election platform. This crisis rhetoric should stop, and the government should take immediate steps to restore Ontario's fiscal capacity because the budget choices that are being made now—choices to prioritize tax cuts over human need—carry with them significant human costs.

In fact, Ontario's spending on all government programs and services is low compared to other provinces and territories. We are third last, after Alberta and Saskatchewan, in total public spending on all programs and services as a percentage of gross domestic product.

In per person spending on all programs and services, Ontario is dead last. This means pressure on all social services that people need, from health care to social housing, education, environment and so on.

No wonder that health care looks like it's taking up a large proportion of the provincial budget. It is easy to appear as a big fish when the pond keeps getting smaller.

In terms of health spending, Ontario's spending per person is actually lower than almost all other jurisdictions in Canada, with the exception of Quebec.

While this government continues to support privatization and rationing of needed care, declaring that health care is eating up more of the provincial budget, what it fails to note is that the total budget has been decimated by more than a decade of massive wealth and income transfer, i.e., tax cuts, from the middle and lower class to the rich. And those tax cuts are continuing unabated along their destructive path, senselessly increasing provincial debt and needlessly reducing funding for health care and other vital public services.

Ms. Shirley Schuurman: I'd point out that there are statistics and graphs to back up these statements in this publication and other publications easily obtained.

Health care budget constraints have fallen on hospitals first. The provincial government has funded hospitals at less than the rate of inflation for three years consecutively. Therefore, hospitals had to restructure.

The MPPs claim there were vast increases in spending according to the provincial budget, but the global budgets on the operating budgets were actually increased by 2.6% in 2007-08, 2.1% the next year and 1.5% in 2009-10.

Ontario hospitals are the most underfunded in the nation and in the throes of massive restructuring. Much of it has been inadequately financed over the last 20 years. From 1981, when hospital spending comprised 52% of the budget, it has declined to now 37% of the provincial budget.

There is evidence that current hospital cuts are a false economy, resulting now in—and some will have their own personal experience with this—increased user fees, new transportation fees, new municipal ambulance costs, new restructuring costs and a burgeoning private consulting industry.

The evidence is now overwhelming that services and privatization of payments for former hospital services, such as chiropody and physiotherapy—there's more evidence that shows that current cuts are increasing Ontario's risk for poorer health outcomes, which will affect a person's health in their lifetime, and sometimes even death. In fact, evidence suggests that the greater the profit, the worse the outcomes. For example, for-profit facilities with the highest profit margin had significantly more regulatory inspection deficiencies than those in the next-lowest profit group.

Ontario has endless hospital restructuring, leading to shortages of in-patient beds, lack of continuity of care, cuts to needed clinics and care, long waits and cancelled surgeries. In the last two years, province-wide, up to 80% of hospitals have faced deficits. Cuts are affecting hospitals of every size. The requirements to eliminate deficits in the context of planned underfunding means that hospitals have announced layoffs for thousands of staff. You've heard of some of that on the news lately. St. Joe's laid off 39 to meet the demands of operational changes and avoid a deficit, being forced to reduce and cut core services. I was at the last LHIN board meeting and there was no mention of that layoff that happened at St. Joe's about a week or two later.

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: In layperson's terms, the consequences of inadequate hospital funding mean patients waiting in emergency departments overnight or even for days. Such situations have been widely reported at the London Health Sciences Centre. LHSC is facing bed shortages in all patient care areas, and the emergency departments at both University and Vic hospitals have reached critical capacity levels. So as to reduce planned activity and increase bed availability within LHSC, hospital administration is attempting to increase repatriation

of patients to regional hospitals, themselves under-resourced.

As a result of restructuring, St. Joseph's health centre was directed to downgrade its emergency department to an urgent care centre. Due to physician shortages, the centre has been forced to cut back hours of service and seek to contract the services of a for-profit purveyor of ER doctors in order to sustain urgent care at the hospitals.

Patients are being cared for in closets, hallways or inappropriate settings because of hospital overcrowding. Patients are being forced to travel from hospital to hospital to get access to care. Patients are forced out of hospital too early and without adequate care.

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Pain, diabetes, physio and occupational therapy clinics are closed. Because the province is not funding physiotherapy, at St. Joseph's Health Care the hospital is contemplating no longer providing the program on site.

Surgeries are cancelled, often at the last minute, causing pain, stress and hardship to patients. Operating room hours are cut back to meet budgetary demands. Infection rates are higher and hospitals are dirtier because there are fewer housekeepers.

Women's services, like mammography and breast cancer screening, are closed. Patients are forced to travel greater distances for care. Patients are threatened with high room charges if they do not move out to a long-term-care home that is not of their choosing.

There is increased fear that care won't be there when people need it.

There are new costs for restructuring, patient transfers, EMS and severance.

There are high rates of antibiotic-resistant organisms in hospitals, and nosocomial infections. Increased morbidity and mortality: 2,100 nurses have lost their jobs in the last year in Ontario, and studies have demonstrated better outcomes with more nursing staff. The workforce is casualized, and licensed staff roles are reassigned to less qualified staff in order to save money.

The patients that are being moved out of hospital are also facing rationed and inadequate care in home care and long-term-care homes. The majority of Ontario's CCACs are in deficit or face severe staffing shortages, leading to rationing and wait lists for care. Home care is poorly organized, ad hoc and largely privatized. Long-term-care homes lack adequate care standards to provide for the heavier-care patients moved out of mental health facilities and hospitals.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about 30 seconds left, so perhaps if you move to your recommendations, the committee would benefit from that.

Mr. Jeff Hanks: Okay. The recommendations we make: We'd like to eliminate all the exemptions from the employer health tax. It would raise \$1.1 billion. Large profitable companies enjoy \$2.4 billion annually in wealth transfers from corporate income tax cuts alone. This revenue is lost to sustaining social programs like health care.

We recommend you:

- cancel the corporate tax cuts;
- eliminate employer health tax loopholes;
- restore hospital funding to, at minimum, meet hospital inflation and stop service cuts;
- measure and meet need for medically necessary services in all settings, including home care, long-term care, mental health care, palliative care, and restorative care;
- curb excessive administrative and executive costs in health care; and
- cancel competitive bidding, P3s and pay-for-performance hospital funding.

Please.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. Now the questioning will go to the government. Mr. Ramal.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you very much for coming today. Of course, I'm like you: I'm in great support of publicly funded health care accessible for all. Sometimes the numbers are deceiving. You mentioned a little bit about the language of sustainability. The Premier talks about this when he talks about health care. You don't agree with me that when you jump from \$30 billion in 2003 to \$47 billion in 2010 and maybe \$50 billion in the 2011 budget, and maybe if we continue to go the same way, it will be about 70% of our total budget, and wouldn't it be difficult for us as people living in Ontario to sustain that? You don't think this requires some kind of transformation in order to be able to deliver publicly funded health care accessible for all? That's the question.

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: I'll answer that, if I may. Thank you, Mr. Ramal. I think what you may have noted there is that it's all about priorities. These are all political decisions to be made. It isn't that there's a lack of money when you choose to do something. It's just the political decision where you want to put that money.

If the government chooses to continue down a path where they want to give away the revenue streams that provide for all these social programs such as health care—and that's what I'm talking about, these needless corporate tax cuts that don't really do much more other than line the pockets of wealthy individuals and corporations—then yes, you're going to continue to find that you're going to be pressed to try to fund these programs. What the health coalition is suggesting is that you have to cancel that if you hope to maintain and sustain the health care system.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: As you know, since 2002, we committed to publicly funded health care. My question is that always we have to find a way to deliver health care in a professional and efficient way.

Also, you mentioned at St. Joseph's 39 spots being cancelled. As you know, I was there at St. Joseph's. They closed 39 spots, but they hired 10 people. They're being closed not because they don't want to service the development, but because they lost beds as part of the transformation of health care. Some of the beds went to Kitchener and some of them went to St. Thomas. Therefore, the spots were not required anymore in the city of London, not because of a cut to health care.

Also, in terms of hospital funding: As part of our transformation we split the delivery of health care between hospitals and community care access centres, opened across the province of Ontario to deliver health care in a way that supports patients while they are sick and live in their homes. So this part of the numbers reflects those things.

I know we talked to you, and we talked to all your colleagues before, and you were in support of that, in order to maintain service and also support families being able to live in their homes and, in the meantime, receive the health care they need with respect and dignity. So you're not in support of that?

Mr. Peter Bergmanis: We're in support of it as long as it's in the community, and unfortunately, the evidence is suggesting that this is not properly being funded yet. Maybe these services are moving out of the hospital setting, but there's nothing in the community replacing it, and when it is being replaced it's actually being put out for a competitive bidding process where the public provider is now competing against a private, for-profit provider who undermines the integrity of the entire public system.

So that is our biggest concern. If it was really out there in the community, we wouldn't have the casualization of the workforce and we wouldn't have people being criminalized for being mentally ill.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Do I have time?

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): There's about a minute left.

Mr. Jeff Hanks: If I could just add a bit? Some \$90 billion is taken out of health care and social programs every year because of the tax cuts, so if you reinvested some of that money it would save lives, literally. It would improve outcomes. It just would have a tremendous impact when we're approaching a severe crisis right now.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: So if you look at the budget from—I'm not going to argue with this one. All the numbers have existed for many years, and you can go back to the budget and check it out. Our investment in health care has increased, from 2003 to 2010, by almost double. We're going to continue to invest in our health care, because we care about publicly funded health care in the province of Ontario.

Hopefully we'll continue to talk; I guess we don't have much time. Anyway—

Mr. Jeff Hanks: Actually, the numbers that we have say that it hasn't increased significantly as a per cent of GDP over the years. It's still maybe—I don't want to give a number, but it hasn't increased. It hasn't doubled, as you've said. I don't believe so.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: From \$30 billion to \$47 billion. Ask the opposition; you can get the number too. It's obvious. You can go to the back of the budget. Anyway, thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL,
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the University Students' Council at the University of Western Ontario to come forward. Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning coming from the official opposition in this round. I'd just ask you to identify yourselves before you begin, for our recording Hansard, and you may start.

Ms. Meaghan Coker: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. My name is Meaghan Coker, and I'm the vice-president, university affairs, of the University Students' Council at the University of Western Ontario. With me—

Mr. Mike Tithecott: Sorry, the microphone wasn't working. I'm Mike Tithecott. I'm the president of the University Students' Council at the University of Western Ontario.

Ms. Meaghan Coker: I'm also the elected president of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, OUSA, and I'm here representing over 140,000 professional and undergraduate students at seven universities across Ontario.

I'd really like to thank the committee for having us here to speak to you today about the importance of investing in an accessible and high-quality post-secondary education system.

Last year, the government's Reaching Higher plan was one of the boldest investments in post-secondary education in a generation, and it has come to an end now. Over the past five years, \$6.2 billion were invested, allowing for unprecedented growth and the strengthening of our institutions.

Students have welcomed and appreciated the sincere commitment that this government has shown to post-secondary education, but there is a great deal left to do if we are to ensure Ontario's future competitiveness and prosperity. Guiding Ontario to robust economic growth will require government leadership on many fronts, but one key strategy for ensuring long-term success is to continue to invest in post-secondary education.

The provincial government's own Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress has, since its inception in 2001, recommended in every annual report that the government provide greater investments in post-secondary education. The recommendation isn't surprising considering the long-term benefits for the province.

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The Premier, with the full support of students, has set an ambitious goal of raising Ontarians' post-secondary attainment level to 70%. Accomplishing this will require that the government continue to build on its significant previous investments through budget 2011. For students, a renewed investment means commitments in three priority areas: one, ensuring access to higher education; secondly, adequately funding our institutions; and thirdly, promoting student success.

While significant investments are required to improve higher education in Ontario, students understand the government's fiscal situation. Our recommendations focus on ways to realize the greatest improvement possible at the lowest cost to government.

Mr. Mike Tithecott: Students' first priority is to ensure the accessibility of higher education through targeted improvements to student financial aid.

Students applauded last year's budget for its improvements to the Ontario student assistance program that allowed students to keep more of their employment earnings, increased loan limits and made it easier for students to repay their loans.

With such recent investments in mind, it is particularly important to re-evaluate spending. Students recommend reallocating money from a program that currently does little to nothing to improve access to post-secondary education but is the government's single greatest expenditure in student financial assistance. This program is education tax credits.

Last year, the Ontario government spent \$330 million on education and tuition tax credits. However, these tax credits do not equally benefit students. In fact, students in the high-income quartile claim nearly four times more on average than students from the low-income quartile. This is an unfortunate reality that is pulling valuable and scarce resources away from those who need it the most and it is particularly disappointing when the participation gap between high-income students and low-income students continues to widen. Students also can only receive tax credits at the end of the year, many months after they need the funds.

In 2007, the Liberal platform recognized these concerns and promised to eliminate tuition tax credits and use the savings to increase upfront grants. Students welcomed this promise and are hoping to see it realized in the government's final budget before the next election.

Eliminating these tax credits next year would immediately free up hundreds of millions of dollars to reduce students' upfront costs and would become more available in the later years as deferred tax credits work their way through the system.

Some of the funds could be used to implement a tuition freeze, which would benefit all students across the province. The remaining funds could be used to lower the OSAP debt cap, which is currently sitting at \$7,300, to \$6,250, thereby capping student debt for a four-year degree at \$25,000.

Students believe that these initiatives would benefit far more families than tax credits currently do, and it could be done at no cost to the government if the tax credits are phased out.

Students would also like to see current assistance programs being extended to more students. Many middle-income families are struggling to make ends meet and therefore cannot fully support their child's post-secondary education. At a cost of \$60 million, the government could open up eligibility for OSAP to most

middle-income families by changing the parental contribution formula that currently shuts out too many families.

Finally, Ontario access grants, which act as a tuition rebate for low-income students, are only available in the first and second years of study. This leaves many upper-year students burdened with increased debt loads. Students ask that the eligibility for the access grants be extended to all years of undergraduate study at an estimated cost of \$37 million.

Ms. Meaghan Coker: Students' second priority is to see a strong, new five-year plan for post-secondary education.

Students were encouraged when the government announced the Open Ontario plan that would include a five-year plan to improve the quality of Ontario's post-secondary education system. Students are hoping the new five-year plan continues to prioritize higher education.

Students strongly believe that the foundation of our university funding model must be fairness. Students recognize that they should contribute financially to their education, but the government also has a responsibility to adequately fund the system.

The Ontario government still spends far less than other provinces and peer jurisdictions on post-secondary education. Even after Reaching Higher, our province still ranks last in funding in Canada on a per student basis. What's more, tuition has continued to increase over the past six years, giving Ontario the dubious distinction of having the highest tuition in Canada. At many of our public institutions, students now contribute more to the operating budgets than the government.

We understand that there are many cost pressures on the government and that continued growth in our colleges and universities will further strain the budget. Students also stand with the government in calling on our institutions to better control their costs, so that new investments can go into quality improvements and not simply be consumed by inflation.

That is why we urge the government to commit to a new five-year plan that does three things: first, plan to fund the expected growth of 50,000 new university students; second, demonstrate progress toward a more fair cost-sharing model by further restricting tuition increases when the tuition framework expires next year in April 2012; and third, commit targeted funds to specific quality improvements. To accomplish this, the students of Ontario are asking the government to add \$300 million to universities' operating budgets in each of the next five years.

Finally, students' third priority is to see the government directly fund initiatives to improve student success and the quality of the learning environment. We are not asking for more government money but to have any new funding that is committed to universities be tied to specific programs for the student experience.

Currently, university instructors are not required to be formally trained as teachers, even though they will spend countless hours in the classroom. High school teachers are expected to complete a full degree in education, yet

university instructors can teach without any prior experience. Students believe that this is one of the most important changes that must take place to improve quality.

Jurisdictions around the world are stepping up their efforts to train professors. Ontario cannot afford to simply hand out the most degrees, but must have the best and the brightest workforce. By targeting \$10 million of future funding increases to the development of a training program for all new faculty and teaching assistants, the government would be sending a profound signal that the status quo is no longer good enough.

Students would also like to see the government create Ontario teaching chairs, similar to the Ontario research chairs created in 2005. The balance between teaching and research is skewed at too many of our universities. Professors are rewarded primarily for their research accomplishments, while having no incentives to improve in the classroom. By creating teaching chairs, the government would demonstrate that focusing on teaching is a public priority and that our best teachers must be recognized.

Finally, students would like to see a portion of new funding targeted to support services such as mental health services, academic advising, career guidance and special support for students with disabilities. These services are a proven way to raise graduation rates, which saves government resources. Unfortunately, university support services are always the first to be cut when budgets get tight. By directly funding support services, possibly through a program in which institutions must match government funding with their own resources, the government would ensure that these vital services are protected and strengthened.

While the Reaching Higher plan has expired, it is crucial that further steps are taken to improve the accessibility, quality and overall financial health of our institutions. Now is not the time to curb investment in post-secondary education and risk undermining the progress that has been made. New and equally ambitious goals must be set for the next five years for our next generational cohort.

As was recognized in 2005 in the government's initial announcement of Reaching Higher, "an investment in postsecondary education today is an investment in jobs tomorrow. But education is more than an economic imperative. It is the measure of our commitment to opportunity—it's the foundation of an engaged citizenry and a strong democracy." And students couldn't agree more.

I'd like to thank the committee again for their time and we welcome your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the official opposition. Ms. Witmer.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Thank you very much for your presentation. As a proud graduate of the University of Western Ontario, you've certainly done that institution proud.

I'd like to, first of all, agree with you that I think it is extremely important that we do see a new five-year plan. I think at this point, when we've gone through certainly a lot of global upheaval and we all recognize that we have to make sure that more and more of our population receives post-secondary education, it figures very large in whatever happens, so I would certainly support you there. I certainly agree with many of the suggestions that you've made regarding access to higher education.

Basically, I've been meeting with students; I have Waterloo and Laurier in my backyard, so I do know that they have proposals as well, but you really would like to see the money going to the students at the start of the term, as opposed to the end of the term. What kind of hardships are created with the system today that you see?
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Ms. Meaghan Coker: Currently the education tax credit system is benefiting students at the end of the year and not at the beginning of the year when we have our tuition and our books costs. There are also further complications because some of these tuition and education tax credits are not going to be available until they've built up enough, until after they've graduated, so it's not even benefiting students sometimes during their educational term.

What we have recognized is that since this is the single greatest investment that the government is making in student financial assistance, this \$330 million could be spent much better. Currently, it's a regressive program because it's benefiting those who don't need it. Those with higher incomes are able to get much more. They're able to have a deduction of \$2,000, where low-income families get \$520. To be able to turn that into something that's much more progressive, to be able to assist those, we think that bringing this into an up-front grant system is one option. However, being able to transfer some of that money through a period of time, you would be able to institute a tuition freeze and also to lower the cap on the Ontario student opportunity grant, capping tuition, or being able to lower the parental contribution levels. We should really assist middle-income and low-income families.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer: Really, that's where our focus needs to be: on the low-income families and students in order that they can participate fully and not have that stress hanging over their heads. So we need to review the funding and make sure that we can provide the access to students.

The one point you talked about is an issue that we've been talking about, and that is the need to make sure that those who are teaching are better equipped to teach. My colleague sitting beside me, Mr. Toby Barrett, heard you last year, and he did introduce, as one of the motions last year, that we would take some steps that would increase the quality of the teaching and fund some pilot projects in order to make sure that that could happen. So we certainly strongly support you that there is a need to take some action. In fact, when I've talked to professors, they've agreed that this is probably something that needs

to happen today because it is having an impact on student outcomes and student achievement. How would you see that happening? How much instruction do you think teachers need?

Ms. Meaghan Coker: I think that's a really interesting point. We certainly appreciate the support that we received last year on this initiative.

What we realize is that the teachers are in control in the classroom and they dramatically affect the learning environment for the students. Being able to better equip our professors and our instructors with the skills and tools to be able to move our classrooms from this passive learning style to something that is a more active learning style, which research shows is much more beneficial for everyone in the classroom, is something that needs work. Our teachers need to be taught how to develop their skills. Being able to direct some of the money that's already currently being invested into our universities is what we're asking. These are priorities that we want the government to be able to take on and to fulfill. It would be directly funding this and targeting it, and that's how we think it would be most effective.

Students fully support any changes to improve the quality within their classrooms.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

CANADIAN DEAFBLIND ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Canadian Deafblind Association to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning coming from Mr. Tabuns of the NDP in this round. Please state your names before you begin.

Ms. Cathy Proll: Good afternoon. My name is Cathy Proll. I'm the executive director of the Canadian Deafblind Association Ontario chapter. Sitting to my right is Heather Cooke, who will be providing intervenor services to Julia Seed, who will be part of the presentation this morning, and to her right is her mother, Linda Hase.

Ms. Julia Seed: Good afternoon. My name is Julia Seed. I am 29 years old and have been deaf-blind since I was eight years old.

Deaf-blindness can best be described as a combined loss of both vision and hearing. This means that my vision and hearing are so limited that I cannot use either sense to gain information and to communicate with the people around me. I rely on an intervenor to provide me with information that I cannot get on my own.

The intervenors I use have specialized training to communicate with me using a tactile method. Throughout Cathy's presentation the intervenor is communicating to me everything that is being said and telling me everything that is happening in the room.

With the services of an intervenor, I am able to live a life just like you. While growing up I was provided with

an intervenor in my school setting. That allowed me to successfully complete my education.

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Currently my work is of a volunteer nature. With the services of an intervenor, I have been able to support the Canadian Council of the Blind and am presently supporting the Canadian Cancer Society.

Thanks to intervenor services, I am able to live a life of meaning. I have friends, I have dreams, and I have goals.

Ms. Cathy Proll: In a demographic study conducted in 2004 to determine the number of Canadians who are deaf-blind, it was estimated that in Ontario alone there were approximately 1,500 people. Due to the isolation of people who are deaf-blind and the significant communication challenges, it was concluded that this number is likely an underestimate, and the number of people who are deaf-blind can more accurately be determined to be closer to 2,800 people.

Intervenor services are a vital service to people who are deaf-blind. The Ministry of Community and Social Services is the ministry responsible for providing funding to transfer payment agencies to deliver this service. Operating under the principles of equitable access to services, assessed need, and within available resources, MCSS has been working with stakeholders to transform intervenor services.

The results of the transformation activities have been shared with the sector in terms of a new funding model. While the new funding formula does address equity and assessed need, it is clear that more funding is required to support this very vulnerable population. While there may be opportunities for efficiencies within the sector, this will not address the real problem. There is not enough funding in intervenor services to maintain service levels or address the demands of new people entering the system. The real problem can only be addressed by additional dollars.

Without additional funding, there will be significant reduction in services, and wait-lists will be inevitable. For people who are deaf-blind, there will be a devastating decrease in their quality of life. There will be an increase in mental health issues. Isolation will be a significant factor, as many people will be limited to their homes and they will not be able to keep their jobs or continue their education. Opportunities to socialize or participate in recreation will not exist. The ability to access information will be compromised. This will result in an inability to give informed consent or make informed decisions. They will also experience a loss of control over their lives. Their choices will be restricted or limited. Families will suffer increased pressures. This will result in a breakdown of marriages and parent-child relationships.

For those Ontarians who are deaf-blind and living in residential supports, it is likely that they may be required to leave their homes and be forced to live with others whom they may or may not wish to. Their homes will become institutions. Without adequate intervenor services, communication issues will escalate and, in some

situations, lead to aggressive and challenging behaviours. This will lead to safety issues not only for the individual who is deaf-blind but for the limited staff trying to provide these services.

The reality of the new funding model remains that Ontarians who are deaf-blind will not experience a quality of life like you or I, nor will they live lives of meaning.

It is the sincere hope of this sector that the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Community and Social Services will engage in a discussion that will lead to additional funds being allocated to this very vital service. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you, and we'll now go to Mr. Tabuns of the NDP.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'd like to thank all of you for coming in this morning. If the intervenor could say directly to Julia from me, I really appreciated her making the presentation that she made.

Ms. Julia Seed: No problem.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The case you make is a very strong case. I have some questions. What sort of funds are we talking about to actually ensure that the intervenor services are there that would deal with the problem so that people who needed the services received the services?

Ms. Cathy Proll: It is my understanding that approximately 10 million new dollars needs to be allocated to this sector, and that is to not only sustain the current services but also to assist new people who will be entering the sector.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: And what's the total expenditure in Ontario today?

Ms. Cathy Proll: I believe the total expenditure today is between \$18 million and \$25 million. I'm not sure exactly.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. I note in here, and I've heard reference to this before, that there's a new funding model that's being brought forward. My assumption is that models were being brought forward because there were problems identified before and there was an attempt to address them. But from what you're saying, it doesn't matter how the model is shaped; if there aren't enough dollars, then it won't fly.

Ms. Cathy Proll: It would be very difficult to half serve a population because it's all about access to information and communication. So if I could speak to the Canadian Deafblind Association, our Ontario chapter, the funding models are such that we would be looking at between a 40% to 60% reduction in services.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Sorry; for some reason I don't understand that. The total amount of money that's being allocated is staying the same?

Ms. Cathy Proll: The total money is currently staying the same. My understanding is that no funding is being removed from the sector, but it's being reallocated within MCSS, within the intervenor services sector. What we're suggesting is that we need new funding to come into the sector. As I mentioned, it's estimated that there are 2,800

Ontarians who are deaf-blind in this province. Currently, MCSS provides services to approximately 310 people.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My. When you presented this to MCSS, what has been their response?

Ms. Cathy Proll: I think while they've tried very hard to certainly understand the issues of the sector and understand the disability of deaf-blindness and also the role of the intervenor, the bottom line is "within available resources," and this problem cannot be fixed without additional funding.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: From what you've said, there are many, many people who are not now getting any service.

Ms. Cathy Proll: Correct.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: What happens to them now? What kind of lives do they lead and in what circumstances?

Ms. Cathy Proll: They would be incredibly isolated. Most of them probably don't leave their homes. Some of them may rely on family to provide them with some limited supports. Certainly there are mental health issues, which in itself is a challenge because our mental health system is not set up to support people who have severe communication challenges.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I don't think I have other questions, but do you have anything else you want to say to us before you wrap up?

Ms. Cathy Proll: I really believe that this is one of the most incredibly vulnerable populations that we support. Not only can they not see and they can't hear, but safety remains an issue for this population. So it is our sincere hope that the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Community and Social Services can work together to help with this problem.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you. I really appreciate you coming in today and presenting so well.

Ms. Cathy Proll: Thank you very much for the opportunity to present.

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS' FEDERATION,
THAMES VALLEY

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Thames Valley, to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning; in this round, it will come from the government side. I'd just ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Ms. Colleen Canon: Good afternoon. My name is Colleen Canon. I'm president of District 11, OSSTF. I'm also a 25-year classroom teacher.

Mr. Blair Middleton: Good afternoon. I'm Blair Middleton. I'm district VP, OSSTF/FEESO, and currently I'm the science department chair and classroom teacher for Lord Dorchester Secondary School here in Thames Valley.

Ms. Evelyn Daley: My name is Evelyn Daley. I'm a federation services officer with District 11, OSSTF, and I

just recently started that job in September. I've been in the classroom for 23 years.

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Ms. Colleen Canon: We appreciate this opportunity to express our views and make some specific suggestions as the government charts its course of action for the upcoming fiscal year.

Our intent in making this presentation today is to provide a Thames Valley submission using local examples. Our provincial OSSTF organization is providing a written submission to this committee that will be a compilation of concerns expressed by our some 60,000 members across this province.

First, I'll tell you who we are. We represent 2,300 OSSTF members locally in four bargaining units: 1,800 of our members are secondary teachers; approximately 300 of them are occasional teachers; another 100 are adult ed. instructors who deliver ESL and adult literacy; and 100 are professional student services personnel, who are social workers, attendance counsellors, psychologists and speech pathologists. We represent a broad geographical area spanning four counties, including Woodstock and Ingersoll to the east, St. Thomas to the south, Strathroy and West Lorne to the west, and Parkhill and Arva to the north. Half of our 28 high schools are within the city of London and we are a mix of urban and rural schools.

Locally, we have been involved in an ongoing dialogue with our area MPPs on publicly funded education, which has been a priority of this government. It is clear to us that finances will be limited in the future as Ontario recovers from a significant economic downturn. Nevertheless, we maintain that funding applied to education should be considered an investment in Ontario's future, with huge returns in the years ahead.

Education, as we all know, is the cornerstone of our society. Funding for public education needs to be a provincial priority to create a strong and competitive workforce for Ontario's future.

Ms. Evelyn Daley: OSSTF believes that the funding formula which generates school board funding must be reviewed, as was promised in 2007. Locally, the funding formula simply does not work for us as we are a mix of rural and urban schools. We have just lived through one school closure in Norwich, and area accommodation reviews are ongoing.

As is the case elsewhere in Ontario, here in Thames Valley we are living through an era of declining enrolment. We would urge you to avoid the obvious answer to declining enrolment by limiting revenue on a per student basis. We advocate flexibility in funding to provide a sound education for all of our students. Student distribution and school configuration in our very large geographical area demand funding flexibility.

Here in Thames Valley, schools are the hub of the community. In a small community such as Glencoe they are the centre of community life. Often, the economic viability of the area is directly reliant on the existence of the school. We would advocate for the broader use of

school facilities in the form of partnerships with municipalities for meeting rooms, sports facilities, fields etc. This would mean less duplication and maximum utilization of existing assets.

One local example is Lorne Avenue Public School in London, which is located in a needy area of the city. As well as serving as an elementary school, it houses adult ESL classes in the evening and summer school, and it is a true community hub as it serves its community in a broader way. It is a convenient service delivery point for school-aged children and their families.

Current funding for adult education is a fraction of what is provided for students under 21. Locally, we have seen huge job losses in the St. Thomas area due to the loss of manufacturing jobs. Adult enrolment for education has spiked, but the lack of facilities has made it impossible to serve their needs adequately. We believe in creative solutions such as mixed-model programs that would pair adult learners with at-risk students under 21 in job-focused, skill-focused programs such as our new high-skill majors programs. Strong adult ed. programs would help return unemployed adults to the workplace faster.

The London area also has a vast population of newcomers to Canada in need of English-as-a-second-language classes. We lack the facilities to meet their needs. Adequate funding levels would help to get new Canadians into the workforce sooner.

Mr. Blair Middleton: The student success agenda has created an abundance of government initiatives and pilot projects. Sometimes, funding is a one-time “money bomb” which may provide additional teachers for a limited time. We would like to see a more timely analysis of funding for government initiatives, and a review before further implementation of costly new initiatives is undertaken. Some of these initiatives include school improvement plans, growing success, school effectiveness frameworks, differentiated instruction, and credit recovery, to name a few.

Student success initiatives locally have meant underfunding for the classroom, where we need the funding the most. Student achievement is measured by credit accumulation and current funding is capped at 7.5 credits per student. With many new credit recovery programs, dual credit classes and co-operative education classes, students are now able to achieve more credits within a school day than ever before. The real cost of all these extra credits is teacher cost in terms of staffing. The lack of funding impacts class size.

Funding for special education programs is critical to integrate and support high-needs students in schools and also provide specialized classrooms for these students. A base level of funding must be provided that is protected from the impact of declining enrolment. High-needs students require services individualized to them. Our support services, such as social workers and psychologists, must be funded based on the actual cost of their salaries. Funding from other government agencies and

ministries to support these programs must be routed through our school boards.

Our neediest students need resources and staff, such as social workers and psychologists, working with them. We need more support staff and professional student services personnel to help our students suffering from mental health concerns. These students are not just in special education, but many are integrated into regular classrooms. We have many students who have mental health needs that are not being met. Access to school board professionals specialized in these areas is essential if they are to achieve their full potential.

Finally, we see class size for students at risk as a priority. There must be allowances for smaller classes to help these students to succeed. Also, co-op and technical education programs and facilities must be expanded for all students to be successful.

Thank you for this opportunity today and we are happy to take your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you very much for the presentation. The questioning goes to the government side. Ms. Pendergast.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Thank you, Blair, Colleen and Evelyn, for being here. We appreciate your presentation and the time that you took today. It’s an ongoing struggle we have. I was a secondary school teacher for 22 years and a high school vice-principal as well, so I certainly understand what you’re saying and the daily struggles. I thank you for what you do in the classroom and in Thames Valley.

I was a member of OSSTF, District 24, for a long, long time before recently being elected. I hear everything you’re saying and I share your concerns, absolutely. I want to assure you, first and foremost, that education is a priority of this government. I have three sons—and I’ll make this story short—but the reason I decided to run for election three years ago was because I didn’t want to live through a time again where we had labour unrest and students were out of school and we had cuts to essential services and education and health care in this province.

The first question I’m going to put out there—because I really need an answer—is how do we avoid going back? How do we ensure that that never happens to our students in the province of Ontario again?

Ms. Colleen Canon: By maintaining the kind of healthy and open dialogue that we’ve had. We had provincial discussion tables in the last round of bargaining. We have one more year left in our collective agreement. I think that smarter folk than me will be sitting at those tables, and we just hope that that kind of healthy respect and dialogue continues.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: When you talk about community use of schools—we now have a community use of schools program at no charge, opening schools to the community—that’s also been a large struggle and I commend Thames Valley. I worked with Thames Valley in a community partnership initiative, where we went to the schools. To open the doors, as you know, in schools has been a silo. I was formerly the PA to education and

my colleague here, Kevin Flynn, is currently the PA to education, so we understand the importance of partnerships.

I wanted to jump to what you were saying at the end, Blair, about the idea of social workers, psychologists and that whole support system. What is a local example? Do you have any local examples in the Thames Valley of what you're doing to partner with agencies, groups and community partnerships to engage with social workers and psychologists? I know that it is a struggle.

Mr. Blair Middleton: I'll let Colleen answer just because—

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: Sure.

Ms. Colleen Canon: Gosh, I would say that we prefer—because we're OSSTF and we represent those folks—that social workers and psychologists and all those folks in the school be our members. So in general, to be perfectly honest, we're not in favour of partnerships so much as we are the educational team.

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In some areas of the province, OSSTF is also your EAs, your office clerical, your custodians. We believe that we provide those, and we would like to see funding for more of those fantastic folks.

The three of us are classroom teachers, but I'm telling you that having those social workers, psychologists and attendance counsellors and all those folks with us in partnership makes a tremendous difference. I don't think that we are equipped, often, to meet the needs of those students in our classes. As Blair said, they're all integrated now. The classroom has changed dramatically—Blair could speak to that better than I can, I think—and quite often, students come with EAs and have very high needs.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: So you're saying that they're not currently in District 11?

Ms. Colleen Canon: Oh, they are. But when you said "partnerships," we wish that there were more of them that were our members. We'd like to see more social workers, more psychologists, more attendance counsellors. We would like the funding to be there for them. We understand the money might not flow through the Ministry of Education. If the money flows through other agencies or ministries, we'd still like it to come to our board to be able to hire those folks so they're board employees.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: That partnership may get another level—at a ministerial level, as well as a local level—so we'll be able to provide the services in times of global fiscal restraint and not go back to times when we walked the picket line.

Ms. Colleen Canon: Yes.

Ms. Leeanna Pendergast: That's a tough challenge. Thank you for representing that and being here today.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Would the University of Western Ontario come forward, please? Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be up to five minutes of questioning coming from the official opposition. I'd ask you to state your name before you begin.

Dr. Amit Chakma: Good afternoon. My name is Amit Chakma. I'm the president and vice-chancellor of the University of Western Ontario.

I'd like to touch on three areas during our presentation to this committee today. The first topic I would like to discuss is how Ontario, more than any other jurisdiction, has done a remarkable job of creating an accessible and affordable post-secondary education system.

We all know that the system at both universities and colleges has continued to grow by record numbers over the past decade. A post-secondary education is an invaluable tool for Ontarians, and Western's primary business is in training and preparing the next generation of global leaders, entrepreneurs, highly skilled scientists and engineers and other professionals, health care practitioners and providers, and the creative minds needed for the economy to prosper.

Government, individual student and family investments in attaining a post-secondary education result in one of the highest rates of return of any investment they can make.

Let me clearly state here that the combination of the Ontario student assistance program, scholarships and bursaries, and institutional financial aid—that is, aid provided by institutions such as Western—has allowed an Ontario post-secondary education to continue to be affordable.

Ontario already boasts the highest level of post-secondary attainment in the OECD. As the system continues to grow and Ontario moves toward its goal of having 70% of the population attain a post-secondary credential, resources must be made available to ensure that the quality of our programs does not diminish.

We have made great progress in the last decade in the quality of the education Ontario students now receive in our universities. In the package we have circulated, just a few of the improvements at Western are highlighted. I urge you to consider what additional resources are necessary to allow us to continue these improvements to accelerate Ontario's system's standing as a global leader.

In order to continue providing a quality education to Ontario's knowledge workforce, we must, at a minimum, ensure that every new qualified student admitted to the system is fully funded. My recommendation to this committee is to urge the government to continue to make investments into student aid as a whole and to continue promoting a student access guarantee so that no qualified student is left behind.

As you can see in the package, at Western we are proud of the fact that we now have more than 40% of our students graduating debt-free from our undergraduate

programs. As I have already stated, we must continue to ensure that adequate financial aid resources continue to be available to those students who require them.

Let me now move to the second area I'd like to address, and that is the economic impact of universities in the local, regional and provincial economy. As I have already mentioned, our primary business is educating and training a knowledge workforce. However, we also are in the business of knowledge creation through the work of our faculty, researchers, graduate students and, increasingly, undergraduate students. Universities are working hard to ensure that we are able to transfer this knowledge. Whether it is a scientific discovery, a technological innovation, best practices or better public policy, we are continuing to try to move this information out to the broader community, industry and government partners. In London, we have been successful in bringing together collaborations with these partners which will help attract investment and create jobs.

One example is the new Advanced Manufacturing Park, a partnership between Western, Fanshawe College, the city of London and industry. This new park is located near the 401 and the London International Airport. It will soon be home to the world's leading wind engineering and composite research facilities. In collaboration with Western researchers, this initiative will act as a magnet for industrial investment in areas such as automotive and aerospace manufacturing and green technology development and manufacturing. Already, we have been able to form a partnership with Germany's Fraunhofer society to bring their experience and industrial collaborations to these new London ventures.

Western is also moving forward with a regional partnership around the development of new water technologies. This partnership includes local municipalities, universities and industrial partners, who are competing in the growing global market of water systems and technology.

I would urge this committee to recommend to the government of Ontario to find a way to invest in these types of collaborations going forward, in order to leverage the potential of our provincial expertise into global leadership in these emerging markets.

Finally, Mr. Chair, the third area I'd like to highlight, which I speak to from both personal experience and Western's aspirations to be globally recognized as a leading university, is the need for Ontario to continue to develop and embrace internationalization as an important cultural and economic tool in our efforts to put our province at the forefront of the global economy. Western strongly supports programs which support our efforts to attract international faculty and students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. We have already seen the recent success of the federal CERC program, which allowed Western to attract a global leader in neuroscience research from the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. This made headlines in Canada and the UK. This was made possible not only by the federal research program, but also through the investment of the

Ontario government into Western's educational and research infrastructure programs, in this case our Robarts Research Institute's medical research magnets.

Through these investments in education and in research infrastructure, we are able to attract the best and brightest to Ontario to work with our own home-grown talent, and I have no doubt that they will make impacts which will be felt around the world.

I must compliment the investment the government made into the 1,000 new scholarships through the Ontario graduate scholarship program. This is helping domestic students achieve their potential in the 14,000 new graduate positions funded through the Reaching Higher plan. But we must also be an open province, and I encourage this committee to recommend further investment into programs which make it easier for students to come to Canada and to Ontario to study.

I would again like to compliment the federal government for its investment in the Vanier scholarships and the Ontario government for the creation of the Trillium scholarships for international graduate students. These globally recognized scholarships will help us attract the best and the brightest to work with Ontario's best and brightest students.

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Another example of an investment I would encourage this committee to consider, which has been put forward by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, would be to allow undergraduate students access to our OHIP system while they are studying in our institutions. This would eliminate one of the financial barriers to attending institutions of higher learning in Ontario.

The quality of Ontario students' experience at university will be enhanced by exposure to and interaction with citizens of the world. This will, in fact, allow all students to be more prepared for the global leadership positions we need them to achieve, regardless of their fields of study.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I'll be happy to answer any questions.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning: Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for coming in and making a presentation today. An earlier group that was here this afternoon was the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. One of their recommendations specifically was to target a portion of future increases in university operating funding to the development of a training program at each university that would give instruction in pedagogical methods and practices to all new faculty and teaching assistants, I think the idea being to improve the quality of in-classroom teaching. Is that something that you support or agree with?

Dr. Amit Chakma: In spirit, I support the notion. However, in terms of specific allocation of resources, I believe that any time we create too many pots, we create inefficiency. So I would support it in terms of encouragement, in terms of policy objectives that government may

outline—that teaching is important—and leave it to the institutions to decide how that can be achieved.

Mr. Norm Miller: So when the money flows into too many individual pots with too many restrictions, it's inefficient?

Dr. Amit Chakma: When we have limited resources, as we do now, the moment we create too many pots, then we get into division: Who gets what? By the time that small pot is allocated, effectively, it loses its effectiveness because we have reduced it to such a level that not many meaningful objectives can be achieved.

Mr. Norm Miller: You talked a bit about student debt. I believe you said that more students are graduating with less debt. Why do you think that's the situation? Having said that, I have four kids that all went to university and all graduated with no debt, so they're in that part of the equation. Are more students accessing OSAP or student aid?

Dr. Amit Chakma: Two major developments are taking place over the last two decades—if not two decades, over 15 years. Number one is that we provide more funding through OSAP. Some of the recent changes we have made to OSAP are welcome, and they certainly help. The second one is that we are now setting aside a portion of our tuition fee revenue to support needy students. That pot has grown into a significant chunk. In our case, this is probably north of \$12 million. A third element is that many of us have been successful in creating scholarships from fundraising. It's a combination of those plus summer programs. In the case of some institutions, internship and co-op programs have certainly helped.

Mr. Norm Miller: I have more questions, but I think Toby wants to ask some questions, so I'll pass it on to him.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you for presenting. Good to see Rob Esselment here as well. He keeps several of us informed of what's going on at Western.

One chart on retention rates shows that 91% of first-year students continue to their second year. How difficult is it for first-year students at Western to transfer to another university? Do they lose their credits? By the same token, how many students would you attract into your second year because they want to get a program at Western they can't get at their home university or maybe they've had to move or something?

Dr. Amit Chakma: We have successes in certain areas. When you are thinking of transfer, there are two aspects. If it is just a credit transfer, that's easy, relatively speaking. We do recognize each other's credits. There's no issue with that. Where the problem arises is the prerequisites. If you take a BA program at Western and you're trying to transfer into a bachelor of science program, not all courses will match up. That will be true from institution to institution. So in terms of general credit transfer, it's not a big issue. In terms of specific program requirements, potentially, there is a gap.

How many students do we take? I don't have a global number for Western, but I do know that we have

designed one program, which is one of our signature programs. It is the so-called HBA program, honours business administration program. There, about 15% to 17% of our students come from other universities, but this is one of the signature programs that is highly competitive. Nevertheless, we take 15% to 17% from other institutions.

Mr. Toby Barrett: As far as the teaching ability of professors, when you're hiring new professors or associates, is there any requirement that they have any experience in teaching or any requirement that they have any training in teaching?

Dr. Amit Chakma: They normally do not have formal training. Universities are introducing some of those teaching options now, but what we do is subject them to either giving a seminar or teaching a course. So we do test their capacity to teach in the classroom. Then, once they come here—this would be true with many institutions; it's certainly true for Western—we have a teaching centre that provides them with that help. And at the end of the day, we provide one-to-one mentorship with senior faculty.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation.

DIETITIANS OF CANADA

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on Dietitians of Canada to come forward. Good afternoon. I note that you've been sitting there, but I feel compelled to tell you that you have 10 minutes, and five minutes of questioning will come from the NDP, if they choose to use that much time. Just introduce yourself, and you can start.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Great. Thank you very much. My name is Leslie Whittington-Carter and I'm the Ontario government relations coordinator for Dietitians of Canada. We are the professional association that represents registered dietitians across Canada. We have about 3,000 members here in Ontario and around 6,000 across the country. Our vision is advancing health through food and nutrition and we accomplish this by providing nutrition information to Canadians, advising governments at all levels on best practices in nutrition, and providing our input into government policies at all levels. I appreciate the opportunity to present our recommendations to you today.

It's our goal to improve the health of Ontarians through cost-effective health promotion and health care service delivery. In the package you've been given, you'll see that we've made a number of recommendations. We think that these will address the health issues prominent in our population, such as diabetes, obesity and other chronic conditions. The underlying theme of all of these recommendations is access—access to professional nutrition advice, access to registered dietitians and access to healthy food for all Ontarians.

First of all, to let you know, dietitians are the most trusted source of nutrition information, according to an Ipsos Reid consumer survey: Over 93% of consumers believe that nutrition information coming from dietitians is the most reliable and credible. That's with good reason, because dietitians have to complete a rigorous education and practical training and maintain requirements of the College of Dietitians of Ontario. Our recommendations are aligned with DC's commitment to ethical and evidence-based practice.

First of all, in order to increase access or support access to registered dietitians, we need to correct the current shortage. Over the past few years, I've made this same recommendation to this committee, and I want to tell you how much I appreciate the fact that a couple of years ago, in the report, that recommendation did make one of the final recommendations. Currently, there is a multi-stakeholder committee working on looking at different ways of dietetic education and practical training. We expect that that committee will be having their report of recommendations to the government within the year, and we would urge the government to act on those recommendations. I don't know what those will be specifically yet, but the committee is composed of education stakeholders and the profession as well as various government ministries, so I expect that they're looking very closely at different models of education and training.

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The second recommendation around access is to continue funding for the operation and promotion of the EatRight Ontario dietitian advisory service. I hope you're all familiar with EatRight Ontario. It's run by Dietitians of Canada, operated by us and funded through the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport, and it provides free access directly to dietitians for all Ontarians. They can call a toll-free number, they can email a dietitian or they can access the resources on the website.

The evaluation of the service shows that consumer satisfaction with the service is very high and that, overwhelmingly, people act on the advice that they're given. People call with questions such as infant feeding, how to deal with diabetes and a number of other issues, and we're finding that it has been very successful.

EatRight Ontario is also supporting the diabetes strategy and working with schools to help implement the healthy school food and beverage policy brought forward by the Ministry of Education.

We really believe that this service is especially important to provide nutrition information to consumers who are unable to access a dietitian in person, either through geographic or perhaps financial barriers.

The other aspect of the service is that it provides support to health professionals, and physicians are among the most important referral services that we have for EatRight Ontario.

Our third recommendation is to improve access to dietitian services in home care. The commitment to aging at home has led to targeted funding for some services for

home care. However, what we have found is that therapy services, including dietetic services, have not had funding increases. In fact, there have been very significant decreases in the number of referrals for therapy services, including dietitians, in home care across the CCACs. That leads to individuals not receiving the care they need, and it's really counterintuitive to the aging at home strategy, which hopes to help avoid emergency room visits and help people to maintain their independence and stay at home.

In addition to that, service provider agencies that employ these therapists have difficulty maintaining their qualified professional staff due to the inconsistency in referral rates, and therefore people leave for greener pastures, as it were, in order to find more consistent employment opportunities.

We feel that nutrition services delivered through the home care system really support those health care system objectives, and we ask for targeted funding to enhance therapy service delivery in home care.

Another recommendation around access to dietitian services contains primary health care services in the family health teams and community health centres. Most of these agencies do employ dietitians who provide nutrition therapy and health promotion services to individuals and groups, and they also act as a resource to the other health professionals who are providing services within those interprofessional teams.

However, many of these positions are part-time, and the current salary guidelines are not equitable with either dietitian salaries in other settings or with other health professionals with similar levels of education and training. We really feel that these salary guidelines need to be updated to reflect appropriate compensation levels, and that will assist with reducing barriers to recruiting and retaining dietitians in these settings.

Those are the recommendations around access to dietitians. When you improve access to dietitians, it will enable individuals and families to improve their health, but it's also important that all Ontarians have access to healthy food so that they can then put into effect those recommendations that the dietitian gives them. One of the ways that we think this can be accomplished is by ensuring that the current social assistance review considers the actual cost of purchasing a healthy diet. There is a great deal of data already available in order to inform those decisions, and that's through the use of the public health unit's nutritious food basket data. Those are compiled on an annual basis by the health units across the province, and we recommend that these reports be used in setting social assistance policy.

My final recommendation is for a bit of a larger, overarching policy for the development of a comprehensive and coordinated food and nutrition strategy for Ontario. There are all sorts of really worthwhile initiatives underway across the province that are doing really great work in their own targeted area, but what we're really lacking is a coordinated and comprehensive overall strategy with really defined goals and objectives. There is another

group, of which Dietitians of Canada is a member, and that's the Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity. They've done a great deal of work on developing a background paper and priority recommendations for the development of an Ontario food and nutrition strategy, and we are supportive of those priority recommendations. Two of them are that they have a high-level ministers' committee specifically to look at all policy options and their impact on health and nutrition; this would be a healthy living committee such as we have had in the past. Given the importance of nutrition in relation to many of the challenges that are facing the Ontario economy and the Ontario health care system, we feel it's important that nutrition be given appropriate emphasis and that there be a ministers'-level committee that looks at the impact of various policies on access to food and access to nutrition advice.

Thank you for your attention to my presentation, and I'd be very happy to answer any questions that you may have.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Very good. We'll go to Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much for coming this afternoon. I appreciate the presentation. What you have to say makes a lot of sense. Do you have studies that you could provide us with that show the impact of dietitians on diabetes in the population? If I understood you correctly, we're underserved by dietitians in Ontario; other jurisdictions put more money into it. Do they show a difference in morbidity and mortality rates?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: I'm not sure that we have the comparative intervention studies that way. What we do have is a very strong evidence base showing the cost effectiveness of dietician services in general. I'm not sure it's specifically the type that you're talking about, but we definitely have a very strong evidence base showing the payback, if you will, of having nutrition therapy for people suffering from diabetes and other chronic conditions.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, the other information would be very handy, but that sounds like a very useful document. Could you provide it to this committee so that we can have it in our deliberations?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Yes, I certainly will do that. I assume the best way to do that would be by email to the committee clerk?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes, and she very efficiently will get it to all of us.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Yes, if you would, and then everyone on the committee will get it.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: She's very efficient that way. Perhaps before we actually see that report, could you talk to us a bit about that cost effectiveness? Obviously, if people manage their diabetes well, there are fewer complications and there are less crises. Can you give us a sense of the amount of savings that are out there through ensuring that people get the correct diet counselling?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: I don't have a dollar figure on that at the top of my head. However, based on

the studies that we've shown, it's certainly significant, and some of that detailed information is definitely in the report that I will forward.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Why is it that advice from you—that wasn't the best way to frame the question. Doctors give advice; nurses give advice; you give advice. Why is it that your advice is more effective than that of other health professionals?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: It's a very fair question, and certainly doctors, nurses and other health professionals have a big role to play in providing nutrition advice as well. What's unique is that dietitians have a targeted four years of university plus a year of practical training specifically on nutrition, whereas in the other professions, nutrition training makes up a very small portion. Certainly, general nutrition advice is very good to come from a number of different health professionals, but when you come to managing complex food and nutrient interactions in a number of co-morbidities—for example, diabetes with cardiovascular disease, renal disease, food allergies—dietitians have a really unique body of knowledge that can integrate all of those factors.

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Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. You also mentioned the whole question of the adequacy of the allowance for food in social assistance rates. Has your organization done an analysis of that? Do you have recommendations around what is an adequate allowance for food, and is it anywhere close to what is being given out now?

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Because the price of food varies a lot by region, it really depends regionally. The price of rent and other things vary as well. What's really great about the nutritious food basket diet is that it is done by public health units, so you can see that in a particular region, this is the shortfall or how close people are coming to being able to purchase healthy food for themselves and their family. There are excellent reports that are compiled by the public health units. I would be happy to forward examples of those as well.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I would appreciate if you would do that so that we could have that circulated to the committee.

I don't have further questions at this point.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you, and if you do provide information, as was stated, the clerk will make sure that every committee member gets a copy.

Ms. Leslie Whittington-Carter: Great. Thank you very much.

ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO NEUROLOGISTS

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Association of Ontario Neurologists to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation and there could be up to five minutes of questioning. I'd just ask you to identify yourself for our recording Hansard.

Dr. Ed Klimek: My name is Ed Klimek. I'm a practising neurologist. I came up from St. Catharines today. I'm the president of the Association of Ontario Neurologists. If anybody is going up to get a coffee, I'd really appreciate one on the way back. It's that time of day for me too, I sense.

I'm before this committee on behalf of the Association of Ontario Neurologists in the hopes that I can focus the government's attention on a problem.

I'd like to thank you for this opportunity. I want to first correct a possible misperception that you may have. In page 5 of the submission that I gave to you, there is a problem of a burgeoning aging demographic. You know that statistical graph of the man standing there with the shoulders and the hat, and the higher you go, the older the population is? Well, for me and my colleagues in neurology, I can assure you, that problem is not—yes, sir?

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): I notice that people are looking for your packet. It went out with written submissions and isn't here today. So you'll have to listen to the gentleman closely.

Dr. Ed Klimek: You have my sympathies if you have to listen to me, but that's the graph, that's the statistical image, and that's the misperception. That problem is not impending. For me and my colleagues in neurology, that problem is here, it is now and it just keeps on getting worse from here on. It will spill over and it will not involve just me or this ministry; it will involve all of society.

By way of introduction, I would say that the neurologists of Ontario have always dealt with the illnesses and disorders related to aging. And yes, you're right: There is also something called a pediatric neurologist. Just for your own benefit, let's just test that. If Jack Kennedy is a familiar name to you, you are about the right age to see a neurologist. Just in case, if you've forgotten who Lee Harvey Oswald might be, you may already have seen a neurologist.

I'm not going to read from this submission, for obvious reasons, to this committee, but I'd like to begin by extracting and focusing an example of just one disorder from the myriad of disorders that we deal with on a daily basis. There are, give or take, 181,000 Ontarians with Alzheimer's disease, a brain disease or some related dementia in this province. The Alzheimer Society says that in about 10 years that problem will grow by 40%. That's a fact.

There are about 230 full-time neurologists in this province. That's determined by the economists—that may or may not be a fact, but they are the number of people who are working as adult neurologists. If we assume that they're all clinically active and they all see adults and we ask all of them to attend patients with Alzheimer's disease—this one single disorder—there will be none left over.

It is clear to neurologists struggling with this problem that we are well into a societal change and a health care crisis. Three years ago, we shared these concerns with the

government and within the Ontario Medical Association. We asked for investment, leadership and assistance in dealing with it. Indeed, in previous negotiations, government negotiated fees for neurologic services because they are recognized as being inadequate. The problem is, of course, that support for services was approved but never funded in hospitals and clinics across the province. It is clear that there is a loss of essential technical services and dwindling capacity in this province.

My society has exhausted all existing administrative processes. Our concerns are firmly lodged somewhere in the fog of forgotten processes and committee minutes. Patients are, tragically, much less fortunate. According to recent press articles, they're lost in the snowbanks of Toronto. My heart goes out to that family and that husband.

Respectfully, to the committee, to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health—this is not one ministry's problem—the capacity to care for neurologic disorders is our priority for our patients and it must also be for government.

Government must help us to improve care within the existing structure, or the existing structure must change and evolve. Government at the highest levels is clearly aware of this problem and it must assume liability for untoward outcome of diminished capacity to care for these disorders in this province.

This is alarming, and there are some options for government. I'm a simple man. I'm a neurologist. I'm not an economist; I'm not a politician. Government has three broad options to consider.

Government can demonstrate leadership. It can direct; it can inspire. It can also establish targeted programs. Neurologic diseases and disorders must be a government program, not a lost priority.

Secondly, government, as you know, redistributes tax revenues. It can also prioritize and realign services. In the theme of bringing coals to Newcastle, I bring some figures to this committee of finance, as paradoxical as it may seem.

The Minister of Health has a 2010 budget of about \$41.5 billion. As a test, who can remember when Tony Clement was the Minister of Health and the budget was \$22 billion, and that was a big deal?

About 9% of all hospitalizations in Canada are for patients with neurologic disorders, diseases or injuries. The hospital mortality for those diseases is immense, and I have that for you in my handout.

Breaking up just neurologic services, never mind society's shouldering the burden of this aging demographic, physician services alone for 2010 are estimated to be about \$14.8 billion.

I told you that there are about 230 neurologists. In the interest of full and complete disclosure, I'd like to tell you that the entire billing attributed to all neurologists in this whole province is about \$65 million. The incongruity of 1% of all doctors dealing with this problem but receiving 4/100ths of 1% of all OHIP billings is not for me [*inaudible*] lying to you.

I'd like to answer any questions you have. But, respectfully, I think I can go no further with this problem without the assistance of my colleagues and the support of government, and I'd like you to focus the attention of government on this problem, if you would be so kind. Please help us and please help our patients.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the government: Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: A couple of clarification questions. I'm also a very simple guy; I'm originally trained in science. Could you give me, if you know it, the average age of a neurologist, and what is the median—half over, half under?

Dr. Ed Klimek: The median age, you're looking at. By chance, it happens to be me. I'm about 57 years old.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay.

Dr. Ed Klimek: What else do you need to know?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I asked about the average.

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Dr. Ed Klimek: Given that none of them seem to be retiring, it's slightly smaller.

Mr. Bob Delaney: In your opinion, what does it take for medical schools to graduate more neurologists? Or let me put it to you another way: What does it take for medical schools to attract some of the best prospective medical minds and have them want to become neurologists?

Dr. Ed Klimek: I think greater minds than I, respectfully, are trying to wrestle with that problem. The simple answer is, you have to want to take care of people, you have to want to take care of older folks and you have to want to take at least 10 years of extra training to do so—and you don't want to go for the easy grab. It's not a high-paying specialty, it's not a procedurally oriented specialty. It spends a lot of time in direct contact with people.

In years gone by, it used to be a diagnose-and-adios specialty with little impact, and that is no longer true. It's changing and evolving.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Using the 80-20 rule, what are 20% of the things that you do from day to day that constitute about 80% of the people you serve?

Dr. Ed Klimek: You're referring to time spent on the 80-20 rule and limiting it only to diagnoses?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Interpret the question as you wish.

Dr. Ed Klimek: I can change the numbers slightly: 90% of my problems come from 10% of the issues before me. Those 10% of the problems are really the ones that are most challenging, difficult and insoluble. They vary between purely administrative, getting tests for people and people who are dying.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'd just like to thank you very much for a very interesting presentation and for taking the time from your practice to come out and appear with us today.

Dr. Ed Klimek: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): And thank you.

LONDON AND ST. THOMAS ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I would call on the London and St. Thomas real estate board to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. The questioning will come from the official opposition. It could be up to five minutes, if they choose to do that. Just simply state your names before you begin for our recording Hansard.

Mr. Jack Lane: All right, thank you. My name is Jack Lane, president of London and St. Thomas Association of Realtors. With me today is our executive vice-president, Betty Doré. I'd like to thank you all for the opportunity to participate in this committee's consultation around the 2011 budget.

By way of background, the London and St. Thomas Association of Realtors is one of the region's largest trade associations, with over 1,500 members. It was founded 75 years ago this year to organize real estate activities and to develop common goals in Elgin and Middlesex county, and these goals include promoting higher industry standards and striving to improve the quality of life for the various communities we serve.

Before I discuss our recommendations, I wanted to provide a very quick housing snapshot: 2010 was a very solid year for the Ontario residential real estate industry. Although a significant portion of the demand was brought forward in the beginning of the year by the harmonized sales tax and stricter mortgage regulations, the Multiple Listing Service recorded over 195,000 residential unit sales in 2010. This was down just 0.1% from 2009. The average 2010 residential unit price on MLS was over \$342,000. That was up 7.5% from 2009.

Locally, real estate sales were up from 2009 by a modest 0.7%. The average price for a home in the association's jurisdiction in 2010 rose 6.3% for detached homes, standing at \$240,147, and it was up 7.9% for condos to stand at \$171,098.

While 2010 marks the second year in a row that the average residential price has gone up more than 5%, affordability in Ontario remains stable and actually improved in the third quarter of 2010, thanks to lower mortgage rates and stabilized property values. Looking forward, both the Canadian Real Estate Association and Canada Mortgage and Housing predict 2011 to be pretty much the same as 2010: solid and steady.

Despite moderation, the Ontario resale housing market will continue to create jobs and generate consumer spending in 2011. Independent research confirms that each real estate transaction in our province generates over \$47,000 in ancillary economic benefits to the Ontario economy. In fact, Ontario's resale housing market created over 80,000 direct and indirect jobs in 2010, while generating \$2.1 billion in consumer spending on everything from home renovations to new furniture and appliances.

With this in mind, I'd like to turn our discussion to LSTAR's recommendations for the 2011 budget. Our

recommendations focus on two areas: personal real estate corporations and brownfield remediation. Both are important to our industry and to the real estate sector in Ontario. Also, each recommendation is fiscally prudent and has a great deal of support from a variety of stakeholders, including many of your MPPs.

To begin, LSTAR requests that the government of Ontario initiate the necessary legislation changes to the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, or REBBA, 2002, to allow real estate salespeople to incorporate.

At present, registered salespeople are prevented from incorporating by two facets of REBBA, 2002. First, REBBA, 2002 does not permit the licensing of personal corporations under the act. In addition, REBBA, 2002 does not permit a broker to pay a commission to an unregistered entity. So while a salesperson could form a corporation, they could not receive commission through the corporation under the act.

We at LSTAR believe that there are sound public policy reasons for permitting personal real estate corporations. First, allowing real estate salespeople to incorporate would give them the same business opportunities afforded to members of other regulated industries. In fact, most regulated professions, including chartered accountants, certified general accountants, lawyers, health professionals, social workers, veterinarians, architects and engineers gained the ability to incorporate through the Business Corporations Act in 2001. REBBA, 2002 did not come into full effect until 2006, and as a result, when the Business Corporations Act was passed, it did not consider real estate salespeople in the professional incorporations provisions of the act. While other professions enjoy the benefits of incorporation, salespeople are unfairly discriminated against in this important business tool.

Secondly, personal real estate corporations would help real estate salespeople cope with the introduction of the harmonized sales tax. While some businesses have benefited from the introduction of harmonized tax, real estate salespeople have not. This is because the majority of a salesperson's business inputs prior to July 1, including advertising, gasoline, car insurance, accounting fees, legal fees and home staging, were exempt from provincial sales tax. As a result, the amount of additional input tax credits a realtor can claim is limited to a select number of expenses, making sales tax harmonization not overly beneficial.

As a professional trade association, LSTAR consistently supports higher industry standards and strong levels of consumer protection. For this reason, our proposed method of implementing personal real estate corporations will not reduce consumer protection.

Similar to other regulated industries, LSTAR's proposal would not permit salespeople to limit their professional liability through incorporation. Indeed, LSTAR maintains that personal real estate corporations should only allow salespeople to benefit from the tax considerations given to corporations.

Personal real estate corporations have been successfully implemented now in British Columbia and are presently going through the implementation process in Quebec. We hope that both of these provinces will act as a model for Ontario as we progress towards the release of the 2011 budget.

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Personal real estate corporations is an issue our association has worked on for well over five years. To this end, our provincial association, the Ontario Real Estate Association, has engaged in consultations with both the Ministry of Consumer Services and the Ministry of Finance on how to achieve the necessary changes to allow members to incorporate.

More recently, during the Ontario Real Estate Association's political affairs conference, realtors, including LSTAR members, met with over 80 MPPs to discuss this issue and seek their support. We are happy to report that the overwhelming majority of MPPs and ministers expressed support for our proposal.

To sum it up, we feel that allowing real estate salespeople the ability to incorporate is good public policy because it would give the profession the same rights and considerations given to most other regulated industries in the province and end the current tax discrimination against real estate salespeople.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about a minute and a half for your next point.

Mr. Jack Lane: To try and make it a little briefer, our next point was concerning brownfields. There are over 12,000 brownfield sites in Ontario, representing hundreds of millions of dollars in property value and much more in economic potential on these idle sites. As an example, at the corner of Clarke Road and Huron Street, we've got the ABB manufacturing facility that has been sitting idle for some time now. We feel the redevelopment of these properties is essential for an increased tax base and infill development.

I'll try and sum this up very quickly. Currently, most of these properties are taxed at an industrial rate. Reducing the tax rate while the properties are under remediation would be a benefit to the developers. The second problem facing developers is that properties cannot be financed during redevelopment. So some assistance and changes in legislation to provide financing for these properties, providing that they are undergoing remediation, would be essential in the redevelopment of the properties and helping the developers be able to afford to do so. Right now, everything they spend has to come from out of pocket.

We've got billions of dollars worth of properties around the province sitting idle because the developers cannot afford—in some cases, some of the properties have been abandoned. The banks don't want them. They're sitting idle. Nobody is claiming these properties. I can think of one property, of those that are local, the Ah So restaurant, that ended up being taken back by the city of London for back taxes and no one would redevelop it because it was a former garbage dump. Now we've got a

piece of property that is sitting idle. It is now in the city's hands and many would say it's a benefit because it's being turned into some parkland, but maybe it's not the highest and best use for the property and the location.

In a nutshell, developers need some assistance. We need some change in legislation to allow those properties to be financed and we need some tax reductions so that during the remediation process, there can be some relief that would encourage developers to do just that—to undertake the remediation.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you. The questioning will go to the official opposition. Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for your presentation. On your first point, allowing real estate salespeople to be able to incorporate—I just want to make sure I understand it. Currently, the advantage of being incorporated is that you would be able then to take advantage of input tax credits with the HST. Am I correct on that?

Mr. Jack Lane: Well, it's not just relevant to the HST, but we also feel it's in keeping with the incorporations act and allowing real estate professionals the same benefits that other industries and other professionals, such as lawyers, accountants and veterinarians, enjoy under the Income Tax Act. The current status quo is discriminating but it also allows a number of other benefits that any corporation would provide.

Mr. Norm Miller: But also—because you stated, I think, that currently the HST is not a benefit for real estate salespeople, in that you aren't able to take advantage of any input tax credits.

Mr. Jack Lane: We are able to take advantage of some.

Mr. Norm Miller: But I think you stated that it wasn't a benefit.

Mr. Jack Lane: Yes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Also related to the HST, I know that in your submission you talked about the amount of home renovations as well that are going on. Do you have any sense of whether the HST is driving more of the home renovation work underground as people try to avoid paying the increased tax levels?

Mr. Jack Lane: I do a fair amount of commercial work as well, and I haven't seen that, personally. I would well imagine that in the residential marketplace and in family renovations that might be more prevalent, but I think more and more people are conscious of the pitfalls of not getting a building permit and not having the proper tradespeople do the work, and with that comes proper invoicing and proper taxation. So I don't think that's a huge part of it. There may be some. With any increase in tax, that's a possibility.

We saw with the implementation of the GST that it had an effect for a period of time, but fortunately—or unfortunately—the public gets used to taxation and we tend to go on with our merry lives, whether we should or shouldn't. But that is the reality. We just want some fairness brought into the act.

Mr. Norm Miller: I appreciate the points that you made to do with incorporation. In my own riding of Parry

Sound, I was recently talking to a developer who's got a subdivision that's reasonably high-end, and things have kind of ground to a halt in that because it's above the threshold, so all of a sudden there is a lot more tax payable on those individual lots with homes. What would be the average price of the homes in your real estate board?

Mr. Jack Lane: We're just over \$240,000, on average, and that's both residential resale and condominium as well, both single-family and condominium.

Mr. Norm Miller: You didn't get your full time on the brownfields. A few years back, there was legislation to try to get development of brownfields, but I'm gathering from the submission you're making that there are still a lot of impediments to get financing and to be able to get through the remediation stage with many brownfields.

Mr. Jack Lane: Financing is a big factor; they can't finance it in most cases. They can get financing once the remediation is done—and they've proven remediation, of course—but during the process, they cannot. Of course, the other obstacle is taxation. The properties are still taxed at a higher rate, yet they're sitting idle. What we would be proposing would be more of an industrial tax rate during the remediation process, providing, of course, that they were showing proof that remediation was being undertaken. So phase one, phase two and phase three would all come into play.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay, thank you. Do you have any questions?

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for your presentation.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you very much.

SARNIA LAMBTON HEALTH COALITION

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Now I call on the Sarnia Lambton Health Coalition to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have 10 minutes for your presentation. There could be five minutes of questioning. I'd just ask you to identify yourself for our recording Hansard.

Ms. Arlene Patterson: Honourable members, thank you for the opportunity today. My name is Arlene Patterson, and I'm the president of the Sarnia Lambton Health Coalition. We're also a chapter of the Ontario Health Coalition. I understand from our representative today, Bob Bailey, that part of this presentation has already been given to you today. We're at the end of the day, so if you would indulge me to ad lib a little bit and speak off topic, or not from the report that I gave you, it might be a little more interesting.

I've been a patient in the health care system since 1991—20 years. I have a chronic condition, and I'm one of 19 in North America diagnosed with this particular disorder. I can tell you that our health care system is second to none, and I'd like to keep it that way.

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My involvement with the Sarnia Lambton Health Coalition started out with providing the opportunity for

me to be able to meet people and give presentations such as today's as to my experience of being a patient in the health care system, only because we don't hear very often from patients.

In 1991, I spent approximately \$300 per year on out-of-pocket expenses in order to visit seven specialists that ranged anywhere from Sarnia-London to Toronto and back. In 2010, that cost has gone up over \$8,000 per year.

I am a single woman and on a fixed income, and the out-of-pocket expenses have certainly gouged into my annual income. Certainly, the rate of inflation has not kept up with the costs in order for me to make medical appointments, tests, follow-up etc.

I shall say again that the Ontario health spending is the second-lowest in Canada. Tax cuts, not health cuts, are eating up the provincial budget.

Public health care in Ontario and in Canada is founded upon the principles of equality and compassion. Its goal is to remove the financial barriers from care when people are in need. This has led to greater equality and improved quality of life for millions of people, despite the endless restructuring of cutbacks to the scope of services covered, and in spite of what the Montreal Gazette has termed a masterful propaganda campaign, determined to topple confidence in the public health system, support for public medicare remains strong.

Ontario is the third-last, after Alberta and Saskatchewan, in the total spending of all programs and services as a percentage of the GDP. This places pressure on all social services that people need, from health care to social housing, education and the environment and so on.

While this government continues to support privatization and rationing of needed care while proclaiming that health care is eating up more of the provincial budget, what it fails to note is that the total budget has been decimated by more than a decade of tax cuts. These tax cuts are continuing.

In our area of Lambton county—this area is one of the largest rural areas in southwestern Ontario—wait times for emergency care at Bluewater Health are eight hours, and apparently this is good, even with the expanded ER services at Bluewater Health.

Alternate-level-of-care patients and their families are treated as if it's their fault that they're in hospital and taking up a hospital bed. They're calling these "bed blockers," of recent.

Patients are being forced out of hospital too early and without adequate care, resulting in a revolving door. The cost of readmission to hospital has not been tracked so that the comparisons in cost of earlier discharge can be justified. Are patients recovering in hospital to the point of safely returning to their homes? This is not the case for many.

I do go on and give you a case study of a woman who fell and broke her hip. She was readmitted to hospital hours after returning home because there was a lack of a patient care plan for this individual. Our concern is, how much does this cost our health care system, given that the

system seems to be very fragmented, lacks continuity and also follow-up that's required?

This particular woman ended up convalescing in care 45 kilometres from her home for six weeks, away from family and at a cost to her out of pocket that was approximately \$800 a month she had to come up with over and above her monthly expenses. She almost lost her home because of that. I don't think that the principles of the Canada Health Act intended for this to happen to any of its citizens.

The area CCAC has allowed Bayshore, a for-profit company holding a contract for nursing services, to set up a hole-in-the-wall clinic to which discharged hospital patients requiring home care are required to travel for nursing care. The costs associated with travel or safety do not appear to be of concern, no matter how greatly this impacts on patients and their families.

The majority of Ontario's CCACs are in deficit or face severe staffing shortages, leading to rationing and wait times for care. Home care is poorly organized, it's ad hoc and it is largely privatized.

There is a lack of adequate core standards provided for heavier-care patients to move home or into the community from mental health facilities, which does lead to inappropriate placement.

What is not being spent at the bedside to ensure patients are well enough to be discharged and return to a quality of life and to their homes is being downloaded to the patient, who is also left to navigate their way in getting their medical needs met. There is a lack of continuity and proper clinical follow up.

If I just may, one of the reasons why I think in our area, as far as budgets of hospitals—when the LHINs were created, I think they failed to understand the difference between a regional medical tertiary centre and individual hospitals. I'm finding now—it's been my experience—that patients within the London area who have been referred from surrounding small and rural areas are now being sent back to whence they came. The reason why these patients were sent to a regional tertiary medical centre to begin with was because of the specialty medical service; it met their needs because those services were not available in their local area. I certainly am one of the examples of that. This has put patients into a very difficult position insofar as they don't know how to navigate the system once they're sent back to Owen Sound or Kincardine, where the services are not there to support their medical needs. I would certainly recommend, and I speak on behalf of the health coalition, that the budgets for regional areas such as the London Health Sciences Centre be separated from hospital budgets different from Bluewater, Wallaceburg, Chatham-Kent alliance etc. These are very well needed medical centres where they have the specialties that are so needed by a lot of us patients.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): You have about a half a minute left.

Ms. Arlene Patterson: I'll leave it at that. If there are any questions, I'll be happy to speak to them, even from

the report that's in front of you as well. I do apologize, but Mr. Bailey said to speak off the cuff, so I spoke off the cuff.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Okay. Then we'll go to Mr. Tabuns of the NDP.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: You had the best presentation of all.

Ms. Arlene Patterson: Oh, really?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much for coming and making a presentation today.

One of the things you touched on very quickly was an article I think in the Montreal Gazette about a program, a campaign of public relations against the health care system. Can you enlarge on that? I think this question of sustainability comes up a lot. Not only you but the other health coalition representatives who've come to see us today talk about the need to end this talk about unsustainability. If you could talk about the Montreal Gazette article and then about the impact of the unsustainability argument, I would appreciate it.

Ms. Arlene Patterson: Well, the argument is not true. Our system is sustainable. It's sustainable because we've proven that. Hospitals in Ontario are funded \$100 per person, per capita, more than any other province in Canada. Our hospitals are the most efficient hospitals in the whole country. So if we can do that, we can certainly sustain hospital budgets.

Now, drawing the difference between general health care spending to hospital budgets, I think the line has been blurred many times in that unsustainability banter—I don't know what you want to call it, but anyway. It is sustainable; we would argue that. We have put out a booklet, actually, on how our health care system is sustainable. Part of the charts that go with our presentation also speak to that.

If we can do with less as much as we're doing now to service patients, then surely to goodness it's only reasonable to believe that we can do better. Where we need to do better is to close the loopholes in the employment health tax, close the gaps in terms of how this system has been so fragmented for patients that a lot of patients are requiring an advocate in order to be able to manoeuvre their way through the system.

We can do better to meet patient needs, but it is sustainable.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: When you talk about those employer health tax loopholes, can you enlarge upon that a bit as to the total volume of money we're talking about here?

Ms. Arlene Patterson: Well, if you would indulge me for a minute—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I will.

Ms. Arlene Patterson: I will read you a couple of paragraphs from Hugh Mackenzie's paper on the Ontario alternative—actually, that's not the title of the paper. It's Meeting the Need: Rebuilding Ontario's Ability to Pay for Public Services. He speaks directly to the employment health tax.

“The most expensive loopholes in Ontario's tax system are the various exemptions from the employer health tax. The loopholes include the exemption for the first \$400,000; exemptions for self-employed individuals; exemptions for income from stock options. All of these exemptions undermine the fairness of the system; all of these exemptions cost the people of this province a substantial amount in lost revenue; and none of these exemptions meets the test of being well targeted to an accepted public policy goal.

“More important, exemptions from the employer health tax are inconsistent with the history behind its creation and the role that it plays in funding the health care system. The EHT is the replacement for the OHIP premium. As such, it is the contribution expected of employers in return for the substantial competitive benefit they receive from the existence of public medicare in Ontario.

“Eliminating all exemptions from the EHT would raise an additional \$1.1 billion.”

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: That's clear enough.

I don't have further questions. Mr. Chair, I leave it to you.

The Chair (Mr. Pat Hoy): Thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

For the committee, our next presenter is unable to be here today, so with that I will adjourn.

The committee adjourned at 1534.

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